The *Wednesday*

Editorial

The Philosopher and his Double

In their great book *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari analyse the structure of thoughts and their transformations across times and places. What interests us here is the birth of a thought. Deleuze and Guattari think that there are three components that announce the birth of a thought: the plane of immanence, a conceptual persona and the concept. The birth of a thought will create a plane of immanence, invent a conceptual persona and bring about a new concept. These components come together, but for the sake of analysis we can take them apart. Concepts for Deleuze summarise the task of philosophy and they populate the plane of immanence. We will concentrate here on the idea of the conceptual persona.

Deleuze says a conceptual persona has 'a hazy existence halfway between concept and preconceptual plane, passing from one to the other.' It is an 'I' that comes into existence on the plane of thought; a self that announces itself. It could be the philosopher himself in a less creative, more prosaic way, or a mythical creation with a name, say Dionysus in Nietzsche's thought, or nameless, such as the 'Absolute I' of Fichte, or simply the 'I' of the Cogito (I think, therefore, I am.) We first have the unconscious, preconceptual plane of immanence that is full of creative energy that has not been determined, which needs to exist and determine itself, so it exists by positing itself as a conscious, conceptual persona.

This persona is a doubling of the philosopher himself in the realm of thought. It is not the empirical thinker but the other of the thinker with varying distances between them. The philosopher could be his thought, such as in Descartes' case, or his conceptual and/or mythological other, such as we find in Nietzsche's Zarathustra or Dionysus. The conceptual persona, then, takes its own life trajectory, sometime as a mask for the philosopher but it could also be his other. The latter case can be seen in Plato's Socrates who is an historical figure, but also a mouthpiece for Plato or becomes Plato himself from the middle period onward.

A conceptual persona exists in thought and takes its life history from the realm of conceptual thought, but it is also rooted in the chaotic, unconscious, pre-conceptual realm. When it announces itself, it comes as a revelation. Nietzsche once said that *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* came to his mind while walking in the wood.Ibn Arabi said his book The Gemstones of Wisdom was given to him in a dream. Wisdom appears as a beautiful woman to Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy,* and Virgil and Beatrice lead Dante through *Inferno*, *Purgatory* and *Paradiso*.

The conceptual persona can be general, such as in the 'Absolute I' of Fichte or the 'I' of the Cogito but it can also be specific. The generality is akin to concepts and their work in philosophy as a tool. The specificity of the figure, and the life it gets, draws from this oscillation between the preconceptual and the conceptual that meet on the plane of immanence. It is in this last sense that the philosopher creates his double that goes on, in some cases to become independent of its circumstances of birth and gain a life of its own, independent of the empirical facts about the philosopher, a life that Deleuze calls a 'pure immanence.' This can't happen in a technical philosophy with its logical rigour but it can happen in a philosophy close to literature, a philosophy that is creative and hovers between the mythos and the logos.

The Editor

Ethics: The Human Search for the Good

We discussed last week the views of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. However, a real shift in ethical thinking came about with the skepticism of Hume who took a naturalistic view of morality. His dictum 'No-Ought-From-Is' became a slogan for all those who doubted the rational basis of ethics. Kant, both in his theoretical and practical philosophy, tried to respond to Hume's challenge. He built a theory based on duty and not on inclination. Freedom and rationality became dominant in the post-Kantian ethics but soon Humean views of ethics were re-introduced through the work of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. There are also some more recent challenges to ethics that we have left out for the time being.

RANJINI **GHOSH**

Part 2

We discussed the views of a number of philosophers who have a rationalist approach to ethics. Here, we mainly deal with the challenge of Hume and the Kantian response. But before leaving this topic, we will also discuss Kierkegaard and Nietzsche.

Hume

The Scottish philosopher David Hume said that moral judgements are not judgements of reason because reason cannot be the basis for actions. Reason is concerned with relations of ideas, like in mathematics or with matters of fact. But these do not compel us to act. We are compelled to act only by the prospect of pleasure or pain. So what is aroused by the prospect of pleasure and pain are passions and not reason. Reason can only guide passions as to the most efficient method of seeking their object. Reason cannot judge or criticize passion. Reason cannot adjudicate between the passions. 'Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions.' Moral judgements cannot be founded upon rational considerations. We do not judge incest among animals. Morality is more properly felt than judged. We can consider any vicious action

like willful murder and we will find that it is constituted of certain passions and motives. We can never find vice in such an action. What we find in ourselves is only a sentiment of disapproval for such an action. So ethics is a matter of feeling and not reason. And this feeling lies in ourselves and not in the objects. Hence Hume argues that no moral conclusions can be based on reason. No factual premises can entail a moral conclusion. When we call an action virtuous or otherwise, it is because the action only arouses a certain feeling in us.

For Hume reason is concerned only with the discovery of truth and falsehood. It can never be the motive for any action. We are motivated by direct passions such as joy, grief, hope or fear, or from our desire to do something good which can be equated with pleasure. We can also be motivated by indirect passions like pride, humility, love or hatred. Hume believed that sympathy for other beings is a natural instinct. Moral judgements are not descriptions or matters of fact. We may recall that Hume had distinguished between matters of fact and relations of ideas. When we consider any action like willful murder then we will see that it is only a matter of fact and there are

Aristotle

Hume

only certain passions and motives involved. Such matters of fact can only be expressed in propositions like *is* or *is not*. Propositions that describe matters of fact like this cannot then be converted into conclusions with the words 'ought' or 'ought not.' Vice and virtue are like sounds and colors, secondary qualities which are perceptions of the mind.

Accordingly, when we say that some act is full of vice then it is merely our sentiment that we are expressing. Virtuous actions only derive from virtuous motives. When we approve an action, we are only approving the motive behind it since these motives are connected either with increasing pleasure or increasing pain. When we call a person vicious then we are not assigning any special intrinsic property to them but merely expressing our reaction to viciousness. When we say that a murder is a bad act, then the badness of the act is not an additional feature along with other facts which the killer had and his motives. Hume's famous contention was that 'an ought cannot follow from an is.'

Contrary to what Kant said about morality arising from a sense of duty, Hume said that an action must proceed from some motive other than morality. Men can act out of a sense of duty. But by itself this confers no merit on the action. A miserly man may sometimes feel ashamed and do some generous acts. For his action to be morally good it is not necessary that he has to overcome his miserly disposition. Goodness depends on conforming to a habitual practice of generosity. It is irrelevant whether the agent has any generous inclination or feelings. It is the consequences that matter. Motives are important only to the extent that they are seen to produce regularly beneficial actions. For Kant an action has moral worth when it is done only out of duty and without any inclinations of sympathy or compassion. Reason has a role only in controlling passions when a judgement based on passion may turn out to be a false judgement. For example, somebody may have a fear of something which actually does not exist. Reason also has a role in guiding passions towards the best means to achieve a goal. Reason enters into the sphere of action only when the agent is

3

motivated towards some end. The choice of ends is outside the sphere of reason.

Hume had suggested that moral conclusions that involved moral words like 'ought' cannot be deduced from non-moral premises which do not include such moral words. This is the slogan 'No–Ought–From–Is' (NOFI). This is also known as the main message of Hume's moral philosophy or Hume's law. What Hume probably meant by saying this is that one cannot get moral conclusions from non-moral premises by logic alone. He could have also meant that we cannot get moral conclusions from non-moral premises by means of logic plus analytic bridge principles (Charles Pigden, *Philosophy Now*, March/April 2011). Suppose we consider the inference: (1) Jack is a bachelor and therefore (2) Jack has no wife. The question is whether this is a valid argument? The answer could be both yes or no. The argument is not a *logically* valid argument because given the structure of the argument and whatever may be the meaning of the non-logical words the premises cannot be true and the conclusion false. There can be a similar argument with the same logical structure in which the conclusion is false, but the premise is true. For example: (1) Obama is a Democrat and therefore (2) Obama has no trousers. In this case the inference is not *logically* valid, but it is *analytically* valid. If we know the meanings of the words 'bachelor' and 'wife' then in the case of the earlier argument it is not possible for the conclusion to be false. Hence, we can convert the earlier argument into a logically valid argument by adding an extra premise called *analytic bridge principle*. So the reformulated logically valid argument would be: (1) Jack is a bachelor; (1a) A bachelor is a man who has no wife; (2) And therefore Jack has no wife. Therefore, such a bridge principle allows us to move from non-moral premises to moral conclusions by an analytically valid argument.

4

Kant

We can say that Hume was denying the existence of *logically* valid arguments from non-moral to moral. During his time, the logical theory was that for a logically valid argument the conclusion was contained within the premises. If the premises did not contain it then one cannot get a valid conclusion. Because one could not get out what one had not put in. If the word 'ought' appeared in the conclusion of an argument but not in the premises, the inference was not logically valid. Therefore, the meaning of NOFI is through logic only. For Hume morality then is purely a matter of sentiment and accordingly invites either approbation or condemnation. Our moral beliefs are based on feelings and not reason.

While Kant had argued that reason is the sufficient motive for actions Hume did not think so. According to Hume we are motivated only by our emotions or passions. For Kant a man who acts out of emotions is not autonomous. He is swayed by desires and emotions and his actions proceed accordingly from outside his

Alistair MacIntyre

will. He commits 'heteronomy' of the will.

Hume distinguished two kinds of passion: those based on self-interest and those based on sympathy. Emotions based on sympathy are more stable. Sometimes we are guided into action not on the basis of our self-interest but on sympathy. Sympathy is found in our common nature and this, according to Hume, is the origin of morality. There are times when we all discount our self-interest and view the world impartially. Such feelings are more stable and common to all of us. There is a common agreement. Therefore, our moral sentiments are far stronger than our individual passions. And it is these common sentiments that are the foundation of customs and laws. Hume was a "naturalist" in that he finds the basis of morality in basic human nature. But for Kant morality is to be found beyond the natural world.

Kant

Kant believed that categorical imperatives were in a sense *a priori*. A hypothetical imperative which is of the form 'If you want x do y' specifies a goal. It is an analytic statement. But a hypothetical imperative is subjective because it is meaningful only to the person who wants to achieve a certain end through certain means. But a categorical imperative has objective validity because it is valid for all rational beings regardless of their desires. In this sense categorical imperatives are abstract from personal desires and the world is viewed objectively only through reason. It is *a priori* because its validity is based on reason alone and does not depend on some empirical conditions like a person's desires which can only be known *a posteriori*. The categorical imperative demands reason which means it is also a demand that I respect reason (Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy*, 2004). It also means that we respect reason not only in ourselves but also in others. It is the fundamental axiom of Kant's morality that all rational beings have a claim to respect. Practical reason makes possible the idea of a community of rational beings who respect each other and are guided by reason.

If the categorical imperative is to have some meaning, then reason must be the motivating force behind our actions. This is in contrast to Hume's view that reason is not the motive of our actions but instead passions are. Kant says that reason can actually guide our actions because the very idea of a choice based on reason presupposes a certain kind of freedom. This freedom allows us not to be an instrument of our desires. It takes us out of the empirical world of nature and puts us in the realm of freedom, a freedom from natural causality. Moral beings are free, rational and capable of self-legislation.

Alasdair MacIntyre says that for many who have never heard of philosophy, morality is roughly what Kant said it was. Kant's philosophy is an amalgamation of the Newtonian laws of nature and empiricism. The empiricists argue that all our knowledge

5

can only be based on sense experience and Newton's laws explained causation in the universe.

Kant argued that experience is not merely a passive reception of impressions but an active comprehension of perception. The mind organizes the various sense perceptions into higher categories of knowledge through the modes of space, time, and causality. Concepts without perceptions are empty; perceptions without concepts are blind. We cannot infer causal relationships beyond the realm of what we can perceive. The realm of morals is outside this realm of causality. Morals are independent of how the world functions.

Kant's conception of morality is based on his assertion that nothing is unconditionally good except good will. The only motive of good will is to do duty for the sake of doing duty. A person may do a duty with some other motives. A shopkeeper may honestly give change in the hope that it will result in more customers. This cannot be called good will because there is a self-interested motive. Kant also says that many altruistic actions arise from inclinations of sympathy etc. which again is not an unqualified good. Such actions are done not because of the demands of duty but because of human inclination. A duty is done for the sake of duty and not because of inclination of sympathy, compassion etc. Duty is obedience to a law i.e. universally binding on all rational beings.

The test of a genuine moral imperative is that it should be a universal law applicable to everyone. I should not make a moral exception for myself. Such an imperative is a categorical imperative. It is in contrast to a hypothetical imperative which says that one should do such and such so that a particular result can be obtained. The categorical imperative is not limited by any conditions. It simply says that we ought to do such and such. Kant
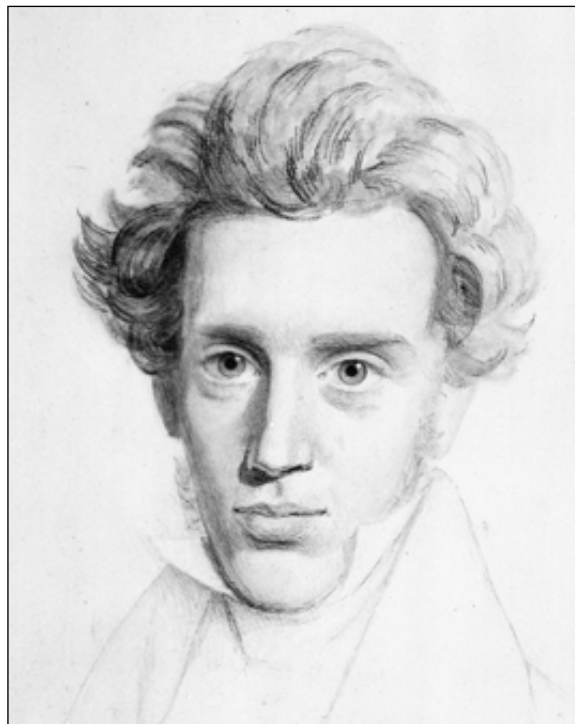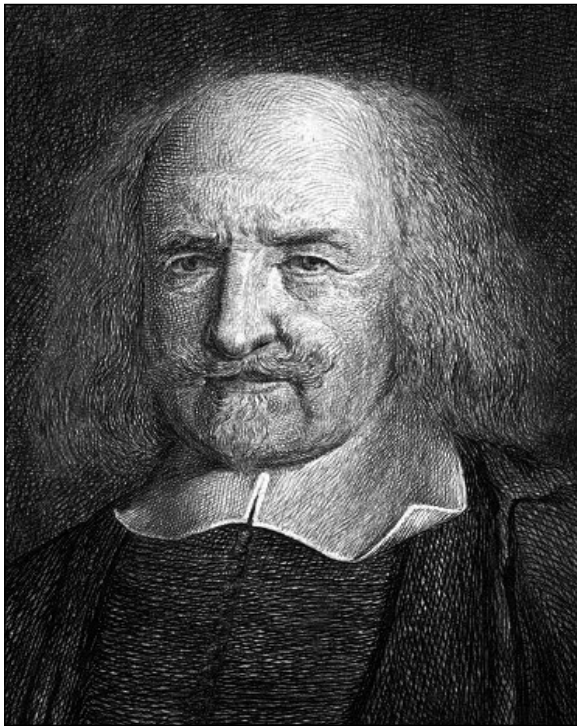

Kierkegaard

believes that there is no external authority to provide us a criterion for morality. Everyone is an autonomous moral agent. There can be no criteria for assessing moral precepts like happiness or some other human desires. Therefore, the Aristotelian conception of Eudaimonia can be no guide for moral actions.

Kierkegaard And Nietzsche
Kant believed that the objective test for morality was the categorical imperative. For Hegel the particular had to subscribe to the goals of the universal. Kierkegaard said that there are no objective tests in morality and we choose our own moral standards. He contrasted two ways of life as the 'ethical' and the 'aesthetic.' The aesthetic life is the satisfaction of one's own desires and avoidance of pain. Romantic love is an example of this. But marriage comes within the realm of the ethical because it involves duties and responsibilities. The aesthetic state of mind is a state of continuous dissatisfaction. The ethical is a state of quiet satisfaction in obligations fulfilled.

Hobbes

Nietzsche

Kierkegaard said that the individual must establish his own relationship to God and every truth for him was subjective. Every individual has his own anxieties and fears and there are no objective standards to guide him. To believe in God is to take a leap of faith. Socrates believed that no one had a privileged claim to absolute knowledge. Each individual possesses some innate knowledge which can be 'brought out' by a teacher. Kierkegaard also subscribed to this view that everyone has to find his own truth. The various truths proffered by various religions are only choices. There are no objective and absolute truths.

Nietzsche believed that Christianity stands for self-denial, and that it was at the core of the sickness of modern society. It promotes false spirituality because it devalues our present world in favor of a transcendent world. Christian morality exalts the virtues of the weak and the poor because it hates the virtues of pride in life and self-affirmation. God is dead and there is no one to guide us in this valueless world.
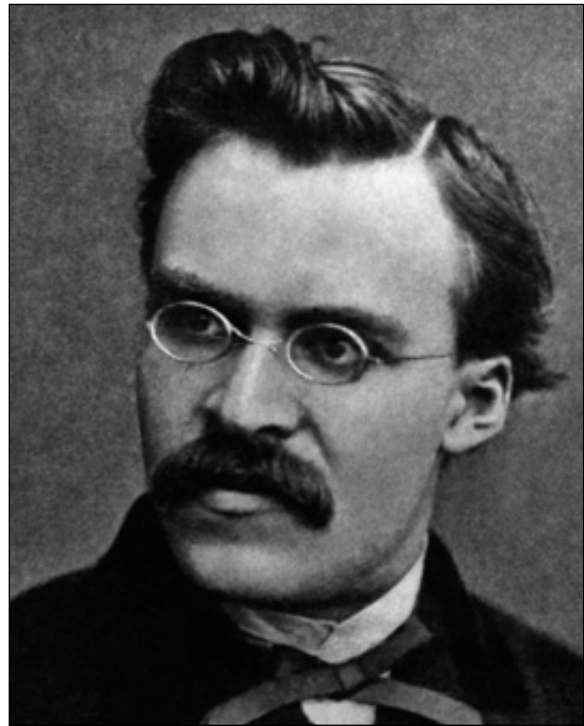
Nietzsche believed that man does not seek happiness. Power is the fundamental human goal and not happiness. He calls for a transvaluation of all values and creation of a new set of life-affirming values. The fundamental contrast in Christian theology or ethics is between good and evil while the fundamental contrast in Greek ethics is between good and bad.

Nietzsche believed like Aristotle that the aim of life is to flourish and achieve excellence. The good man, for Nietzsche is one who flourishes and allows the exercise of his will. His conception of the good is not the 'good will' of Kant or the aim of happiness as the British Utilitarians proclaimed. Nietzsche says that the exercise of the will is to be based on the dispositions of courage, pride and firmness. The aim is mastery over the self and others. Passions are an essential part of a virtuous character. Pity and sympathy have no place in Nietzsche's conception of the ideal man. They are, for him, signs of weakness and the 'herd mentality'.

7

The Way I leave

The way I leave I'll do it secretly

without a tear that binds me to the flesh,

without a scream, that binds me to the mind,

but like the ghosts, that come and go unheard

with memories floating quietly undeterred

between the many different rivers of belief.

I'll slip along, a dream that has been dreamt,

a careless brush of air, a butterfly

you see and then it's gone, a speck of light,

that winds its rainbow prism across a face.

And when you cry, I leave a hint of lace

with my last shadows just to hide your grief.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Poetry

Emily Bronte

Oh, dreadful is the check - intense the agony -
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.

'The Prisoner A Fragment' by Emily Bronte

The moor so singular to her
To others was a common sight,
She felt its open prospect stir
Her spirit to a strange delight.

There was a voice upon its air
Not to be heard by every ear,
A voice that called on her to dare
When others might shrink back from fear.

In the deep silence of the night,
A power beyond word's power to say,
Unfelt by hand, unseen by sight,
Would come to carry her away.

It drew her longing soul apart,
Freed from the fetters of the flesh
She felt an overwhelming smart,
When they were once more forged afresh.

She'd seemed to touch what lasts forever,
Been raised to reach what is sublime,
But fallen back from the endeavour,
Into the flesh and into Time.

Yet visions such as poets cherish,
Of what will be with all else gone,
Existence that will never perish,
Would never cease to lure her on.

Their strange and unappeased delight
Meant more than grass and tree and stone,
As she achieved the mystic flight
Of the alone to the alone.

However much her soul might burn
Until her body seemed to melt,
She had to feel the flesh return
To cancel what her soul had felt.

Edward Greenwood

Wittgenstein and Ethical Discourse

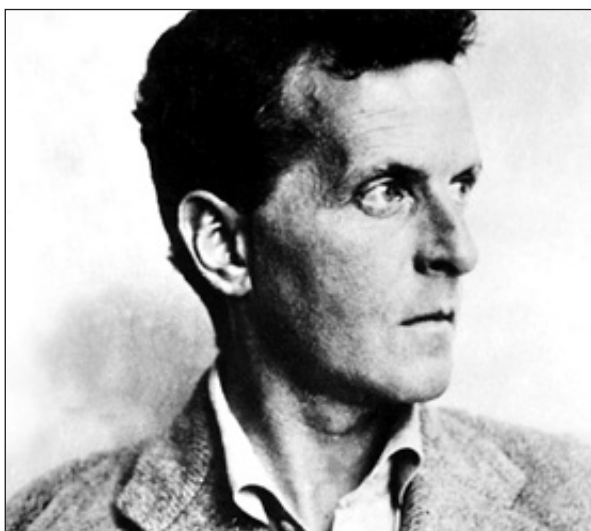## *Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 27th February 2019*

PAUL **COCKBURN**

In this meeting we discussed ethics in the light of Wittgenstein's views. Ludwig Wittgenstein thought that absolutes in terms of ethical statements and values were 'nonsense'. This sounds derogatory, but in fact Wittgenstein probably did not mean it to be. He thought relative values were the key to our ethical lives, the empirical context was important. We have to 'earth' our ethical statements so that they are practically useful. The meaning of language is bound up with its usefulness, so ethics should be useful in practice. But can you have an ethical fact? Facts are precise. If we want to travel from London to Oxford, it is a fact that there is an optimal or 'best' route in terms of the roads we should take to minimise the distance (ignoring the problem of traffic jams of course!). But some people might prefer to go via the scenic route rather than just get there in the shortest time. In terms of the correct moral behaviour we need to take in a particular situation, we tend to take decisions based on what we value, and vagueness instead of preciseness creeps in because we make assumptions about the psychology of others,

Wittgenstein

what causes their behaviour, what are the social norms.

In practice the application of higher order moral concepts such as 'Goodness' (as an absolute) is problematic. If we take a possible moral absolute such as 'killing is wrong' we find that in practice killing might be justified in some circumstances. Justice could demand that a criminal guilty of heinous crimes deserves the death penalty for instance. Or we might have to make a choice in terms of sending a few people to their death in order to save a larger number of people.

Wittgenstein thought that no logical analysis of ethical concepts was possible, and that an absolute concept such as 'Goodness' is in a realm divorced from everyday reality. This seems to imply that essentially 'Goodness' is separate from a good action, and that goodness is in fact a relative term. Is there a 'natural' good? In Wittgenstein's terms, there is a 'family resemblance' between all good actions, but you can't generalize from individual cases to form an absolute which is 'Goodness.' Language is a human construct, and there is no clear representation or clear idea of a concept such as 'Goodness'.

But what about the value of a human being, the inter-personal nature of our lives and hence the need for ethically good relationships? There are laws which are enforced in society based on an ethical code. Ethical codes connect to life, so that we can live with others. But are these laws and ethical codes relative in that the ethics for one group do not agree with those of other groups? Our views could be culturally conditioned. Kant thought we should seek to agree universal values, and he thought this was possible. One view was that we are still on a journey trying to do this, aiming for 'Goodness'.

'Vision'

By the Iraqi Artist *Noor Kamal*

13

Sartre Versus Levi-Strauss

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 6ᵗʰ March 2019

PAUL COCKBURN

We discussed creativity, particularly in relation to concepts. According to Deleuze, concepts start as vague ideas, and there is then a dynamic process which 'fleshes them out' and gives them structure. We now have a number of grand narratives in philosophy, such as Plato's Forms, materialism, scientism, Marxism, phenomenology, linguistic philosophy, and psycho-analysis. There seems to be a danger that these ways of looking at 'what there is' in a philosophical sense have outgrown their usefulness. Any one 'narrative' can become fundamental in the sense that it is seen as grounding philosophy. Perhaps post-modernism will somehow solve this philosophical impasse where ideas are generally seen as 'battling against' other ideas. Analytical philosophers can 'cherry-pick' some Continental concepts and try to sharpen them up. But it is the whole mix of philosophical ideas which perhaps need to be considered in some way as a whole, including Greek philosophy and also religious and mystical ideas. Is this possible or is the scope simply too wide?

In the past religious doctrine was considered to be something like the Holy Grail, you had to keep it strong. Some would hold that Greek philosophy corrupted Christianity in the sense that it moved the faith away from its grounding in personal experience into a realm which was too abstract, making it vulnerable to philosophical and scientific attacks. In Islam it could be that it led to fundamentalism.

We also discussed the 'polar opposites' in modern French philosophy of Sartre versus Levi-Strauss. David Burridge wrote a short note to the meeting to discuss:

> 'Sartre argued existential consciousness chooses freedom for itself. In other words, it can dismiss the past and think creatively a new and better existence. Levi-Straus argued no such isolated consciousness could possibly escape the principles of universal mind structuring our experience of the life-world.
> I would firstly argue that if you start to

Claude Levi-Strauss

develop a new freedom, you must reflect on, and consider what created the past limitations to freedom. Moreover, the understanding of what the new existence should be like will be fashioned by what we have developed from our past understandings.

The absoluteness of Levi-Strauss, his universal mind structuring, is also a dangerous locking away of reason. Of course, we are going to use language, with established concepts to reason any improvement of existence but then we formulate proposals to seek and test outcomes. It is through this process that we can move to a better existence.'

The discussion showed that there seems to be truth in both views: we are not just individuals, we are born helpless, and dependent on others. We absorb the culture, language and heritage of our family and society: this provides a structure which we can rebel against if we want to, and many do. In choosing to reject the norm individuals help society to change, hopefully for the better.

A Year without Albion Beatnik

The *Wednesday*

It is just over a year since the Albion-Beatnik Bookstore closed its doors. It was a very sad event and a set-back for cultural life in Oxford. The shop was a home to the Wednesday group for two years before its closure. It was an unusual bookstore. Everything about it was unusual: the name, the layout, the café, the activities and the publications. Entering the shop, one took in the layout of the shop, decorated with fragments from books, poems or book titles on the tables. There were stacks of books standing like statues commemorating the old days and cultural life. The colours were fantastic, the highlighting of books was interesting. All this hit you at first glance and made you wonder that this was not only a bookshop but a 'Cultural Centre'.

The proprietor, Dennis Harrison, is someone who has a vision. He still runs cultural events, music, and poetry from different venues in the centre of Oxford. He published a quarterly magazine plus poetry collections and novels and encouraged others to have their cultural activities in the shop and he supported their projects. That was the case with our Wednesday group and magazine. Besides us as the Wednesday group, there was the Writers group, the poets, and the 'philosophy-in-the pub' all meeting in the shop at different times. Jazz and poetry had a special place in the shop. Dennis also played the piano very well. He opened the shop for long hours, closing sometimes at ten o'clock or eleven.

Now that the shop has closed and we have moved to the Opera café, we still visit the window of the shop and look in – it has been empty all this time. We feel sad to have lost Albion Beatnik, although we haven't lost contact with Dennis who is a great supporter of The *Wednesday*.

15

The *Wednesday*

The Second Year

Volumes Five & Six are now out

The Wednesday

Journal of Ideas, Poetry & Art

Thinking Out Loud

Volume Five

2019

The Wednesday

Journal of Ideas, Poetry & Art

Thinking Out Loud

Volume Six

2019