

# The Wednesday



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *Mysticism and Intellectual Intuition*

Ibn Arabi, in his *The Alchemy of Human Happiness*, describes two forms of knowledge: The first is mystical knowledge, which he calls 'the private divine face.' It is the knowledge that goes beyond the empiricist way of knowing. I call it here 'intellectual intuition'. The second is rational, empirical knowledge

In his *Meccan Openings*, Ibn Arabi describes existence as a circle. There are lines connecting the centre to each point on the circumference. The points are the existing entities. Each line is the face between the centre and the entity. The line shows the poverty of the entity and its direct reliance on the centre for its existence and maintenance through the 'private face'.

The creatures are the points on the circumference. They have two ways of looking: one towards the private face (the centre), the other towards each other. The latter is the empirical realm. The private face is beyond the grasp of the intellect and is known through direct experience. Knowledge coming through a direct experience is individual, private and free from the chain of mechanical, empirical causation. 'Cause and effect' is a linear mechanical chain that will never reach the totality of its object, while the private face mode of knowledge is organic. It is the relation of the totality to its parts and the parts to their totality. It is a direct grasping of the totality of its object. It is also a non-sensory or intellectual intuition.

One way of looking at the private face is that it is a mode of knowledge that is not connected with sense-perception. It is not a mode of thinking that needs its object to exist to be able to know and think about it. It is not logically or empirically an *a posteriori* knowledge but a knowledge that is prior to the existence of its object. It is also a knowledge

which creates its object. It is more like the artistic approach to its object, rather than the scientific one. The objects of this knowledge conform to it, while rational knowledge that works through mechanical causality conforms to its objects. Rational thinking is slavery to causes while knowledge through the private face is freedom.

Another way of conceiving of it is that of a poetic vision. Ibn Arabi, in some places, refers to *ilham* (inspiration). It is through the private face that God talks to each person. That person may be ignorant of the private face, and he will attribute the thought to himself. He doesn't realise where he got it from because of his ignorance of its source. Ibn Arabi suggests that inspiration is a continuation of the Prophetic knowledge after Prophethood has ceased.

But this *ilham* is a poetic idea. It may be a special faculty; the mystics refer to it as the heart. It takes a great poetic vision and a religious sensibility to see what is involved in this inspiration. Holderlin, the German poet, said of the poet:

'his soul, being compelled by secret forces to escape self-consciousness in the very moment of his highest consciousness, thereby safeguards the life of the spirit... in him the spirit hatches itself out and learns to soar, often carried away by the sacred rhythm, then borne along, swung up and down in sacred frenzy, abandoned to the divine; for this only comes from within: the movement towards the sun; it clings to the rhythm.'

This idea is well-known to poets, artists, philosophers and scientists who appreciate the power of the imagination and the totality of reality beyond the piece of knowledge they are engaged with.

*The Editor*

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# Spirit, Culture and the Brain

***The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* by Iain McGilchrist is a very interesting book and reading it is a life changing experience. It suggests a theory about the human brain, in terms of the right and left hemispheres, and it reviews the medical evidence for this. It also investigates Western culture for manifestations of what the theory predicts.**

JEANNE WARREN

## Part 1

'This book tells a story about ourselves and the world, and about how we got to be where we are now. While much of it is about the structure of the human brain ... ultimately it is an attempt to understand the structure of the world that the brain has in part created.' This is said on page one of the book. That is how the author begins a journey of nearly 500 pages.

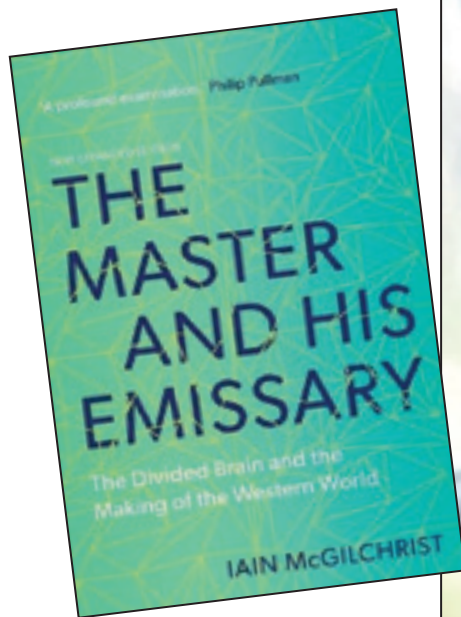
He believes that developments in the brain over time have led to a growth in self-consciousness and increased our difficulties in managing ourselves in society. He hopes that an understanding of underlying brain function can help us to understand our problems better. In particular, we are becoming very technological and leaving behind more humanistic ways of living, which are even looked down on and derided. I will follow the structure of the book and talk first about the divided brain and then about how McGilchrist sees the relation between our brains and our culture.

The human brain is complex. The most recently evolved part of the brain, the frontal lobes, are much larger in humans than in any other species. It is to this fact that we owe our ability to 'stand back' from the world and from our immediate experience [p.21]. This enables us to plan, and to take control of the world around us rather than simply responding to it. In this we differ from other animals. But the division of the cerebral cortex into two hemispheres, joined by a band of tissue called the corpus callosum, is something we share with the higher animals [p.25].

Apart from each hemisphere controlling the opposite side of the body, the right hemisphere the left side of the body and the left hemisphere the right side, the two hemispheres enable two different *kinds of attention*. Animals and birds experience competing needs. There is a need to focus attention with precision, as a bird for example needs to focus on a seed that it wants to pick out to eat. At the same time there is a need for open attention to the wider environment, to look out for possible predators. These two different kinds of attention need to operate simultaneously. This suggests the need to keep parts of the brain separate, to stop them interfering with each other.

As McGilchrist puts it: 'If you are a bird, in fact, you solve the conundrum of how to eat and stay alive by employing different strategies with either eye: the right eye (left hemisphere) for getting food and feeding, the left eye (right hemisphere) for vigilant awareness of the environment.' [p.26]

Quite possibly the division of the human brain arises from the same need to do two things at once, to direct a narrow, focussed attention to carrying out particular tasks while at the same time giving a broad, open attention to whatever else is going on in the world beyond. The band of tissue which connects the two hemispheres not only enables communication between them but, just as importantly, enables one hemisphere to inhibit the other, to stop it interfering. If for some reason this band of tissue is cut, the inhibitory function is lost, but the person still functions



as one person, not two, indicating that the hemispheres also communicate in other ways, though not as fully [p.210].

The hemispheres are asymmetric. From popular science we may have learned that language resides in the left hemisphere and empathy in the right hemisphere. Though this is largely true, it is also true that *both* hemispheres are involved in almost everything we do. McGilchrist concentrates on the differing types of *attention* characteristic of each hemisphere and on their interaction.

He points out that the kind of attention we bring to bear on the world changes *what kind of* a thing comes into being for us. The right hemisphere brings into being for us a world in which we *experience* the complex, embodied world of unique beings, a world which is constantly changing and with which we are deeply connected. The left hemisphere 're-presents' a version of our experience, presenting us with static, separable entities which can be grouped into classes and on which predictions can be based. This kind of attention makes each thing explicit but also static, mechanical and lifeless. It enables us to know and to learn and to make things. It gives us power [p31].

In Chapter Two of the book McGilchrist asks: 'What do the two hemispheres "do"?' It contains

many results arising out of brain research, and I cannot begin to summarise it. Much research involves subjects who either have a split brain, in which the connecting band of tissue has been severed, or who have one hemisphere disabled, either because of an accident or a stroke or because it has been temporarily disabled for experimental purposes. (This can now be done safely with no after effects.) Here are some examples:

1. The right hemisphere sees the whole before whatever it is gets broken up into parts, whereas the left hemisphere sees parts. Split-brain subjects are unable to relate the shape or structure of something they have *seen* to something they *feel* with their *right* hand (left hemisphere control). With their *left* hand (right hemisphere control) they perform perfectly [p.47].

2. Drawing skills are impaired if one hemisphere is disabled. Subjects relying on the left hemisphere alone (right-hemisphere damage) lose overall coherence. If asked to draw a person they cannot assemble the bits properly, for example attaching arms to the neck or the lower part of the trunk. Subjects relying on the right hemisphere alone (left-hemisphere damage) lack detail though they get the overall shape recognisably correct [p.47].



3. If the right hemisphere is damaged, disabling the left side of the body, the left hemisphere may actually deny having anything to do with a body part that does not seem to be working properly. Patients will report that a hand doesn't belong to them or belongs to the person in the next bed. Quite elaborate stories can be invented [p.67]. If the left hemisphere is damaged, causing the disabling of the right side of the body, the patient does not exhibit this behaviour.

The right hemisphere is particularly well equipped to deal with our emotions, our sense of humour, our use of metaphor, our religious sense, and all our imaginative and intuitive processes [p.209]. It is important in being able to 'put ourselves in another's shoes.' Some types of right hemisphere damage, but not left hemisphere damage, cause patients to become incapable of empathy [p.58].

The right hemisphere is responsible for every type of attention except focussed attention [p.39]. In almost every case, what is new must first be present in the right hemisphere before it can come into focus for the left [p.40]. A right hemisphere stroke can be more disabling than a left hemisphere stroke, except that in the latter the ability to produce language is lost. Understanding of language may still be present. For example, one patient with left hemisphere

damage could instantly pick up a brick on command, but he had no conscious memory of the word *brick*, being unable to say or write the word [p.50].

The left hemisphere operates an abstract information system, storing stable information which enables it to distinguish instances of a type. The right hemisphere prefers to deal with actually existing things. Again, both hemispheres share in most activities, and part of the relationship between them is that they inhibit each other, so if the left hemisphere ceases to function, the right hemisphere may discover unused abilities, and vice versa.

Part One of the book, on the brain, contains two fascinating chapters which I will not go into here. Chapter Three 'Language, Truth and Music' considers the possible origins of language. Chapter Four 'The Nature of the Two Worlds' considers how philosophers have apprehended the divided nature of the brain through their systems of thought. Heidegger and Wittgenstein get particular mention.

The heart of McGilchrist's theory about the two hemispheres is in the next chapter, Chapter Five 'The Primacy of the Right Hemisphere'. He believes that while both hemispheres are of huge importance to us, the right has precedence,





East Asian culture is more balanced between the right and left hemispheres

because, and here I quote him, 'it underwrites the knowledge that the other comes to have and is alone able to synthesise what both know into a usable whole.' [p. 176].

According to McGilchrist's thesis, the left hemisphere, with its powerful analytical abilities, cannot operate on its own with the degree of success achieved by the right. Quoting again from the book: 'The left hemisphere, the mediator of division, is never an endpoint, always a staging post. It is a useful department to send things to for processing, but the things only have meaning once again when they are returned to the right hemisphere. . . .[W]hat begins in the right hemisphere's world is "sent" to the left hemisphere's world for processing, but must be "returned" to the world of the right hemisphere where a new synthesis can be made.' [p.195].

McGilchrist chose the title of the book from a story he remembers from Nietzsche. (Strangely, he could not say exactly where, and my philosophical friends who are fans of Nietzsche have not been able to tell me either.) The story tells of a wise ruler, the Master, whose domain expanded under his rulership so much that he needed carefully trained viceroys or emissaries to oversee its more distant parts. Eventually one of the cleverest and most ambitious of the

emissaries decided to usurp the Master and rule in his stead. But he lacked the wisdom of the Master, and eventually the domain collapsed in ruins.

McGilchrist sees the relationship between the hemispheres in Western culture as being analogous to that story. He sees a power struggle between two unequal entities, in which the dependent partner, the left hemisphere, starts to see itself as of primary importance [p.204]. Seeing the two hemispheres of the brain as two warring parties may seem fanciful, but the brain is as central to a person as any part of the body. How are we to think of it? As a machine? That is even more of a travesty, unless we believe that people really are at bottom machines. That would be a left-hemisphere view of us.

This leads to the topic of the dominance of the left hemisphere in our current culture, McGilchrist's central thesis. He says, by the way, that the culture of East Asia is different, with a better balance between right and left hemispheres. So, we are talking here about our Western culture, roughly from the very early Greeks to the present day.

- **All page numbering refers to the first edition (2009). There is now a new expanded edition (2019).**

## Critique of Structuralism

**In this article, I want to review semiology as Saussure defined it and then explore its use as a basis for the structuralism of Levi-Strauss, following through with the post-structuralist criticism of Saussure.**

**DAVID BURRIDGE**

In his book *Continental Philosophy Since 1750*, Robert C Solomon writes:

*'Levi-Strauss rejects the idea of the Cartesian subjective self, and in its place imposes an ambitious and ominous theory of universal structures, not based in the self (as in Kant, et al.) but in language, and ultimately in the structure of the human brain.'* (Solomon, P.195.)

In his book about Saussure Jonathan Culler compares him to Durkheim and Freud:

*'Anyone analysing human behaviour is concerned not with events themselves but with events that have meaning.'* (Culler: Saussure, Fontana, P.13)

Language is a structured system. A body of necessary conventions in a society. There is hardly likely to be anybody who would not agree with this. It is after all our means of expression and through the use of language comes the creation of everything that we would regard as civilised or just practical. The controversy arises with Saussure's science of signs. He argued that there is a physiological pattern of sound waves which are physical facts external to the individual. So, it would appear that there is a system of signs which have meaning independent of the way an individual shapes the language. A system of signs is a sound pattern which is connected physically to the brain. This would infer that language could be studied independently of the culture that uses or shapes it.

There is the synchronistic perspective which looks at the current users as a whole. But there is a diachronistic study which looks at language

through the course of time. Semiology is the science of signs, whether they are spoken sounds or written words.

Saussure admitted that there is an arbitrary nature to signs: *'There is no natural nor inevitable link between the signifier and the signified.'* (Culler, P.19). The same object will certainly have different names to identify the same object.

A language can divide up its signifiers to express particular concepts: *'Such concepts are not autonomous – They are members of a system that are defined by their relations to other members of that system.'* (Culler, P. 24). A linguistic unit is a form of sound and 'Langue' is a system of a language. Parole on the other hand is the individual's use of the language. I may be learning the formal structure of a language but when I use it to express my thoughts, I am exercising parole (what I would describe as colloquial speech). The question then is why does this link Saussure up with Freud and Durkheim? Because:

*'The social phenomenon is made possible by a system of interpersonal conventions: a language.'* (Culler, P.72)

And:

*'Semiology is thus based on the assumption that insofar as human actions or productions convey meaning, insofar as they function as signs, there must be an underlying system of conventions and distinctions which makes meaning possible.'* (Culler, P.91)

This inspired the establishment of structuralist philosophy, particularly with the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss. In an epoch-making article: *Structural analysis in Linguistics and*



Levi-Strauss

*Anthropology*, he says:

*'Linguistics occupies a special place in the social sciences-----It is probably the only one which can truly claim to be a science'. (Levi-Strauss: Structural Anthropology.)*

Essentially Levi-Strauss is admiring the structure of linguistics as a methodology which could aid the study of anthropology. Language expresses culture, both diachronically and synchronistically. The features of culture are passed down through the generations and are also subject to changes through current uses.

Levi-Strauss however recognises that there is a strain between the abstract analysis of Linguistics and the specifics of cultural analysis:

*'The linguists try to join the anthropologists to make their study more concrete, while the anthropologists are trying to rejoin the linguists precisely because the linguists appear to show them a way to get out of the confusion resulting from too much acquaintance and familiarity with concrete and empirical data.'* (Ibid. P80)

This seems to me to admit to a fundamental problem that works back through all schools of



Lacan

philosophy. Are the facts driven by principles or are principles only to be understood through the evaluation of empirical data? In his comparison of Linguistics and anthropology Strauss seeks a balance:

*'Finally, I would say that between culture and language there cannot be no relations at all and there cannot be 100% correlation either. -----If there were no relations at all-----the human mind is kind of jumble----if the correlation were 100%, then we should not be here to discuss whether it exists or not.'* (Ibid.)

Structuralism here seems to be a pragmatic modus operandi, rather than a hard philosophical doctrine.

We can briefly consider that Lacan set about applying the structural model of linguistics to psychoanalysis, proposing that the 'unconscious' was structured like language with its own logic of dreams and fantasies. This meant that the conscious mind was the parole. In effect he was pushing away Freudian analysis and seeking to replace it with semiological methodology. He was seeking the language of unconscious desires in dreams. Here again we have the pursuit of an abstract but underlying explanation of immensely complicated detail, within psychological syndromes.



In these examples structuralists stand back from the established thinking in psychoanalysis and anthropology and seek a new way to structure vast detail into concepts. As Barthes states in his book *Mythologies*: '*Semiology is a science of forms, since it studies significations apart from their content.*' Traditionally myth is a story which conveys meaning which is carried over centuries. Barthes reinvents myth as a type of speech. As a language it can be structured in semiological ideas of: Sign, signifier, signified. In the myth, he separates the *language-object* which is the language, which the myth uses, from the *metalanguage*, which is the Myth itself. In other words what meaning it is trying to convey. He calls this the *Signification*. Pictures are for him just as much myths as written stories. He uses the example of a picture of a 'Negro French soldier saluting' (P.126). The picture conveys motivated form, in this case showing the adherence of a colonial soldier to French imperialism. So, there are three kind of signifiers:

First the empty signifier: *I let the concept fill the form of the myth without ambiguity.*

Secondly the full signifier: *In which I clearly distinguish the meaning and form.*

Thirdly: *an extricable whole of meaning and form.* (P. 128)

Of course, all stories and pictures need full interpretation delving into their meaning and context. It might be argued that using Semiology as a means of cold objectivity loses the value of the deep examination of detailed facts in either anthropology or psychanalysis. After all Freud was using mythological references to label syndromes he had experienced in his practice. Using a structuralist approach to find independent forms which do not take into account the variety of meanings conveyed by detail may in reality be of little value.

In the chapter *Myth Today* (in *Mythologies*), Barthes extends the word 'myth' to all kinds of journalism, political speeches, and films etc. Of course, we need to critically examine all formal communication, fiction or fact. I am not sure that reference to signs and signifiers aids the search for truth.

If we set aside structuralism then perhaps it's time to reconsider what is philosophy? The post-structuralist Gilles Deleuze posed this question. He posed the thought: The philosopher is the friend of the concept. (*The Continental Philosophy Reader*, P.406. All further quotes are from this book.) Philosophy is about rigorously creating concepts, not just polishing up or explaining known concepts but challenging them.

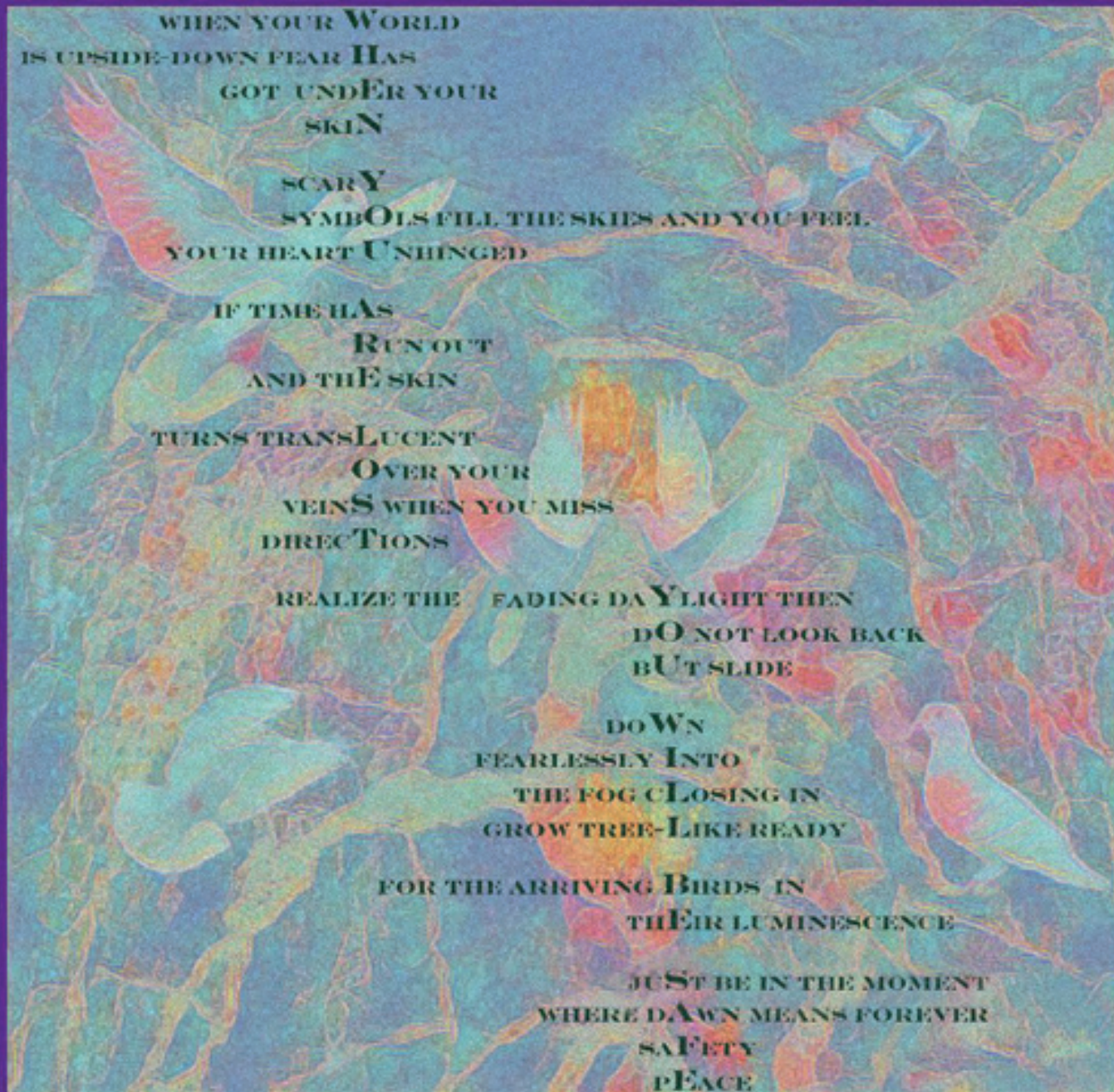
The ancient Greeks could stand back from the empirical world and consider abstract ideas. Deleuze pointed out that in the modern world the philosopher has to deal with the human sciences: *Closer to us philosophy has met with many new rivals. These were first of all the human sciences and especially sociology which wanted to replace it.* This opens the question whether philosophy should not be concerned with the creation of concepts adrift from the empirical world, rather it should be concerned with social reality. Aside from social sciences Deleuze considered also: *it was the turn of epistemology, linguistics, or even psychoanalysis---From test to test philosophy confronted increasingly insolent and calamitous rivals.*

If the task of philosophy is the formulation of concepts, then those concepts are to be formulated and then tested in the real world (psychologically or sociologically), or the formulations are a purely theoretical exercise like writing poetry. (Good poetry is not just about rhyme or rhythm but also reflects life). The difficulty with philosophers taking hold of say psychological concepts is that they tend to take them beyond reasonable empirical limits. A particular example is in phenomenology, expanding the idea of Gestalt from common-sense to an all-embracing concept. By the same token, it appears to me that linguistics (semiology) became popular with philosophers because it appeared to simplify and organise a complex, anthropologically described world. Language is indeed a vital method of human expression. But we have to look at the culture of a people to understand how they have shaped the language over time, rather than trying to summarise cultural complexity to fit a linguistic principle. Structuralism needs to give way to empiricism.



## Art and Poetry

### WHEN YOU ARE LOST YOU WILL BE SAFE (A MESOSTIC POEM)



WHEN YOUR WORLD  
IS UPSIDE-DOWN FEAR HAS  
GOT UNDER YOUR  
SKIN  
SCARY  
SYMBOLS FILL THE SKIES AND YOU FEEL  
YOUR HEART UNHINGED  
IF TIME HAS  
RUN OUT  
AND THE SKIN  
TURNS TRANSLUCENT  
OVER YOUR  
VEINS WHEN YOU MISS  
DIRECTIONS  
REALIZE THE FADING DAYLIGHT THEN  
DO NOT LOOK BACK  
BUT SLIDE  
DOWN  
FEARLESSLY INTO  
THE FOG CLOSING IN  
GROW TREE-LIKE READY  
FOR THE ARRIVING BIRDS IN  
THEIR LUMINESCENCE  
JUST BE IN THE MOMENT  
WHERE DAWN MEANS FOREVER  
SAFETY  
PEACE

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

# Nature and Our Place In It

## *Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2019*

**The topic for our discussion in the meeting was: What is Nature and Man's Place in it? Is mankind (and womankind) a freak of nature, or are we the master of nature, or are we just part of it? In what way do we stand apart from nature?**

PAUL COCKBURN

Nature is wonderful and beautiful, but it is also cruel in many aspects. In nature it seems that the strong win against the weak. Nature is 'red in tooth and claw'. If man is part of nature in this sense, then we also should be strong: so why should we bother about the weak? (This links to our discussion last week – see *The Wednesday*, Issue 97 on animal ethics).

We have political creeds and powerful economic system which say that competition is good and ensures the best will come to the top: but what about those who are at the bottom and do not have the opportunity to rise? What is the role of reason in all this? Does reason lift humanity out of the evolutionary process?

### **Nature or Nurture**

Schelling thought that nature becomes conscious of itself in human reason, but reason does not seem to apply very well to such elements of our human experience as suffering and morality. So perhaps as humans we have to step outside of nature and construct our own metaphysical and 'supernatural' world which is different from the world of nature but related to it.

Goethe believed God was revealed in nature, and thought that if we were sick, we should trust in the healing powers of nature. Nietzsche promotes the ideal of the supermen, forever pushing themselves on to higher and higher achievements. He thought moral values derive from the social groups we belong to and these can hinder the development of new values, customs and practices. Why should the 'great individual' be muzzled or hindered by 'herd morality'?

In our meeting, the question was asked – what

would nature be like without human beings? Generally, species populations are controlled ecologically in nature, but this may not be some sort of mechanistic control on numbers. With the impact of human beings on the planet becoming increasingly harmful, nature (as in Gaia) might fight back!

We seem to be no longer simply animals, our nature as social animals and our use of reason, taken to a high level of sophistication, seem to make us different. We have for some reason become alienated from ourselves. Artificial Intelligence and robots seem to be becoming better than us in certain respects, perhaps particularly in terms of their efficiency at certain tasks. Even our choices either seem to be more limited than in the past or they are more dramatic - witness the refugee crisis.

The medieval theory of the 'Chain of Being' held that there is an ascending order of complexity in biological terms, which applies to levels of consciousness. But it does seem to be a chain – some animals are conscious, they can use reason, they do take moral actions. Do they have a conscience? As humans we can self-consciously reflect on our actions, stand back, feel guilty, and change.

We tend to think animals act instinctually, and their behavior is determined. But we cannot tell what goes on in an animal's mind, but our inner experiences and thinking are key to us. But where do our thoughts come from? Are we sure 'we' are the source of our thoughts? Thoughts could originate from outside of us, or from other people, or from our unconscious. This led us to discuss pan-psychism, the view that everything, including plants, rocks, stars and planets are conscious.



## Reflections On The Editorial On Ibn Arabi

BY EDWARD GREENWOOD

I think that the editorial in issue 97 of *The Wednesday* with its references to the interesting Sufi mystic Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) is, nevertheless, gravely mistaken in claiming that the mysticism of such poets as Ibn Arabi is of epistemic value, in short, that it gives us knowledge. Knowledge, whatever it is, must make sense, and I think that the editorial is far too dismissive of Kant's notion of the limits to knowledge set by reason, or of what Kant called 'the bounds of sense.'

What such figures as Ibn Arabi give us may be valuable as an exercise of the imagination, but in making assertoric claims about what lies beyond the bounds of reason, it is not knowledge that they bring.

The mystic poet claims by esoteric means to attain the unattainable. But as Nietzsche says in the chapter 'Of Poets' in *Zarathustra* part two 'How weary I am of all the unattainable that is supposed to be reality. Alas, how weary I am of the poets!' In part one of the same work he had criticized the 'Hinterweltlern' who see themselves as transported out of their bodies and from this earth. Yet it is, in fact, to their bodies and to this earth 'that they owe the joy and convulsion of their transport.'

The mystic poet claims to attain a theophany, a glimpse through some beauty seen in this world of a higher beauty in

some Platonic world beyond it. The aspiration is of great psychological interest and may produce fine poetry, but the only knowledge it produces is the knowledge of itself, not of any otherworldly truth.

The editor mentions a work *The Alchemy of Human Happiness* translated in 2018 by Stephen Hirtenstein. This is a part of a long work with the title *The Meccan Revelations*. It is striking that about a century earlier, i.e. around 1105, the philosopher Al Ghazzali had written a work with the title *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Al Ghazzali attacked the philosophers in a famous work called *The Destruction of the Philosophers* to which the philosopher Averroes replied in a work called *The Destruction of the Destruction*. It is interesting that Al Ghazzali was also suspicious to some degree of Sufi mysticism.



Ibn Arabi

Ibn Arabi works through the imagination. As the philosopher Peter Hacker shows in his chapter on the imagination in his book *The Intellectual Powers* 'imagination is a cogitative faculty rather than a cognitive one.' It may help us to envisage possibilities which lead to solutions of cognitive problems, but it cannot of itself establish those solutions as true. Only through the senses and reason do we establish knowledge. The poets, as Nietzsche said, are often liars, though enchanting and interesting ones.

## Adorno: Gold Assay



CHRIS NORRIS

Like gold, genuineness, abstracted as the proportion of fine metal, becomes a fetish . . . . The unguineness of the genuine stems from its need to claim, in a society dominated by exchange, to be what it stands for but is never able to be. The apostles of genuineness, in the service of the power that now masters circulation, dignify the demise of the latter with the dance of the money veils.

**T.W. Adorno, ‘Gold Assay’, in *Minima Moralia***

(Note: This is one of several attempts to translate some cryptic and dialectically wiredrawn passages from Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* into something more like Bertolt Brecht’s tough-minded, down-to-earth didactic style.)

Adorno

12



Deep thinkers talk of ‘authenticity’,  
But we know that’s the verbal rot  
By which the fascist demagogues decree  
We’ve no role in their master-plot.

It’s just another piece of jargon, see,  
One tailor-made to fill the slot  
Where their kowtowing to the powers-that-be  
Goes well with words like *Volk, Land, Gott*.



Take note of Rektor Heidegger when he  
Reveals how language goes to pot,  
With all those pompous jargon-words that we  
Non-dupes are always quick to spot.

‘In language lies our German destiny,  
Our very ownmost sense of what  
It truly means for genuine thought to free  
Us from our thought-infected lot.’

Their message, bluntly: if your race i.d.  
Or native language-ways are not  
*Echt-Deutsch* then you can stuff that empty plea  
And scram, you rootless polyglot!

Let’s not deny: their language-pedigree  
Is one directly aimed to swat  
Aside all those whose tongue or family-tree,  
On their view, counts for didley-squat.

So when they next head off on some wild spree  
Of hunting out old meanings hot  
From source, just say ‘junk-etymology  
Plus racist crap: your crowning shot!’.



They’re all the same, those real ‘authentic’ guys,  
They all think true-to-self’s the way  
To find the soul beneath the social lies,  
As in some private gold-assay.



Marx

## Poetry

They're wrong because the self they recognise,  
Or think they do, will never stay  
Put long enough or auto-stabilise  
To yield a solid underlay.

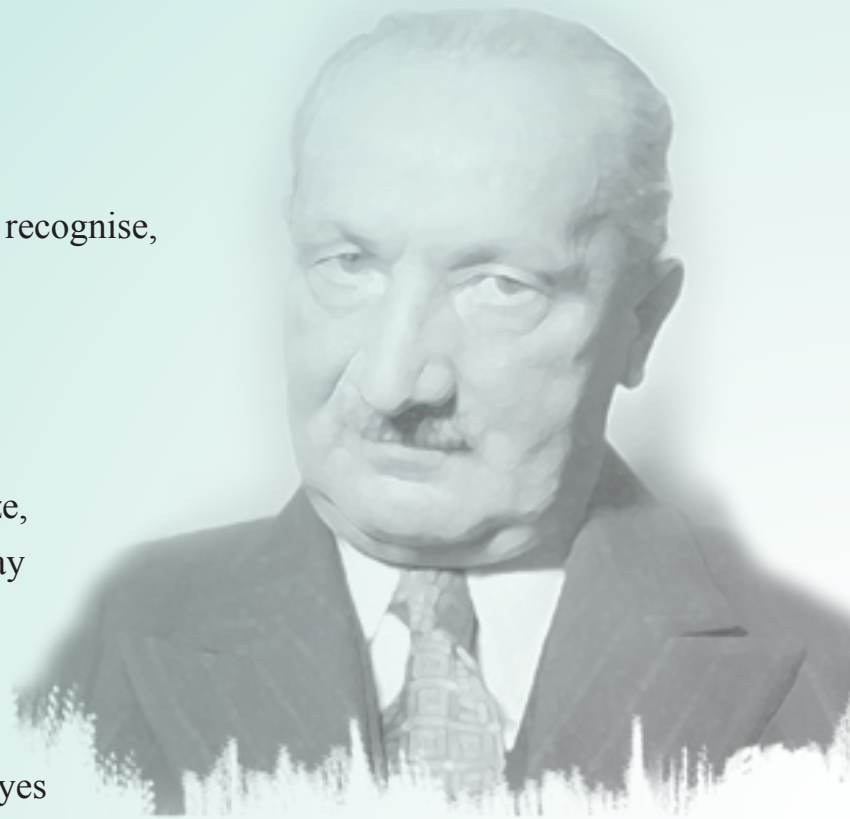
That's why the authenticity they prize,  
That fake of fakes, must cause dismay  
In any deep-self voyager who buys  
Into its endless shadow-play.

We're social selves, existing in the eyes  
Of others, those whose looks convey  
Whatever fictive tales we must devise  
To keep that wounding truth at bay.

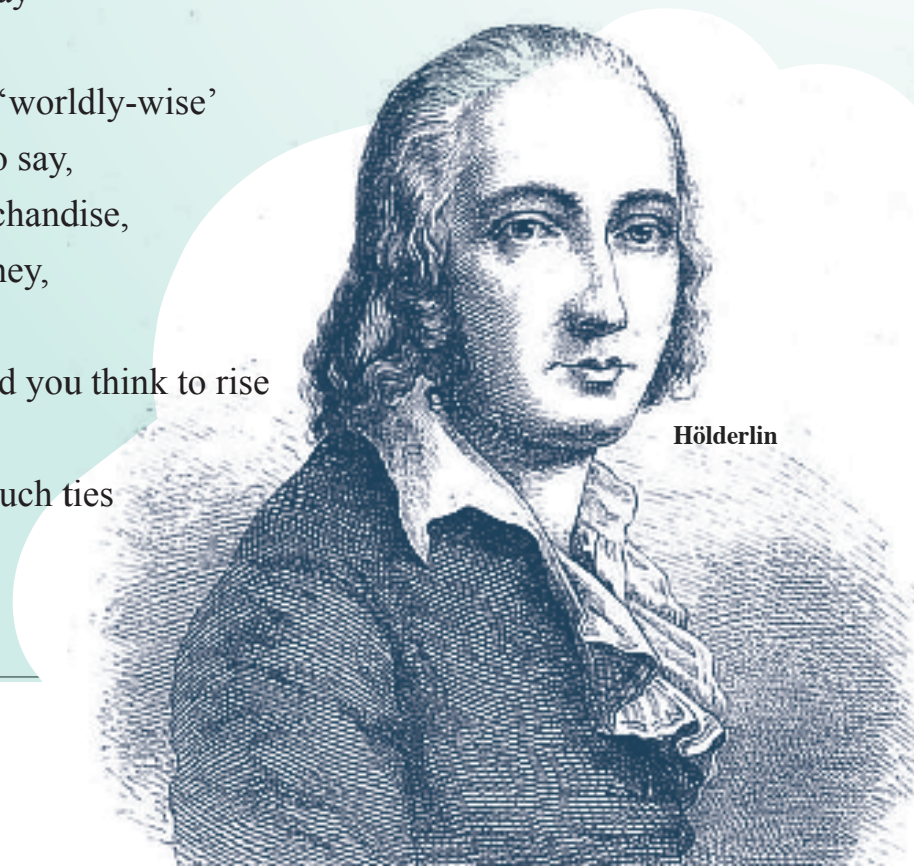
Why not take it on board and analyse  
How nothing now escapes the sway  
Of capital, how it commodifies  
Our lives, our loves, and everyday

Transactions to the point where 'worldly-wise'  
Means 'giving head and heart no say,  
Regarding men as so much merchandise,  
And ordering all things just as they,

The boss-class, want'. So, should you think to rise  
'Authentically' above the fray  
Of inauthentic life, think how much ties  
You to it like a tourniquet.



Heidegger



Hölderlin

As Marx once said, no end to how it screws  
The whole thing up, this latest mode  
Of capitalist production where we lose  
Our human traits, where goods upload

Them in distorted form, where what we choose  
To buy defines us, and we're owed  
Respect to the degree that we abuse  
Our fellows as a moral code.

'Be real authentic, self-invest your dues',  
The gold-assayers said but showed,  
To keen-eared jargon auditors, just whose  
Crass slogans echoed down the road.

It's still the populist's most favored ruse,  
That smack of genuineness bestowed  
On trivial thoughts by summoning the muse  
Of fake profundity to goad

The *Geist*-infected mob. Hear how they fuse  
The lethal rhetoric that flowed  
From Hitler's progeny with what ensues  
When leopards ravage soul's abode.

For it's the same sound rings in their tattoos,  
Those hierophants, as in an ode  
Of Hölderlin when Heidegger construes  
Each *Eigentlich* semantic node.

## *The Wednesday*

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