The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

On Epistemic Injustice

I came first to the concept of Epistemic Injustice through an interview with Miranda Fricker, now a professor of philosophy. She had worked on this concept for a decade before publishing a full book on the subject under the title *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. The concept combines epistemology, ethics and politics.

Epistemology as taught and thought about has been viewed from an abstract perspective, focusing on an idealised agent (or subject) in an idealised and abstract situation. What is missing from this picture is the real practice of acquiring knowledge or giving testimony. Normally, philosophers discuss knowledge as a justified true belief with some variants and objections, such as the internalist and the externalist position. The first requires that the subject knows that he knows, the second says that this is not necessary and that knowledge depends on how things stand in the world. But how do we deal with each other as bearers of knowledge? This picture is silent about the matter. In the social sphere it is not enough that subjects know that they know, or that their belief matches the state of the world. Rather, they are evaluated by their interlocutor.

Moving beyond the abstraction of the standard philosophical view of epistemology to the daily practice of acquiring and exchanging information, we come to the relationships that govern the social order. These are relations of power and systemic prejudices. We get below the surface relation of theoretical justice to the injustices, discussed here in terms of epistemology but also ethics. The work of Fricker mainly deals with the exposure of these power relations, building on, but also criticising and going beyond, Michel Foucault, and also using ideas from Bernard Williams. We discover that people are judged unjustly in their testimony and the description of their situation, especially when it comes to ethnic minorities, immigrants and women. We can also generalise the case to include the judging of one society by another, where power relations hold in a post-colonial world.

Epistemic injustice happens when a person is not believed because the social stereotypes about the group the subject belongs to undermine the credibility of the subject, say because of the colour of their skin, their religion, gender or country of origin. The epistemic injustice will put the person at a disadvantage in cases where truth and trust matter, say in judicial matters. Wrong judgments in these cases may end up causing people to lose their freedom and rights. But it could also lead to marginalization and limit the participation of individuals (or the groups they belong to) in the public sphere because they will be considered untrustworthy or incompetent.

Fricker refers to stories from novels, films and empirical research to show the extent of these injustices and what they lead to. But the most devastating conclusion one gets from these injustices is that which attacks the very identity and self-confidence of the person. As she says: the 'trustful conversation with others is the basic mechanism by which the mind steadies itself, but 'testimonial injustices exclude the subject from trustful conversation. Thus, it marginalizes the subject in her participation in the very activity that steadies the mind and forges an essential aspect of identity'. It degrades the individual and the group and distorts who the subject really is.

There is more to epistemic injustice than what we have outlined here. It is not an abstract research but a social programme that may lead to the liberation of individuals, groups and maybe whole nations from malicious stereotypes and injustices.

The Editor

Concepts and Reality

This second in a series of three articles explores the idea of concepts through a view of language as the use of recognisable signs to express information by combining concepts.

CHRIS **SEDDON**

Part 2

In the first article of this series of three I quoted three related notions from the history of Philosoph y and illustrated some working definitions of *intentional action*, *language*, *operational language*, *operational concept*s and *operational grammar* which ground language on the notion of referential concepts, without limiting language or concepts to that function.

In this article I illustrate how these ideas relate to generalisations and the idea of vocabulary approximately shared between language users, vagueness, explicit definitions, and context-sensitive language.

In the final article I illustrate the importance of linguistic self-reference in everyday contingent language and how the notion of definition avoids some contradictions inherent in formal accounts. Finally, I use the ideas to defend the distinction between analytic and synthetic language.

Generalised Operands

Although other analyses are possible, the choice of analysis is usually based pragmatically on how the concepts invoked might most conveniently be defined or understood. Operational concepts are generally best understood by generalising about their operands. So, in the original example, having understood well enough who Chris and Dolly are and what it means for one person to love another, we can understand what it means for Chris to love Dolly. But if the original analysis were replaced by the following:

```
operation: Chris loves Dolly
operator: Chris loves
operand: Dolly

operation: Chris loves
operator: Chris
operand: loves

Chris[ Loves ][ Dolly ]
```

Then it would be necessary to understand what loves is, without reference to any lover or beloved, and then to understand what it means for Chris to do or be anything with reference to anyone or anything. It is much less practical to try to understand what Chris is in terms of everything that might be said about him, than to understand what love is in terms of what it means for a lover to love a beloved.

By allowing an operator to apply to any number of operands an operational grammar meets the need to express generalisations.

For example:

```
operation: Chris loves everything
operator: every
variable: thing
operand: Chris loves thing

operation: Chris loves thing
operand: Chris
operator: loves thing
```

```
operation: loves thing
operator: loves
operand: thing


And[ thing: Loves[thing][Chris]]


operation: Chris loves something
operator: some
variable: thing
operand: Chris loves thing


Or[thing: Loves[thing][Chris]]
```

In the above examples, "everything" indicated a generalised conjunction "And", and "something" indicated a generalised disjunction "Or". It is important to note that because language requires generalisations, people may associate a sign with more than one concept, and the concepts with which they associate signs depends partly on linguistic context. In the analysis of "Chris loves everything" above, the word "thing" is a variable declared within the context of the conjunction expressed by the word "every". The conjunction has an infinite number of operands - any concept that results from associating any concept with the sign "thing" within that conjunction is an operand of the conjunction.

Variable Signs
In this sense, within operational language, every sign is a variable, either because it occurs within an explicit generalisation (as the word "thing" did above) or because the person already associates it with concepts as the result of their prior experience of its use (as I assume we did with the the word "loves" in those examples). A person brings their existing vocabulary to each new sentence, associating each sign in their vocabulary with familiar concepts. Whilst considering the sentence they supplement or modify their initial vocabulary to associate different concepts with new or generalised variable signs.

Chris Seddon

Within the scope of a generalisation, people can associate the variable sign unconditionally with any concept. In most cases only some of those instances will be relevant. For example, that Chris loves everyone in his family is essentially a generalised conjunction of a conditional saying that everything is such that, if it is in his family, then Chris loves it. In this example the generalisation has an infinite number of conjuncts, but because of the condition it contains, only a few are relevant:

```
And
[ thing: If
  [ In_family[ Chris ][thing] ]
  [ Loves[ thing ][ Chris ] ] ]
```

Pre-Existing Vocabulary And Vagueness
Like explicitly generalised variables, pre-existing vocabulary typically also associates each sign with several concepts. This makes sense of the comparative vagueness of most language.

For example, the opening example supposes the pre-existing vocabulary: "Chris", "Dolly" and

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"loves". In most appropriate contexts different people will associate these signs with similar concepts, but in certain contexts significantly different interpretations might arise. For example, would it invalidate the original sentence if I loved the original Dolly but failed to love her clone? The answer to that question depends in part on whether we would associate the sign "Dolly" with the clone as well as the original.

Some of us might, and some might not. We might not even notice the difference in our vocabulary until such a situation arose. In fact (even if they take the example to represent a factual claim), most readers of this article will not know anything about Dolly except that it is something I claim to love (this vagueness leaves the entire sentence very vague, but not completely meaningless - for example readers might at least infer that I love something, real or imaginary, without yet understanding what).

As another example of vague vocabulary based on the opening example, I might understand love in the sense that a lover will usually do their best to help their beloved, and be able to recognise situations and people to whom it relates, but there may be some borderline cases which I have never really considered one way or the other - would I still call it "love" if the lover refused to do something very harmful to themselves just for the sake of some slight benefit to their beloved? This is not intended as a moral question about love, which would presuppose a definite enough shared understanding of the question, but a linguistic question about the word "love", and how we might wish to use it.

It makes sense to say that before I even considered such a borderline case my vocabulary did not distinguish whether the word applies to that case or not. At that time, I associated the word "love" with many similar concepts, including one which applies in the borderline case, and one which does not. After I consider the case, if

I do decide that I need to refine my vocabulary, I will discard at least one of those concepts as not associated with the word love. On the other hand, if I decide it is better to leave the word vague in that respect, I will not discard either alternative (although this will only help when generalising beyond the borderline case).

Typically, I will not even know precisely which concepts I associate with my vocabulary, nor will I know whether your vocabulary is associated with precisely the same concepts as mine. But we usually hope that we know our vocabularies well enough and that they are similar enough for practical communication.

For this reason, it is convenient to regard pre-existing vocabulary as creating an implicit disjunction of any new sentence generalised with respect to the variables of our vocabulary limited to the concepts of our vocabulary.

Explicit Definitions

This is how explicit definitions work too, except that the disjunction is generalised with respect to the term(s) to be defined and contains a conjunction of the combined definitions of those terms and their use. The first conjunct is another conjunction generalised with respect to the context and parameters of the terms and contains definitions as extensional equivalences of the terms to be defined in that context with those parameters and previously understood terms in that same context with the same parameters. For example, the traditionally formatted definitions below implicitly establish the structure of generalisations which follows:

self-loving
> That a *person* is ***self-loving*** means: that the *person* loves the *person*.

loved
> That a *person* is ***loved*** means: that someone loves that *person*.

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```
There are some concepts
  self-loving and loved such that:
      in any context
      and for any person,
          that in the context
          the person is self-loving
        is equivalent to
          that in the context
          the person loves the person
        and
          that in the context
          the person is loved
        is equivalent to
          that in the context
            there is someone who loves
the person
    and in this sense
        Chris and Dolly are both loved
      but
        Dolly is not self-loving.


  Or
  [ self-loving: loved: # defined terms
    And
    [ And # definitions
      [ context: person: # parameters
        Equivalent # first definition
        [ context # definiendum
          [ self-loving[ person ] ]
          context # definiens
          [ Loves[ person ][ person ] ]
        ]
        Equivalent # second definition
        [ context # definiendum
          [ loved[ person ] ]
          context # definiens
          [ Or
            [ lover:
              Loves[ person ][ lover ]
    ] ] ] ]
      And # use of the defined terms
      [ loved[ Chris ]
        loved[ Dolly ]
        Not[ self-loving[ Dolly ] ]
    ] ] ]
```
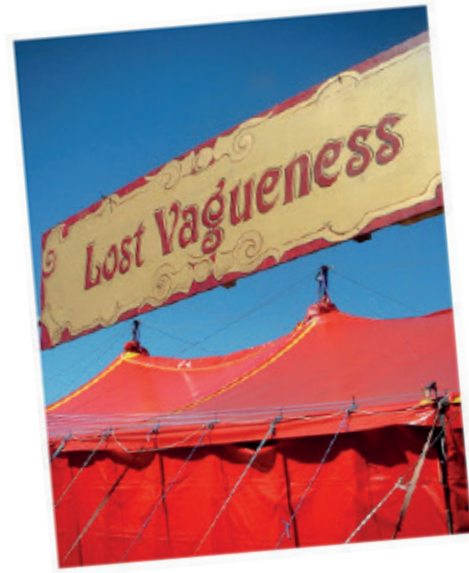
Context-Sensitive Language

Recognising that people bring a specific pre-existing vocabulary to their understanding of each compound sign makes sense of context-sensitive pronouns such as this:

```
operation: He loves her
operand: He
operator: loves her

operation: loves her
operator: loves
operand: her

Loves[ Her ][ He ]
```

Of course, non-verbal signs such as pointing can reduce ambiguity, and it is possible to imagine a pronoun that only makes a reference for me when I combine it with pointing, but this would not eliminate ambiguity. This account, which accepts that a person will adjust their vocabulary according to context, explains how it is that a context-free grammar can express context-dependent concepts.

In natural language, many contextual elements are tacitly implied. For example, "Chris loves Dolly" has a tense, which implies a context-sensitive time-restriction, which I might explicitly express with the operator now, as in "Chris loves Dolly (now)", which relies on the ever-changing pre-existing vocabulary of language users.

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Concepts and Forms

DAVID **JONES**

• **On Abstract Concepts**

General concepts such as 'love', 'hate' and 'happiness' are regarded as abstract because they are 'general' terms for many particular or possible 'instances'. Any particular instance would not be regarded as abstract, it would be regarded as a particular fact. Definitions of general terms do not set limits on any particular fact. Whatever is reported about a particular fact cannot limit something else or something previously not known, also being reported about the same fact. Definitions of natural things govern only conventions of the expected use of a word within a living language. *The words only point like signposts towards what the communicator wishes to move the attention of the listener or reader towards*. Having general terms in a language prevents the necessity for every particular thing to have a unique signifying word. Instead we have general concepts and general within more encompassing generalisations or in other words 'genus', 'species' and difference and the particular difference of place and time identifies a unique particular.

It is only pure abstract concepts such as those in mathematics or Euclidean geometry that can be limited by their definitions because they are 'artificial' and not 'natural' so they must be only what we made them to be. Human beings are also natural beings and their sympathies, antipathies and happiness are part of their natural behaviour.

• **Form**

The notion of 'form' will certainly be merely an abstraction in the mind of a thinking person if that thinker regards some particular 'form' without regarding it in *relation* to the corresponding *material* that is being formed. 'Form' is only meaningful in relation to 'the what is being formed'. The word 'material' is not limited to physical substance. The modern use of the word 'material' is a 'reduction' of its original philosophical use. For instance, individual speech sounds (as material) can be formed, by combination, into syllables. Then, regarding 'syllables' (as material), different syllables can be 'formed' in combination to make 'words'. Words (as material) can then be arranged to 'form' statements, and so on. In this way material and form are 'co-relational'. Another example might be that the elements of harmony and rhythm (as material) are 'formed' into musical compositions. This essential relationship between material and form, which is called hylomorphism, is needed to adequately understand either material or form because as the given examples illustrate, something can be viewed as material or form depending upon the perspective that is being taken.

Sometimes it is suggested that general concepts and ideas are just accidental to human cognition and nothing to do with the real world in itself. When scientists discover a 'pattern' in the behaviour of natural processes in the cosmos they regard such a 'pattern of behaviour' as something that would continue to occur even if there were no human minds to to capture it in cognition. The human language that is used to identify such a pattern of behaviour with an arbitrary word such as 'gravity' would not be used without humans who need to communicate it but what the word 'gravity' refers to is a 'forming principle' which is a part of nature and human beings have, also by nature, an organ of intelligibility that can inwardly perceive such a 'forming principle' as a pure idea.

'Capricorn' *By the Iraqi Artist Noor Kamal*

Climate-Change: a Dialogue

CHRIS **NORRIS**

'Nice day for February, like early Spring!'
Hang on a bit, rejoicing not allowed.
Just think what two or three decades might bring,
For every silver lining has a cloud.

'So nice, not having insects hit the screen,
Those bugs that used to leave the car a mess!'
Spray your insecticides and let them clean
The last few humans out: one bug the less!

'Great Winter holidays in places where,
Just three decades back, you'd have frozen stiff!'
Enjoy it while you can, but do take care:
Bush-fires are now a case of when, not if.

'El Nino's shift of tack brings benefits
For some, like these unseasonable highs!'
OK, make hay, but just remember it's
High ultra-violet streaming from the skies.

'Old misery-guts, what's wrong with taking long-
Haul flights to somewhere nice when it's so cheap?'
Oh nothing wrong, dear traveller, nothing wrong
Short-term, but longer-term the costs are steep.

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'But we've cruised North and seen the polar bear,
The tern, the narwhal, and the caribou.'
You've seen the ice-floes crack, and done your share
Of killing in that last-chance Arctic zoo.

'We've seen those Greenland sharks, their bodies sleek,
Their deep-sea habitat a world apart.'
No refuge: their survival hopes are bleak
As sonar rings at depths way off the chart.

'Yet times there are, brief moments, when we feel
That there's 'one life, within us and abroad''.
Fine sentiment, no doubting its appeal,
But lost on sea-birds plastic-choked and shored.

'We've given up our diesels and gone back
To petrol, like the eco-experts said.'
Smart move financially but it won't crack
The problem or raise victims from the dead.

'Perhaps you're right, but what's to do? We've checked
And there's no remedy to fit the bill.'
Try 'pessimism of the intellect'
Along with 'optimism of the will'.

Notes
'one life, within us and abroad': Coleridge,
'The Aeolian Harp'

'pessimism of the intellect', 'optimism of the will':
Antonio Gramsci, *Letter from Prison* (1929)

(Of course, this poem is a piece of blatant hypocrisy
since, in common with most relatively well-off people
in the West, I don't come close to living up to the
standards it implies or requires. There is also hypocrisy
in using 'We're all in the same hypocritical boat' and/or
'What can you do?' as ways of trying to get myself off
the hook.)

Town Life

Within a small circle four coffee shops,
six pubs, five take-aways,
one gambling parlour,
two charity shops. Houses crumble
in paved gardens under nettles.

Front gardens are packed with wheelie bins,
where once people kept patches of grass,
privet hedges and roses, curtains are drawn
behind diesel-coated windows, hallways
are pungent with cooking smells.

Solitary alcoholics smoke outside entrances,
teenagers huddle in corners behind the church.
People queue for fish and chips
with children and dogs on streets
that close in and go on with their day.

At night the never-ending barking
of distressed dogs, shadows
of errant cats slinking past,
the angry voices of drunks
in the early hours.

Dark windows, empty streets are waiting
for the absent light to entangle the stars,
but to be blinded by the glare of street lamps,
and the lunatic moon that slowly edges in
to dazzle the restless insomniacs.

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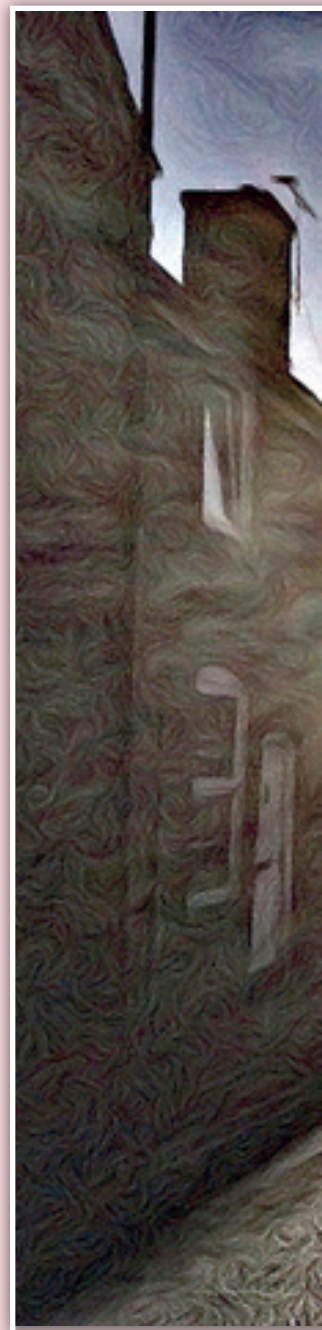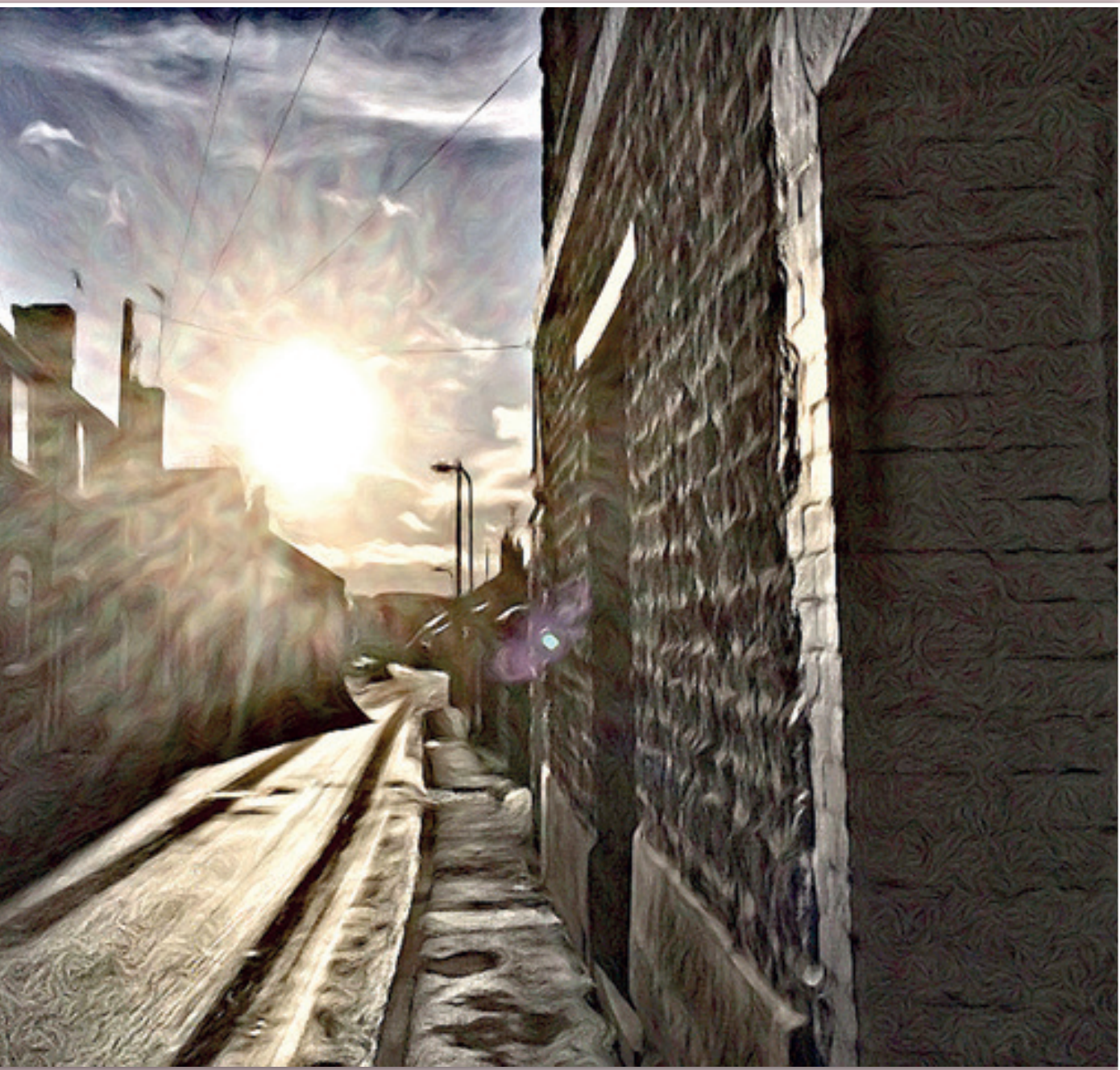
Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Identity, Fragmentation and Integration

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 24ᵗʰ April 2019

Is identity a given, metaphysical entity or is it an historical process open to change and development?
Is fragmentation necessary- that it is in the nature of identity (unity) to go through diversity, or a contingent fact of history? Is it desirable or regrettable?
Is integration a return to identity in its original form or is it a higher level of identity (unity in diversity)?

PAUL COCKBURN

In our Wednesday meeting, we discussed identity, fragmentation and integration. Identity has been normally discussed in a logical sense, but we also added the social dimension. Fragmentation is an ambiguous concept. It can be considered as differentiation – a harmless multiplicity – but fragmentation somehow also has a negative connotation. It implies a lack of unity. Functional differentiation is not negative: a company making a product, say, needs a production plant, a marketing department, personnel and finance departments etc. Our bodies have many organs and parts, all functionally working together to keep us alive.

Modern social life is segmented. We join different groups, have various special interests, go to work. Others may therefore only come to know us within specific contexts. A hundred years ago most people would have lived close to others in small communities and be well known to others over a long period of time. This segmenting of our lives in the modern world leads to a fragmented self. We can perhaps overcome this by telling ourselves the story of our lives, we construct a narrative for our lives which gives us a sense of our identity.

One view was that only through relationships does my identity appear. In sport, it is often only in a team that the brilliance of the individual is manifested. Army training can be very harsh, with individual liberty severely curtailed. But out of this harsh treatment an incredible 'esprit de corps' can be built up, so that each member of the group (a platoon in the army) is prepared to die for the sake of the others. In society there are forces which mould us, we are dependent on others, but we also want our independence. The two big questions are 'who am I' and 'where do I belong'.

We considered the idea suggested by Bernard Williams and others that our identity is, in part, socially constructed. If what defines us as rational beings is rationality and rationality appears in a social context of dealing with each other, then the presence of others and our relationship with them is constitutive of our own identity. Rationality needs a check on it and the check comes from social interaction. This will generate a steady sense of the self. How others think of us will also increase the degree of stability of the self. Fichte applied this to the personal: the 'I' and the other 'I' and considered the other as a constitutive condition of our consciousness. He built his whole system of ethics on this idea. We are not only individual rational selves, but

Bernard Williams

we represent one over-arching rationality, continually developing towards perfection and self-sufficiency.

Hegel's idea of '*Aufhebung*' (Sublation) was also discussed as a means of bringing the fragmentation into unity at a higher level. In the Hegelian system, there is an undifferentiated unity, that goes through contradictions and negations into a differentiation without unity, and finally through an act of sublating, the fragments will find their unity into a higher synthesis. The synthesis both preserves and transcends the previous stage. Identity is then reproduced at a higher level, enriched by all the dialectic that has gone into making it.

Chris Seddon presented a full logical analysis of identity (which we hope to publish in a forthcoming issue of The *Wednesday*). He distinguished between absolute identity, equivalent identity and approximate identity. The *absolute identity*: that things are absolutely identical means that any description applies either to all of them, or else to none of them; that is, everything they have, they have in common. The *equivalence* identity is a relationship of an equivalence. It means that each of the things it relates is related to itself, to any others that are related to it, and to any others that are related to that; or to put it another way, they all have something in common. The *approximate equivalence* identity is that in which something might be equivalent to two other things that are not equivalent to each other, for example, being roughly the same colour. In the meeting, he discussed the concept of logical identity in terms of our perception of objects.

We discussed the tea-pot on our table at the Opera Café in terms of its identity. We can link it to all instances of tea-pots, even a Russian samovar is a tea-pot of a sort, from a different culture. We are somehow led to the infinite: there are an infinite number of contexts and ways we can link the tea-pot to other contexts. William Blake wrote about seeing a whole universe in a grain of sand! This is easily done in the object sphere, but things are more complex in the social sphere.

Identity involves the concepts of resemblance, repetition, and recognition. It also involves the idea of tradition. Social and cultural change might challenge all these aspects. We may feel we have lost our tradition, that things don't resemble what went before them and we no longer recognize ourselves in them.

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Identity: The View from The Arts

What about changes in literature and the arts that have brought major revolutions in thinking and sensibility?

Rahim Hassan suggested that the development of art and culture generally presents another view of identity and change. The worry about identity is also a worry about the disintegration of a world-view, a form of culture or artistic sensibility. Major changes in the history of civilization must have carried with them a sense of uneasiness, due to the fracture of a world-view or a loss of a form of culture. The Enlightenment was such a change, but also the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century with new movements in art and literature.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a euphoric post-modernist turn and talks about the fragmentation of the subject, culture, form and identity. This comes with an anxiety and fear which are sub-conscious and reflect our not being able to come to grips with change, the loss of the ability to deploy our usual categories or simply a fear of the unknown, especially when the media interfere and hype all this.

But change is not bad if we can keep our confidence and go through the fragmentary stage to its conclusion, a conclusion that may arrive at a new identity formed at a higher level than we currently have. Hegel has the word (*Aufhebung*) meaning sublating [assimilating (a smaller entity) into a larger one]. Nietzsche would say that we arrive at a stronger position with more drives that are unified into a 'grand style'.

Peter Wood said that some points of major culture-historical change have produced some of the greatest artistic achievements – e.g. Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Friedrich – by creating artistic visions that are in opposition to the contemporaneous political and religious attack upon human and cultural values. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century this attack was made directly via cultural means, i.e. by a degradation of culture itself, by promotion of bourgeois culture that presents a degraded view of the human (Monet and Impressionism, Joycean stream of consciousness...). This is the case with almost all so-called 'high' art (Shakespeare was enjoyed by the lowest levels of Elizabethan society), which is really formalistic and anti-human, along with the denigration of all so-called 'low' art, i.e. anything that humanity as a whole can respond to due to its appeal to the deepest layers of human reality. Loosed from its anchor in human truth, in the art that is promoted by the establishment (Saatchi, for example) all we are left with is post-modern relativism – replacing the cosmic statement of *King Lear* with Tracey Emin's knickers. But great art will continue to arise from the marginalized (Shakespeare was on the run half his life).

Rahim Hassan added that there is a relationship between tradition and identity (or Form). Tradition is something given that we receive from the past, like common-sense philosophy in Britain which has a tendency to persist while identity is something evolving. Of course, tradition could also be evolving but maybe at a slower rate. It is more prone to shocks in the arts and literature than in philosophy.

Peter Wood replied that the arts reflect more the details of the concrete situation, which is ever-changing, while philosophy only flies at dusk. Still, we must be careful not to overgeneralize about the philosophical tenor of the times - just because some bigwig at Oxford sees things in particular terms doesn't mean that his view is shared by all the individuals in society. And the arts, of course, are *creative* and, at their best, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Peter Wood

The Quest for Identity

DAVID BURRIDGE

David Burridge

There is a chapter in Anthony Storr's Book *The Dynamic of Creation: The quest for identity* that is relevant to the debate. He is dealing with the quest for identity of creative people – *the creative person needs both an unusual access to his own inner depths and also a strong or at least adequate degree of control to contain and make use of what he finds there*. The poets and composers he cites are struggling with the self, what Keats calls the proper self and there is of course the need for conformity. *There are many people who under-estimate their strength, forcefulness and power to act, because they think of themselves as passive vessels*.

There is an important psychological distinction between dependence and independence. In order for someone to be creative they must be able to realize their own identity outside the group's tendency to enforce its identity, whatever that might be, even though they will be using the language and addressing the customs of that social grouping.

Freedom is necessary for genuine creativity. However, dependence is the opposite powerful social force. Most people have a sense of belonging and when this disappears people do not feel free but lost. So, on the one hand there is complete independence allowing creativity and on the other hand we have dependence allowing constructive social cohesion. In fact, we all have a potential capacity for creativity (we should not just think about the arts when we are talking about independent thinking). On the other hand, we all have a varying need to belong. To understand group identity, we must first analyse ourselves.

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The Second Year

Volumes Five & Six are now out

The Wednesday

Journal of Ideas, Poetry & Art

Thinking Out Loud

Volume Five

2019

The Wednesday

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Volume Six

2019