

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Poetry and the Philosophers

Last week **The Wednesday** celebrated its first poetry reading event. We have a full coverage of it in this issue. The poems read in that evening are all of the philosophical-poetic nature. This raises again the question of the relationship between poetry and philosophy.

Plato is the first to come to mind with his attack on poetry in *The Republic*. In Book Ten, Plato exiles the poets from his republic. The reason seems to be that they bewitch the people and keep them for ever in the Cave. They are too busy with the particulars of this world and the changing shadowy realities. Initially, in the first half of the Republic, Plato accepted that the poets could play a role in facilitating the education of the guardian class. Poetry and music are helpful means for memorising and learning, but later on, the problem is considered in its generality and relevance to the Republic as a whole. As Plato comes to the idea of the Forms, the particulars of this world lose their significance. Poetry which deals with these particulars has then lost its dignity and the poet is banished from the Ideal City.

Incidentally, Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens) turned away from music and thought that it is incompatible with his newly impressed Islamic faith. But when he founded the *Islamia School* in London, he discovered that the children learned faster and memorised better if the material is presented to them in a rhyming, musical way. He then reconsidered his position and took up singing in support of good causes and serving spiritual purposes. Plato did a similar thing by allowing those poets who sing about the Forms. Remember that contemplating the Forms was given to the philosophers, so the poet can rise to the status of the philosopher. The philosopher is looking at the Forms or having intuitions about them and not discursively conceiving them, and so the philosopher comes close to the position of the poet.

If Plato rejects the poets because they are not metaphysical, or not metaphysical enough, Nietzsche, the anti-Plato philosopher, also rejects the poets but for the opposite reason. For Nietzsche, they are too metaphysical (or other worldly) and not sufficiently immersed in this world.

Nietzsche, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Part I, Of Poets*, thought that the poets are shallow and their imagery not rooted enough in this world – they build castles in the air. “Alas, there are so many things between heaven and earth of which only the poets have let themselves dream! And especially above heaven: for all gods are poets’ images, poets’ surreptitiousness!”.

But he is being polemical here and is not fair; he does not capture the essence of the creative poetic process. Perhaps he was more perceptive in *The Birth of Tragedy* when he compared the poetic occupation with words and images (the *Apollonian*) to the more amorphous chaotic world of music (the *Dionysian*). The latter takes precedence for him over the former.

The important thing is to notice that there is a level that precedes words and images that the poet occupies first before he descends to the world of words and images (or individuation). This world is what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book “*What is Philosophy?*” call the “*Plane of Immanence*”. Both poetry and philosophy occupy this plane before they become individuated in the way they are delivered to us, the first figuratively and imaginatively and the second abstractly and conceptually. They are the twin peaks of the Parnassus: Bacchus (Dionysus) and Apollo.

The Editor

The Progressive Role of 'Unsociable Sociability'

What Can Kant's Concept Of History Teach Us Today?

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Immanuel Kant

Does Kant have a concept of history? Can it teach us anything about the world we inhabit today? The following article suggests that Kant does have a philosophy of history, which is modern and relevant to the political situation today.

In philosophy departments across the world Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as his prominent moral works are analysed, discussed, and often despaired over by students and scholars alike. His 'critical philosophy' has been written about in essays and articles in all parts of the publishing industry and even referenced in popular films (*Superman II* gives a nod to *Critique of Pure Reason* in one of its scenes). Yet his philosophy of history remains controversial and largely ignored, leading us to ask: does Kant have a concept of history and can it teach us anything about the world we inhabit today? I'd like to briefly suggest that Kant does have a philosophy of history, which is actually quite modern and that it *can* teach us something about the political situation today.

would have to consider if s/he wanted to compile a universal history of past human actions. This may not seem like such a curious idea today as we see this type of history frequently published with various subjects as their catalyst (e.g., Diamond's *Guns, Germs and Steel* and Harari's *Sapiens* – these are both attempts to construct a universal history from a particular point of view). But what is curious about Kant's little article is its discussion of conflict in human history, as well as nature's role in such conflicts.

Our age is increasingly defined by a wide array of conflicts, whether military conflict, digital conflict or even conflict which straddles both of these elements such as the military use of drones. Even jostling on the packed bus or train for a better place can be read as a form of social conflict. Modern terrorism in all of its appearances can also be considered under this rubric; an element of everyday life for many in the Middle East and one that increasingly dominates American and European consciousness. Whilst it is true that Kant could never have foreseen a situation where conflict is so multifarious, his concept

In 1784, three years after the publication of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant published a curious article in a prominent intellectual newspaper entitled, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*. Made up of nine 'propositions,' the article attempted to outline the necessary elements a future historian



Versailles: ended a war but did it start another?



Yalta conference: did it lead to the Cold War?

of history may still be able to tell us something about these conflicts. In Kant's view history tells us that conflict is not simply a set of randomly occurring mindless acts, nor is it a sign that we are unavoidably heading toward an apocalyptic nightmare. Rather, there is something integral at play in conflicts no matter how multifarious they are and in what context they appear.

In Proposition Four of Kant's article, a notion which has since been named the 'cunning of nature' (due to its similarities with Hegel's 'cunning of reason') is defined. The cunning of nature involves a feature of human social interaction Kant calls 'unsociable sociability,' which he defines as the human being's 'tendency to enter into society, a tendency connected, however, with a constant resistance that continually threatens to break up this society.' Put simply it is a part of the human being's natural inclination to connect with other people and to be part of a larger whole, yet it is also a part of this same natural inclination to destroy these social bonds through isolation. Kant attributes a lot to this concept in that it is the source of all human conflict, even attributing global conflict between states as emanating from unsociable sociability. Countries enter into antagonism with each other through the mechanism of unsociable behaviour, breaking the sociable links that might have been resulting in a state of war. We need

only look at the Cold War for a striking example of unsociable sociability propelling states into unresolvable, war fuelled deadlocks.

Kant also attributes historical progression to this concept, which means that it is responsible for the human species developing toward more enlightened states. Without the antagonistic feature of the human being Kant thinks we wouldn't be propelled to grow culturally or intellectually. In this sense, unsociable sociability is the driving force behind the movement of all human history and conflict plays a major role here according to Kant. If there is a stubborn question surrounding this idea, if it doesn't seem to add up, it is perfectly understandable and in line with much post-1945 historiographic thought about progress. For how can we say that conflict in all of the ways outlined above ultimately contributes to historical progression, especially in light of the tragic horrors of the Twentieth century? Surely, we cannot judge these conflicts based on a concept of progress devised in 1784?

Actually, Kant's concept can account for these conflicts. The point toward which human history tends, according to Kant's Fifth Proposition, is a '*perfectly just civil constitution*,' which means an egalitarian society or a 'cosmopolitan' society whereby all are welcome and equal. Kant

attributes this utopic end to unsociable sociability because it allows us to learn from the conflicts it catapults us into. This is the crux of Kant's point in the article and perhaps its most peculiar feature; unsociable sociability pushes human beings into conflict with each other, only to force them to develop moral laws and to learn how to and how not to treat one another. According to Kant this all leads to a state whereby conflict is necessarily abolished. Hence, the cunning of nature; conflict occurs in the pursuit of an end we are oblivious to, but which helps us learn from the mistakes made in human history on both an individual and global level. In a loose note from 1776 Kant already had a clear inkling of this notion: 'The useful aim of philosophical history consists in the preservation of good models and the display of instructive mistakes.'

This may seem hazy, but I think it teaches us a key lesson about today's events. It is easy to lose sight of the human being's capacity to learn and that we have the ability to construct laws which prevent harm from coming to others. It is easy to look at the social and political situation globally and in the UK and determine that things can never improve, that we are on course to collide with historical catastrophe. What Kant teaches us is that we must not lose hope that a perfectly just society (no matter how unlikely it seems) is possible in the future and that the social antagonisms which result in conflict are steps toward this goal. Without this hope we are rendered powerless to change anything. Kant urges us to strive toward a more cosmopolitan society, for if we do not then we have truly learned nothing from the tragic horrors which scar our history like craters on the Moon, and we ignore the lamps lighting up the road into the unknown night.

Thinking In Words: Is It Possible?

DAVID JONES

I am constantly surprised to hear people claim 'that they only think in words'. In response, I usually say: 'have you ever wanted to say something but not been able to find the words to say it?' They usually accept that they do have this experience but still cannot focus their attention on the actual thinking process.

If I wanted to explain something important to someone then I might inwardly rehearse the speech, but rehearsing a speech is not actually 'thinking'. Words are actually not for thinking because the 'thinking' must logically precede and determine the judgement of the selection of words. *The essential property of language is 'communication' not 'thinking'*. However, some people may be unconscious of their thinking process and may be only able to bring thoughts to a level of awareness at the level of verbal communication such as inwardly speaking to oneself.

The works of Aristotle that are collected in a volume known as the '*Organon*' can help a reader to become aware of the various processes of thinking that might otherwise be below the level of conscious awareness. Without such guidance, the attention of the mind is sometimes entirely used up on the '*matter*' of a thought and be unconscious of the '*form*' of the thinking.

I recently read that for about one thousand years the '*Organon*' by Aristotle was required to be studied by every university student before they went on to study their actual subject of study because this work was considered to teach and develop, for the student, their 'instrument' of knowledge. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case and few students are today proficient in the concepts explained in this work. Perhaps this is one reason why so many people equate language with thinking today and perhaps that language and words are so easily able to be used to form people's thoughts and attitudes.

“Love Poem” by the Iraqi artist *Sadiq Toma*



*Inspired by a poem of the Iraqi poet
Mohammad Mahdi Al-Jawahiri (July 1899-July 1997).*

SUPERVENIENCE:

Is morality just a hunch?

DAVID BURRIDGE

Moral properties are not natural properties, but in actual moral situations they supervene on them.

In the following article, I want to explore this distinction between moral properties and the social situations in which we need to make moral decisions.

It's part of my reasoning process that not only do I recognise how things logically fit together, but also, I question whether I deem them good or bad? Of course, it is not possible to deem something good or bad until you have a clear understanding of what it is you are perceiving. But often many things are recorded in our memory with label on them –*good /bad*.

This doesn't necessarily mean they are intrinsically good or bad, it just means that the experience we remember was surrounded by **a good feeling or a bad feeling**, at the time. These feelings would require empirical testing to clarify them. So, for example if I see some people standing talking across their garden wall, I might be reminded of my childhood when neighbours would have screaming matches across the wall that separated them (particularly when alcohol had been consumed). I had effectively labelled neighbours talking to each other over their garden walls as unpleasant. However, if I ignored my past experience, and investigated a particular gathering, I might find that they were sharing a happy chat. So, determining whether some social situation is good or bad requires empirical research and some evaluation based on that research.

Of course, there are pure moral properties of a social situation which are essentially good. As an example, the volunteers in Syria called the "white helmets", have saved 60,000 lives. In particular Abu Kifah, who gave his life to help save the innocent. This clearly represents moral goodness; the outcome was good and their intention was good. They would still deserve our praise even if they had not been so successful. Their intention was admirable. Sadat has criticised them, because they didn't suit his purposes. Perhaps he was responsible for having Abu Kifah shot. Moral properties supervene particular interpretations of social situations. Lifting a baby out of rubble and handing it to his mother, is an act pure love, as is risking your life for other people's welfare.

So where do pure moral properties originate? Background, breeding, culture usually form our immediate answer. Clearly when we see a moral situation we will look for the elements which accord with what is regarded as good or bad in the society/ culture, in which we have grown up in, or adopted. **But let us say that there is in a society a deep prejudice which has been part of that culture for generations. It is expressed in the street language of the inhabitants of that society. So, we may inherit the imposition of prejudice, but even so have a deep feeling that the prejudice is morally wrong when we encounter a situation created by it. We can push it aside, because there is in our minds a higher order of moral properties; if we only delve deeply enough into our thinking. By exercising reason, we discover that everyone**

deserves our respect and prejudices should be pushed away as a low grade contentions. This is what I would term *humanitarianism*.

So, is there a universal morality beyond the empirically testable world? If so, is access to this morality through a process of thinking that strips away all moral conditioning a pure form of morality? The difficulty with this is that morality is about how we treat our relationships with other people. So, we must re-enter the world to deliver this morality, to give it practical value. **If such a high morality exists then it is only to be sensed as a notion or an intuition.** We examine the moral situation and rely on our sense of what is good and bad, whilst working out interactions consistent with the intuition. This of course assumes we are not psychopaths.

WHAT IS THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE AND HOW FAR CAN IT HELP IN MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES?

Kant posits a *good will* as the only thing in the world that is beyond limitation. **“A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes--- It is good in itself”.** He conceives it also as governed by reason. The Categorical Imperative is founded on this idea, contrasting with that which he terms Hypothetical imperative. **The Categorical is founded, he argues on universal morality and is right in itself. The Hypothetical on the other hand, depends on the empirical circumstances, the particular outcome, for its goodness.**

To make ethical choices on the basis of maxims derived from categorical imperatives, we would be essentially stripping away all the empirical circumstances as well as our emotions and any particular cultural considerations. We would be relying on reason that emanates from our transcendental-self to supply an *ought* which has universal validity.

It is right to have principles, to seek natural justice and freedom of the individual, as well as have a fundamental concern for the good of humanity. Ethical choices should be tested against universal



Philippa Foot

principles of morality. Nevertheless, **ethical choices and decisions should also involve a thorough exploration of the empirical circumstances for them to be morally sound and of practical value.**

Before discussing this further, it is useful to understand where Kant says universal goodness comes from. If we delve into his Pure Reason, we can find the building blocks. Kant defined in his philosophy the difference between pure and empirical cognition. He recognised empirical cognition: “there is no doubt that all cognition begins with experience” --- “yet it does not all arise from experience”. He separates the empirical process of understanding from our ability to think independent of anything that might be currently going on around us. This capacity is a-priori to what we might experience. Reason is a practical and powerful cognitive process in humanity.

“Metaphysics is divided into the metaphysics of the speculative and the practical use of pure reason and is therefore either metaphysics of nature or metaphysics of morals. ---- Now morality is the only lawfulness of actions which can be derived from a-priori principles. Hence the metaphysics of morals is really the pure morality which is not grounded on any anthropology (no empirical conditions),”

The distinction between hypothetical and categorical imperatives is whether our judgements are formed by the practical necessity of a possible action, or a deep moral conviction fashioned in our souls without any reference to particular circumstances.

We all of course seek happiness, but happiness depends on a particular outcome and is

hypothetical, and the same actions repeated in other circumstances may not lead to such happiness. We are seeking therefore a universal morality: **“There is therefore only a single categorical imperative and it is this: act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law.”**

So, for a maxim to be derived from a categorical imperative, it is instigated by the *Good Will* in us. **A maxim for Kant was an underlying principle for action, which was also a flawless good intention with universal value.**

But how can we tell whether an imperative comes from deep in our souls or from a pressing need to deal with particular circumstances that have arisen?

Kant argues that the rational being should not consider what happens but what ought to happen and by such deductions distinguish the pragmatic from the universal. He propounded the formula of “the end in itself”: Act in such a way that you always treat humanity-----never simply as means but always at the same time as an end”. So humanity is made up of rational beings with their own maxims and their response will be equivalent to yours.

Philippa Foot in her (*Morality as a system of Hypothetical Imperatives*) argued that moral behaviour can occur as the result of adherence to moral maxims or out of pure self-interest, to garner the praise of society. If the categorical imperative were to apply, then actions should be done for their own sake, because they are right and not for some ulterior purpose. But following her logic, the hypothetical imperative which focussed on outcomes might be more realistic. Or does the nature of the imperative, matter as long as there is a good outcome? If Save the Children Fund gets all it needs to deal with a particular crisis, what does it matter what the contributors’ motives were? In practical day to day terms it

doesn’t matter, but **a Kantian might argue that such charities might not exist if Humanity had no sense of higher morality, and was merely moved by self-interest.** Kant would expect one to act beneficently towards vulnerable people, but treating them as rational beings.

It is clear that a truly universal law should fit snugly in everyone’s head, and for true universality there should be no contradiction. But even Kant envisaged that there would be contradictions both conceptual and of will. An immoral maxim would have a contradiction in it.

Korsgaard deals with the contradiction in three ways. She deals with first the logical contradiction. Kant gives the example of a man in financial difficulties who borrows money not intending to repay it. This, Kant argues, would fail the contradiction in conception test and be a non-starter. Korsgaard argues that it is in fact a logical contradiction as, if it were a universal maxim, it would lead to the practice of promising and offering just dying out. (*Obviously this takes no account of recent history*).

The second contradiction is teleological. In other words, a maxim should be consistent with its natural purpose. For example, Kant argued that it is a defilement of natural law to take one’s own life. This leads to the issue of natural actions. If a person is terminally ill and suffering unbearable pain, then his desire not to suffer may understandably lead him to end his own life. Any universal maxim reflecting a natural law would stumble over this contradiction.

This leads to the practical contradiction. For a maxim to have any value, it must be developed through the practical employment of reason. It must take into account all the circumstances in the world to be encountered. If, however, a purpose is thwarted in practice because the means of achieving them will be unavailable, then this would be a practical contradiction. For example, we can have the maxim that society needs to

have high levels of education. If, however, examinations are subject to routine falsification, then the purpose is not achieved. The failure does not mean the maxim is flawed, but that the conduct has to be separately dealt with. So perhaps the purer purpose would be to achieve higher standards of education through the deployment of fair examination systems. There are two moral standards addressed; education and fairness. So, there are contradictions to the achievement of universal moral maxims, which was recognised by Kant. He accepted that these were problems to achieving universalism but saw in the strength of practical reason the power to will universal maxims, at the same time maxims without contradiction.

Korsgaard argues: “As a rational being you may take the connection between the purpose you hold and an action that would promote it to be the reason for you to perform the action”. You would then consider whether that connection is sufficient to be universalizable. However, when considering the practical application of a maxim in particular circumstances we may find that there is a higher order of maxim to the one originally reasoned. If we take the often quoted example of the Jew that is hiding in your cellar and you are challenged by a Nazi as to whether this is the case. The maxim of always telling the truth is overridden by the maxim to save an innocent life wherever possible, or the maxim to defeat a monstrous ethic wherever possible. This might be described as an ascendancy of truths. Or it might be that the maxim not to lie is a thesis, which is countered by the antithesis: there are occasions when telling the truth is immoral. A new synthesis would be that the truth should be told only when it might lead to a truly moral outcome. (A *dialectic of maxims*).

Pristine *ought-to-be's* - universalised maxims, have little value if they are not altered and conditioned by facts from the world we experience. The categorical imperative may operate like a mantra in the head, but ethics has



Christine Korsgaard

to be secured through empirical evaluations. Kant was seeking to achieve pure morals through rigorous practical reasoning. His belief that there is good will inside us that we can realise through, what seems to be a Cartesian search in our transcendent self, is admirable, but **the only way we are going to truly evaluate a maxim, as to its universality is to put it to an empirical test both now and projecting into the future - as far as we are able.**

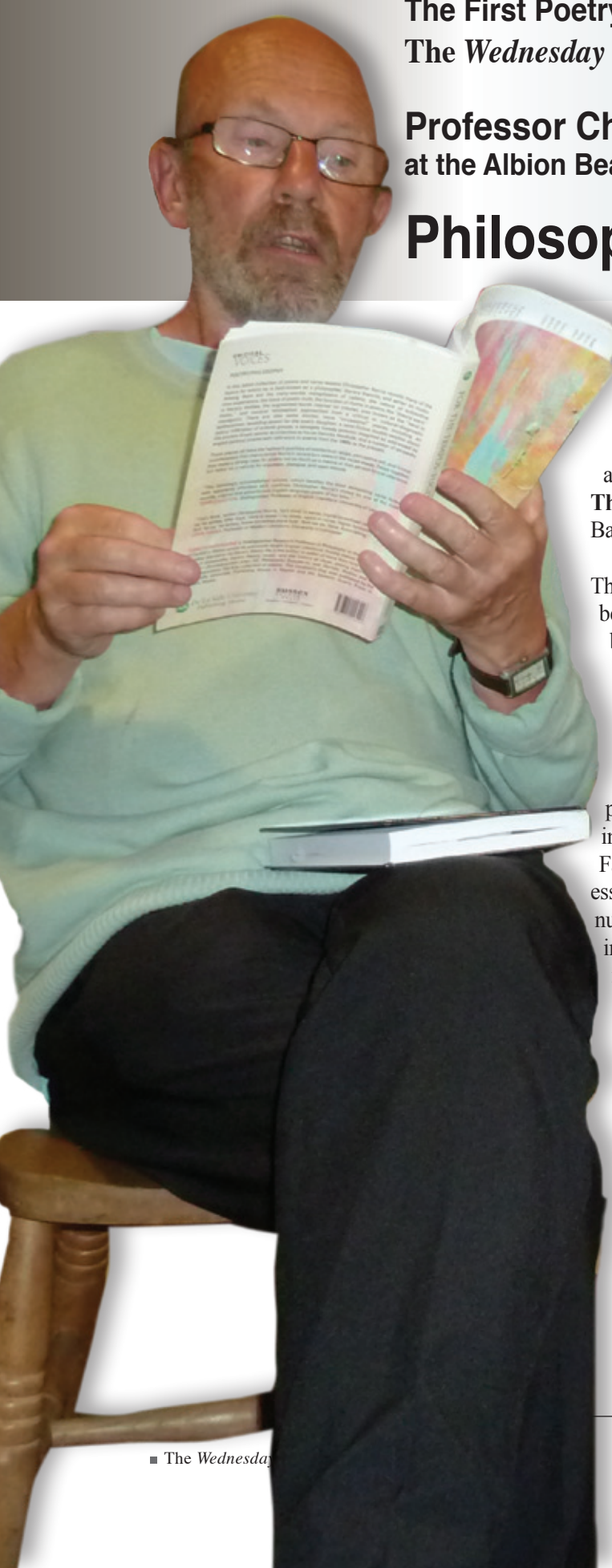
So, what then is the value of *supervenience*? The sensible empiricist should say that we need to develop the capability of standing back and viewing objectively a moral situation, and have strong sense of moral properties which I would call **a notion of humanitarianism**. This should guide our thinking as we work out the best possible outcomes in a particular social problem. We can subsequently generalise on the outcome and use this judgement in future similar social problems. But **there will always be a need for detailed empirical research nudged along by humanitarian notions.**

Events

The First Poetry Reading organized by
The Wednesday

Professor Chris Norris
at the Albion Beatnik explores the *Villanelle*

Philosophy in Poetic Forms



The Wednesday is pleased to have organized its first poetry reading ever at the Albion Beatnik Bookstore on the 13th of September 2017. The event which lasted nearly two hours (7.30 to 9.20 pm) attracted a good audience and it was conducted in a smooth and amicable spirit. The event was opened by the editor of *The Wednesday*, Dr. Rahim Hassan and it was chaired by Barbara Vellacott.

The interface between poetry and philosophy has sometimes been very unfriendly but for Chris Norris this is far from being the case. Chris is Emeritus professor of philosophy at Cardiff University, well-known as a writer and expert on *Deconstruction* and modern philosophy. About six years ago, he was sitting on the stage at a graduation ceremony when a line of poetry about Nietzsche came into his head. He developed it and since then he has published a number of poetry collections. The collections include “The Cardinal’s Dog” (2013), “The Winnowing Fan”, and “For the Tempus Fugitives: Poems and Verse-essays” (2017). He has also been a visiting professor in number of universities around the world. *The Wednesday* invited him to read his poems, which are, mainly, reflections on philosophers, old and new, starting with Descartes and ending with Deleuze.

The relationship between poetry and philosophy did not get off to a good start with Plato being against poetry. To Plato poetry feeds the passions, and is divorced from the perfect Forms and essences as it tries to copy these perfect ideas, and it fails because it is not the ‘real’ Form. However, Plato himself seems to be poetic and used many poetic techniques and images. So, Plato depicts a fight between poets and philosophers. Modern-day analytical philosophers see continental philosophy as being like poetry, as it is not rigorous and logical enough. Metaphors and symbols and other poetic devices such as rhythm simply do not work by means of logical argument.

Chris Norris, however, thinks that the quarrel between poetry and philosophy is artificial. Poetry is not restricted to flights of the imagination, in the 18th century poets such as Pope and Dryden did argue a case, as in Pope's *Essay on Man*. They found that it is not below the dignity of poetry to tackle philosophical issues. Poetry nowadays is mainly anti-formalist, and non-traditional.

Modern poetry has moved away from regular structure. This started with Mallarme, the French poet with his metaphor and symbolism. It became unusual and unexpected. But Chris has found that the formal constraints of poetic form involved in writing poetry can be an instrument of creativity, as when the rhyming leads to a word, say, which sets the poem off in a new direction. He has written a number of poems in the *Villanelle* style. This is a 19-line poem with two repeating rhymes and two refrains. It goes back in its history to the Troubadour poets in the Middle Ages. It was greatly influenced by the Andalusian poetry and some argued that even its themes were taken from the Andalusian Arabic poetry (*Zajal* and *Muwashah*). In his poem on *Descartes*, Chris Norris says:

: It stood to reason, but can reason stand?
 : All the best indicators say not so.
 : One thing's for sure: it will not go as planned.
 :
 : Time was when good solutions came to hand.
 : You searched, and when you found one, you would know.
 : It stood to reason, but can reason stand?

The refrain in his poem on **Heidegger** is: "He was born, he thought, he died." Heidegger uses "*Dasein*" and does not use "*Human Being*". He is now very controversial. Chris starts with this refrain and then goes on to interrogate his past and his political inclination. Chris thought that his Nazi sympathies means that he was not 'authentic':

: Quite simply, 'He was born, he thought, he died'.
 : These facts, you said, suffice to tell the tale.
 : All else is idle talk, best set aside.
 :
 : Birth-dates and death-dates: these can be supplied,
 : Though thought alone sets out on Being's trail.
 : Quite simply, 'He was born, he thought, he died'.
 :
 : Such is thought's piety, so woe betide
 : Those whom it summons but to no avail.
 : All else is idle talk, best set aside.
 :
 : They take your *Daseinsfrage* as their guide
 : To truth although its rudiments entail,
 : Quite simply, 'He was born, he thought, he died'.

Chris tackled more recent philosophers, no less controversial in their thoughts if not in their lives. His poem on **Adorno** is remarkable for its thought. Adorno was against a closed system and he thought that 'he who integrates is lost,' meaning that the particular disappears under the universal or the generalization. Adorno was concerned about abstraction. It is too easy, he thought, to go wrong with big theories, i.e. when we ignore the particulars. We tend to escape into abstraction. Adorno wanted to return us back to the reality of the here and now:



Professor Chris Norris reads *The Wednesday*



Chris meets the group with Fred Cousins to his right and Paul Cockburn



Chris Norris with David and David

Particulars alone should rivet thought.
 Let's have no concept cast its abstract spell.
 By each catastrophe the lesson's taught.

Maybe it helps us get from is to ought,
 Sets value free of its fact-hardened shell:
 Particulars alone should rivet thought.

This pleads that haecceitas not go for naught,
 No scheme of things its vibrant thinghood quell.
 By each catastrophe the lesson's taught.

All history shows that lesson dearly bought
 When heavenly concepts conjured earthly hell.
 Particulars alone should rivet thought.

So, it was on negation's side he fought
 For space where exiled intellect might dwell.
 By each catastrophe the lesson's taught.

The poem on **Lacan**, the French psychoanalysis, deals with the other, a theme that will recur with Levinas. It is the problem of the other. Lacan also wrote a lot about Freud and the talking cure of psychoanalysis. You have to read between the lines! Metaphor is the figure of desire.

Our gaps grow ever wider, and it shows.
 Your silences are what I most should heed.
 'There id shall be', is how the message goes.

Our case is not so hard to diagnose
 Since Freud and Lacan taught us how to read.
 Id knows the gaps in all that ego knows.

Quite simply, it's the problem that arose
 When Descartes pushed his ego-sponsored creed.
 'There id shall be', is how the message goes.

What's lost when poetry's reduced to prose
 Is crucial here, both masters seem agreed.
 Id knows the gaps in all that ego knows.



Burridge to his left
Clough



Some of the audience



Chris reading his poems

The poem on **Derrida** is a bit funny and unexpected. Its written from hedgehog's perspective. The poem takes its theme from one of Derrida's articles: "Che cos'è la poesia?" (*What Is Poetry?*). Derrida says:

"Prickly with spines, vulnerable and dangerous, calculating and ill-adapted (because it makes itself into a ball, sensing the danger on the autoroute, it exposes itself to an accident). No poem without accident, no poem that does not open itself like a wound, but no poem that is not also just as wounding."

And so, Chris Norris picks up the theme of Hedgehog:

Each time headlights approach I curl up tight.
The roar of tyres crescendos, then recedes.
So, I outlive your road-kill night by night.

My spines do splendid service in a fight
With any animal that wounds and bleeds,
But when the lights approach I curl up tight.

See here: my spines still bristle though the sight,
Mid-carriageway, is one no driver heeds.
Yet I outlive your road-kill night by night.

You tossed me from the verge; for you I write
This hedgehog-poem as you judge their speeds
So that when lights approach I curl up tight.

Let's not pretend you don't enjoy my plight
Out here where every near-miss surely pleads
I might outlive your road-kill night by night.

Should not such fluke longevity invite
Some greater care for my survival needs?
Yet still when lights approach I curl up tight.

Now they pass inches from me left and right
Where every speeding vehicle exceeds
The law. Outlive your road-kill night by night
I shall, but lights approach: I curl up tight.

Levinas in his book "Totality and infinity" talks about the **Absolute Otherness**, the impossibility of bridging



David Clough (front) and Jane Clark the well-known Ibn Arabi Scholar (back).



Dennis Harrison of Albion Beatnik talking to Dianne and Paul Cockburn



Gusts enjoying the readings

the gap between the first person and the other. Chris thinks the other can be known to us and that the problem is not so severe:

..... An alter ego's what the Other meant.
 'Tout autre est tout autre' can't be true.
 Sheer Otherness would be a non-event.

 Let's then resist the segregating bent
 That bids the moi haïssable shrink from you.
 An alter ego's what the other meant.

Deleuze enrages analytical philosophers. He wants philosophers to create new concepts, not just analyse old ones. He does not like structure. Chris refers to it as the rhizomes squeeze – rhizomes tangle and kill the tree.

..... Come Winter they'll survive the sharpest freeze
 Deep down but up above kill each new shoot.
 How should the rhizomes not destroy the trees?

 Let's grant, trees rot; yet nothing guarantees
 Their death until root-sickness grows acute.
 What once stood strong must perish by degrees.

There was a poem on **Agamben**. He is a philosopher who comes up with new ways of thinking about 'classical' themes. He also wrote "*The End of the Poem*" arguing that poems should stay open and not concluded, very different take from that of Dante:

..... Verse-closure throws the whole thing out of gear.
 With tensions unresolved it stays alive.
 Signs of convergence mean the end is near.

 Unrest's endemic to the poem's sphere.
 When meter vies with syntax, then they thrive;
 Verse-closure throws the whole thing out of gear.

Chris Norris also read more poems on different subjects, one of them on death. In his poem on **Dylan Thomas**, Chris took the opposite view to Dylan Thomas famous poem about death '*Rage, Rage, against the dying of the light*'. His message is just stay with it, do 'go a bit gently'! **Kubler Ross** wrote about dying and accepting it. Sadly, she did not live up to it when she was dying. His poetry is up-to-date with events, especially the **Grenfell Tower** tragedy. And he reflected on **Kalashnikov** who invented the infamous riffle. Ironically,



Kalashnikov said he wanted to invent a tool for farmers, not a machine-gun. At the end of his life he regrets his invention, even though others pulled the trigger not him.

Chris also read a poem on the tragic fate of the philosopher and novelist **Iris Murdoch**. It is fitting for the evening, since Murdoch is connected with Oxford. She suffered from dementia before her death. It was very sad how such a brilliant mind was reduced to watching Teletubbies in her illness.

The poems used rhythm well, creating a spell by using the repetition which is inherent to the Villanelle style. But can a writer of poetry have intentions which are easily transferred to the page or is the meaning in the words?

Most of the poems about philosophers were ironic, deflating the philosophers written about, sniping at them, making fun, deconstructing the deconstructionists, maybe.

Finally, it was a good evening for poetry, read by a true master of both poetry and philosophy and listened to by very attentive minds. There was a debate between the poet and his audience and many questions were asked, especially by young students of Oxford University. **The Wednesday** magazine intends to repeat the experience of poetry reading with Chris Norris, David Burridge and others.

Paul Cockburn, Fred Cousins and Rahim Hassan

David Clough wrote: Meeting Christopher Norris

I'm not sure how we arrived at the order of the poems last about Descartes then Heidegger, then Adorno, then Lacan but it felt right or suited some of my own thought. The ones about Derrida and Agamben followed before the one about Joyce Grenfell Tower, the inquiry about which starts today (14th Sept). Levinas and Deleuze came first and last after the break interspersed with ones about the Russian rifle-maker Kalashnikov and then Iris Murdoch watching Tele-tubbies and the reversed Dylan Thomas villanelle.

It was clear in the readings that he wasn't supporting Heidegger but was also critical of the infinite otherness in Lacan and Levinas.

Does philosophical poetry start with Heidegger? It is the case for Chris Norris, although he acknowledges that Plato himself used poetic technique and imagery. The formal poetic essays of Dryden and Pope are perhaps better guides.

Going back to the origins of language, as in reading Heidegger, is not philosophical enough. So, people like John Sallis end up just being passive before the text.

Ricoeur corrects this as he does also the non-event of the Levinasian other. This makes other people in the end so abstract... far too abstract. Yet if language misleads as well as guides, the poet is responding to subterranean promptings shaped by language, but maybe a form of active critique is still necessary.

Books about the end of theory abound now. Limited critique is still key but each new short Agamben book can create a new branch of theory. De Man's late writing contains evidence of the guilt he felt about WWII journalistic blogging as we would say now. This is perhaps why Hillis Miller and collaborators discuss the problem as a general type of archive problem. Perhaps this makes sense but I'm not sure. If only Adorno had the personal drama of Kierkegaard. Not just the dramatic life of an actress, but the loss of Regine was something Adorno was all too aware of in his early study of the Danish philosopher. The whole aesthetic becomes a kind of cover for loss perhaps. But theories of mourning and loss in Kubler Ross aren't matched in her actual life. Curiously I first heard about her reading Zizek but neither Zizek or Badiou featured during the readings night.

The Wednesday

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Alice in Wonderland

PHILOSOPHY FESTIVAL

Saturday 23rd September
10.00AM-5.30PM



Five speakers present philosophical ideas somehow connected with Alice in Wonderland and invite you to contribute to the debate.

Topics include:

'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone,
'it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less.'

A Lacanian View of Reality through the Looking Glass

Six impossible things: Lewis Carroll in everyday life

Is faith 'believing six impossible things before breakfast'?

Reflections on Gigantic or Tiny Alice in her Underground Adventures
Through the Looking Glass

£38 for Philosophy Society Members; £45 for non-members.

Includes a 3-course themed lunch and refreshments.

Profits will be split between the charities Mind and GXCA.

Poetry and Pints evening
7.30PM ONWARDS



£8 on the door to include a pint or glass of wine/soft drink - £6 in advance
Those interested in reading please contact the office at the Memorial Centre

To book or for more information please contact Fauzia Rahman frphilosophy1@gmail.com.
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