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The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Mysticism and Process Philosophy

This is the last of a series of editorials on mysticism and the thought of the Spanish/Arab mystic Ibn Arabi. The aim is to show the relevance of mysticism to philosophy and to widen the canon of philosophy by admitting into philosophical discussions philosophers from different eras and places, as well as different methodologies.

Ibn Arabi's treatises on change and becoming are written in his short book, translated from the Arabic into English as *The Secrets of Voyaging* (tr. Angela Jaffray, 2015.) He draws a picture of a universe that is in movement and renewal every moment. It is a lively universe and linked to the Breath of Al-Rahman (God The Most Merciful). He uses an illustrative and colourful language, full of religious imagery. But this universe is very close to that of the philosophers who opted for a metaphysics of a process (a becoming) rather than a static Being. Heraclitus said in one of his fragments: 'Nothing endures but change. There is nothing permanent except change. All is flux, nothing stays still.' This was expanded on by a long list of philosophers of becoming, such as Whitehead, Bergson and others.

But this is not the last word on Ibn Arabi's metaphysics of change. In his masterpiece *The Bezels of Wisdom* (tr. by R. W. J. Austin, 1980, Chapter XII) he emphasises change but argues against both those who think that there is only change and those who think there is only being. He argued for immanence rather than transcendence. His argument is interesting, and we may have a chance to discuss it on another occasion.

There are implications for this universe of change for meaning and interpretation. Ibn Arabi, in the *Meccan Openings*, describes an exchange between a gnostic voyager and God. The voyager prays for an end to his travelling and asks for rest in God. But God tells him that voyaging has no end, either in this world or the hereafter. In one of his supplications, Ibn Arabi and a number of famous Islamic mystics, such as his Egyptian contemporary, Ibn al-Farid, asked God to increase them in bewilderment. Seeking knowledge has no limit. It is a process that goes on and on, with the renewed states of Being.

Ibn Arabi, in the *Meccan Openings*, says that: 'The one for whom meaning is repeated in his recitation [of the Qur'an] has not recited it as it should be recited. This is an indication of his ignorance.' Angel Jaffray, in her introduction to *The Secret of Voyaging* says: 'In a cosmos that is constantly created afresh with each breath, it is only the ignorant who regard the recitation of a sacred text as unchanging and its interpretation as fixed.'

Three years ago, Johan Siebers ran a seminar on Process Philosophy at London University. He linked the metaphysics of change to creativity, spontaneity, intuition, experience, non-conceptual thinking, the limits of rational thinking, process philosophy and the need for a new language to describe being.

Siebers called for a new thinking: 'Perhaps we are moving outside of the realm of conceptual, discursive reason when we try to think spontaneous movement and the sense of originality, possibility, relationality and creativity associated with it.' He also cited David Hall who said that: 'process cannot be directly thought due to the static, form-endowing character of reason, anymore than permanence can be directly felt, due to the dynamic, form-excluding character of intuition.'

All this requires an open-mindedness, a new vision and perhaps a new language and concepts that run parallel to logical and functional (scientific) concepts. New concepts may be needed, ones rooted in this universe that is ever moving and newly created in every moment.

The Editor

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, the right and left hemispheres. Last week, we reviewed the medical evidence. This week, we will investigate Western culture for manifestations of what the theory predicts.**

JEANNE WARREN

Part 2

The second half of the book explores the cultural history of the West in the light of what we know from research about the capabilities of the two hemispheres of the brain and the relationship between them. It seems that in the ancient world, before the Classical period in Greece, people were less aware of themselves as individuals. There are virtually no faces in prehistoric art. [p.257]. There was a change in the portrayal of faces between the sixth and the fourth centuries BC in Greece. This and other changes in that period may point to a development of the frontal lobes of both hemispheres at that time. Initially both hemispheres advanced together. Facial recognition and empathy are right hemisphere functions, but many fruits of Greek civilisation depend on a development of the left hemisphere, such as the beginnings of philosophy with the pre-Socratic philosophers, the development of geometry, the formulation of political theory and the codification of laws.

At some point in the ancient world, writing was invented. This gave a huge, external boost to the power of the analysis carried out by the left hemisphere because knowledge could be remembered and accumulated over generations. The achievements of Classical Greece demonstrate the power for good of the left hemisphere when it acts as the emissary of the right hemisphere and has not yet come to believe itself the Master.

Until Plato, Greek philosophy reflected the concerns of both hemispheres, examining the constant change of the world as well as seeking what is unchanging. But Plato took a decisive turn towards a preference for the certainty of ideas internally known and not subject to the vicissitudes of external changes [p.285]. This is the world of the left hemisphere, and it so appealed to Classical culture that it gradually came to dominate Western culture until the Renaissance. It led to a progressive narrowing of the culture, as attention was withdrawn from the outer world to the interior world of the individual mind.

In the Renaissance there was a resurgence of the right hemisphere. The sterile habits of thought of the Middle Ages were re-invigorated by a new attention to the outside world, to nature and to the depths of human emotion and their representation in art. The hemispheres were once again in balance, the advances of the left hemisphere being taken up into a new and more developed synthesis

Iain McGilchrist

by the right. The arts flourished and modern science – which depends on observation of the world and interaction with it – began.

However, the balance did not last. Left-hemisphere dominance returned. McGilchrist sees the Reformation as a left hemisphere movement. It started off as a genuinely holistic revolt against the corruption of the Catholic Church. McGilchrist thinks that Luther 'could be seen as a somewhat tragic figure.' [p. 314]. Luther's impulse towards authenticity, towards a return to experience as opposed to reliance on religious authority, became in the hands of his followers an iconoclasm which set about destroying the very things he valued. This progression from wholeness to partiality is one which McGilchrist sees as recurring in later periods as well, so I am going to give a rather long quote from what he says about the Lutheran reformation.

'Luther perceived that the inner and outer realms, however one expresses it – the realm of the mind/soul and that of the body, the realm of the invisible and the visible – needed to be *as one*, otherwise the outward show had nothing to say about the inward condition. In other words, the visible world should be a 'presentation', in the literal sense that something 'becomes present' to us in all its actuality, as delivered by the right hemisphere. This perception, which is simply part of and entirely continuous with, the Renaissance insistence on the seamlessness of the incarnate world, inspired Luther to decry the emptiness that results when the outer and inner worlds are divorced. But his followers took it to mean that the outer world was in itself empty, and that therefore the only authenticity lay in the inner world alone. The result of this is that the outer world becomes seen as merely a 'show', a 're-presentation' of something elsewhere and nowhere – not an image, since an image is a living fusion of the inner and outer, but a mere signifier, as delivered by the left hemisphere. The transition that is made in this important derailment of Luther's intention is not from belief in outer forms to belief in inner forms, but from a view of outer and inner as essentially fused aspects of one and the same thing to the belief that they are separate ('either/or').' [p. 315].

The Reformation, McGilchrist says, was the first great expression of the search for certainty in modern times [p.315]. But it was not the last. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment and twentieth-century Modernism have this in common, that knowledge is believed to have to be certain, and that uncertainty, which comes to include art and religion, is devalued. Post-Modernism allows uncertainty, but it does not re-connect us with the world, it simply abandons the external world altogether, along with certainty.

The word 'Spirit' stands for different things to different people, but always it includes ideas of depth and uncertainty in the face of a world that extends beyond our understanding and control. This attitude is essential for religion. Its lack makes religion itself problematic. It is an attitude which is simply not understood by the left hemisphere acting alone. As

Martin Luther

McGilchrist says, '[T]he right hemisphere pays attention to the Other, whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves, with which it sees itself in profound relation…. By contrast, the left hemisphere pays attention to the virtual world that it has created, which is self-consistent, but self-contained.' [p.93]

I think that McGilchrist is right in characterising our culture as being too dominated by the left hemisphere, so to speak. Whether his analysis is correct or not, it is at least based on a reasonable theory which bears examination. His description of the world of the left hemisphere on its own sounds a lot like the world towards which we are heading:

'The left hemisphere is competitive, and its concern, its prime motivation, is *power*. If the working relationship were to become disturbed, so that the left hemisphere appeared to have primacy or became the end point or final staging post on the 'processing' of experience, the world would change into something quite different. And we can say fairly clearly what that would be like: it would be relatively mechanical, an assemblage of more or less disconnected 'parts'; it would be relatively abstract and disembodied; relatively distanced from fellow-feeling; given to explicitness; utilitarian in ethic; over-confident of its own take on reality, and lacking insight into its problems – the neuropsychological evidence is that these are all aspects of the left hemisphere world as compared with the right.' [p. 209].

What can we do if we want to change things? There is not a great deal about this in the book, but it does point out that we are becoming increasingly disconnected from the things that could bring us back to a more balanced world. Knowledge of our own history and connection with nature both encourage right hemisphere ways of thinking, as does artistic experience. Education could foster these instead of down-grading them. We have increased in self-consciousness and this makes our relations with each other more complicated and potentially difficult. McGilchrist suggests we might be willing to learn from the East, but also that we have wisdom in the West. He says, 'One possibility is that music, which brought us together before language existed, might even now prove effective in regenerating commonality, avoiding the need for words that have been devalued, or for which we have become too cynical.' [p.458]. In a footnote he reminds us of *El Sistema*, the youth music programme which has had stunning success with poverty-stricken youngsters in Venezuela.

I want to close with a word about Quakerism. Historically, Quakerism was at least in part a reaction to the Reformation. It was trying to recover the balance between the right and left hemispheres which was lost by the Reformers.

A Quaker's meeting

Quakerism emphasised experience, 'What canst thou say?' It emphasised openness, 'Are you open to new light, from whatever source it may come?' It rejected the stuffy products of academic theology, which George Fox called 'notions'.

It also retains some of the narrowness of the left hemisphere emphasis of the Reformation in its rejection of the use of ritual, and in its historical rejection of the visual arts, music and poetry. Happily, this last has lessened in our time, but Quakerism will probably never be able to appropriate concrete symbols into a ritual as part of its core practice. Interestingly, McGilchrist considers a refusal to allow for special sacred places or times as also indicating undue influence of the left hemisphere. He maintains that instead of making all times and places sacred, it makes no time or place sacred [p.320]. While the (left hemisphere) reasoning behind our Quaker belief about this is impeccable, the (right hemisphere) intuition about it may leave us with longings for something which we lack.

However, by accommodating religion AT ALL in the modern world, Quakerism has made a huge step towards the integration of the worlds of the right and left hemispheres.

* * *

Thinking back over what I have written, one of the most important insights the book gave me may have remained implicit and it needs to be made explicit. It is this: The thinking characteristic of the left hemisphere is never the whole story, because it is not directly connected to the world outside. It can only think about what it knows from the right hemisphere, but the problem is that *by itself it does not know this*. To borrow a phrase from publicity for a talk by Iain McGilchrist at the Ian Ramsay Centre in Oxford in 2011, 'Both [hemispheres] are necessary, but one of them sees less than the other, while nonetheless believing that it sees everything.'

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

Identity

Philosophers with the habit of focusing on logic may think of identity as a type of relationship between objects, whilst philosophers with the habit of focusing on people may tend think of personal identity. I like to do both. Others may think of cultural identity.

CHRIS SEDDON

Logical Identities

Focusing first on logic, I am thinking of three types of identity.

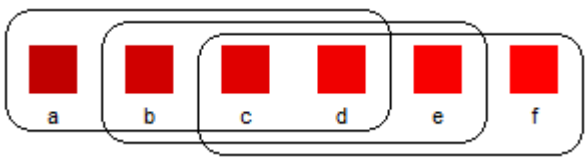
The simplest, although perhaps the most brittle, I might call ***absolute identity***: that a relationship is an absolute identity means that any description that applies to any thing which it relates applies to all those related to it; that is, everything they have, they have in common; or in other words, nothing differentiates them. This concept of absolute identity is simple in that it can be defined simply in terms of logical denial (the word 'not'). It is brittle in the sense that it is so absolute. The result of 2+2 is absolutely identical with the result of 3+1 because you can say nothing about the former that you can't say about the latter, but a thing which is my chair is not identical with every other thing which is my chair, because chairs change over time. I can say of my chair now that it is varnished, but I could not say that of it when I bought it. So my chair now is not absolutely identical to my chair then.

This leads to another type of logical identity, called ***equivalence***: that a relationship is an equivalence 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, there is something they and only they have in common. My chair now is not absolutely identical to the chair when I bought it, but it is the same chair as when I bought it. It also matches other chairs round the table because it is the same model of chair as those, or as I might say in another sense, it is the same chair as them

Versions of identity

too. Equivalence relations are more flexible than the relation of absolute identity. The concept of a relation being an equivalence is also quite simple, in that it can be defined simply in terms of logical denial, but each different equivalence relation may depend on contingent properties, such as being a specific chair, or being a chair of a certain model. Most identities in normal language are actually just equivalences.

There is a yet weaker type of equivalence relation, which I might call ***approximate equivalence***, in which something might be equivalent to two other things that are not equivalent to each other, for example, being roughly the same colour. That a relationship is an approximate equivalence means that each of the things it relates is related to itself, to any others that are related to it, and also by another relationship such that if this other relationship relates something to three others and two of those to the third, then it relates those two as well. This is also a simple logical property of relations. With the example of colour, suppose we have an approximate equivalence relating colours that are roughly the same such that a dark red is roughly the same as a slightly lighter red, which is roughly the same as a yet lighter red; the dark red might not be roughly the same as the yet lighter red, but if there were two other shades of red, both roughly the same as both the dark and the slightly lighter red, then those two other shades must be roughly the same as each other.



In the example above, imagine that b ≈ e, but a ≉ e and b ≉ f.

If we also imagine that b ≈ c ≈ e and b ≈ d ≈ e, then if we take ≈ to be an approximate equivalence, we must infer c ≈ d because they are both approximately equivalent to b and e which are themselves approximately equivalent.

With regard to historical processes, change and development, we always have a choice whether we talk about objects differing in some absolute way at different times or in different contexts but being equivalent in some way, or about objects being absolutely identical at different times or in different contexts but differing in some way relative to those times or contexts, but the former choice is nearly always easier, because it is easier to understand the appropriate equivalence and use the absolute descriptions, than to use absolute identity and attempt to understand the context-relative descriptions. So for example, I could say that my chair in the past is absolutely identical with my chair now, but I would then have to understand time-relative concepts of being varnished, being a certain model of a chair, and anything else I might want to say about a chair. It is simply easier to say what it means for two instances of a chair to be instances of the same chair.

Personal Identities

Personal identity is clearly not absolute identity. I am not absolutely the same as I was yesterday or will be tomorrow. It might be an equivalence - I am the same person as I was yesterday - but what is a person, or more specifically, what does it mean to be the same person? Plausibly, something along the lines of having the same beliefs and desires, but since these change over time, we might be tempted to look for equivalence based instead on having the same core beliefs and desires, or a shared history of causally related beliefs and desires.

Personal change need not be a matter of personal history - people also change back and forth between different social or emotional contexts. We might say that a particular person becomes a different person behind the wheel of a car, but we still have some idea that it is the same person who changes in this way. There are more extreme cases in which our concept of what it is to be the same person is stretched to or beyond its limits. I am thinking in particular of ***Dissociative Identity***, in which a person's beliefs and desires have been so compartmentalised (usually through extreme

Religious identity

experiences such as trauma) that under some conditions they are only physically the same person, but mentally and emotionally they are completely different, with different memories, emotional traits, and motivations. This is generally regarded by psychiatrists as a disorder, and an older term for Dissociative Identity Disorder is Multiple Personality Disorder.

In my view the new term better reflects the role of ***dissociated memories***, in which the presence of certain memories might reasonably be inferred both from independently recorded personal history and observed current behaviour, but of which the person is completely unaware. Dissociated memories are towards one end of a spectrum of memories which affect our behaviour but are not straightforwardly accessible to us: we are aware of ***suppressed memories*** but make an effort to push them away; we are not aware of ***repressed memories*** but can make an effort to access them; we are affected by dissociated memories but cannot access them consciously; and of course we may be affected by ***false or exaggerated memories*** which only seem to reflect real experiences.

Dissociative identity is an extreme form of dissociation, in which strongly related and internally consistent sets of dissociative memories and associated emotions, desires and beliefs drive behaviour only under certain conditions but may occur alongside or be replaced at other times by different sets.

Much of my work on recovery from the effects of trauma is with people displaying various degrees of dissociation, from real or histrionic cases of extreme switching between mutually unaware personalities, through experiences of dissociative episodes such as situational memory loss or psychotic recall, to impaired awareness of one's own memories, beliefs, emotions, or actions. In my view less extreme forms of dissociation are a part of normal human experience.

Although I was at one time diagnosed with multiple personality disorder, I believe this was an exaggeration, but I still experience more extreme forms of dissociation than most people, and this makes the concept of personal identity and fragmentation particularly interesting to me.

Cultural Identities

Other forms of identity include national identity and class, gender, sexual, or religious identities, etc. Clearly these are not absolute identities - two people may share a national identity but have different religious identities. Simple examples are often equivalences - for example we may share a national identity because we feel we belong to the same nation. In this sense it is not surprising that as our understanding of what it means to belong to a specific nation, class, or religion changes, so our sense of our national, class, or religious identity changes.

It may also be that some such identities are approximate - for example, I and someone in a different religious denomination may feel that we share a common religious identity, but they may also feel they share a religious identity with someone in a third denomination with whom I do not feel I share that religious identity. We do not have to suppose that one of us is wrong - there need not be a single common property which defines an approximate equivalence, but the equivalence can still be clearly defined, if we wish. It is a mistake to suppose that such identities exist as a shared property, rather they exist as a relationship having certain properties.

Friday Meetings at Rewley House – Oxford University

The Philosophical Society at the Department of Continuing Education of Oxford University, Rewley House, organises monthly talks delivered by volunteers from the society members. The meetings were founded and ran for nearly two decades by Peter Townsend until his retirement this year. They are now organised by Chris Seddon. Chris will present the article published in this issue of The *Wednesday* on identity in the forthcoming meeting.

The schedule for the next few months on the second Friday of each month between 19:00 and 21:00 in room 113 at Rewley House in Oxford is as follows:

- June 14th
  Identity
  Chris Seddon
- July 12th
  What is philosophy?
  Rahim Hassan
- August and September
  Topics to be decided
  Volunteers sought!
- October 11th
  Rules of War
  Peter Townsend
- November 8th
  Hegel
  Jeanne Warren
- December 13th
  Topic to be decided
  Volunteer sought!

The last speaker at these meetings was Bob Stone who presented an excellent paper on Mental Events. Previous talks earlier this year were:

- January 11th
  Why we do philosophy
  Chris Seddon
- February 8th
  Wittgenstein, religion and nonsense
  Bob Stone
- March 8th
  A sense of completion
  David Burridge
- April 12th
  Science and philosophy
  Kingsley Micklem
- May 10th
  Davidson on Mental Events and Anomalous Monism
  Bob Stone

If you have any further suggestions for topics or would like to volunteer to present a topic, please contact Chris by e-mail at:

fridayphilsoc@chris.seddon.name

Rewley House – Oxford

A Wednesday with Rilke

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 29th May 2019

RAHIM HASSAN

The *Wednesday* meeting was initially created with a wide vision that encompasses philosophy, poetry and art but gradually it moved into abstract thought. That is why we thought a turn to poetry could redress the imbalance. Barbara Vellacott agreed to give the Wednesday group a taste of the poetry of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875 - 1926). It was an experiment in engagement with poetry, hearing it, reading it again, absorbing it and then talking about it. Rilke's poems read were from his *Sonnets to Orpheus* (in Don Paterson's translation, Faber, 2006)._

Rilke was writing in the Chateau de Muzot Veyras in Switzerland's Rhone Valley. He heard a voice, an internal voice and started writing his *Elegies*. He experienced the hurricane of the spirit and wrote the entire *Sonnets to Orpheus* in three days and then finished the *Elegies*.

Barbara introduced the talk with a line from Rilke:

'Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angelic hierarchies?'

These were the words 'heard' by Rilke in the storm, inner and outer, at the Duino castle that started the *Duino Elegies*. Later, when finishing the *Duino Elegies*, Rilke described the 'hurricane of the spirit' which produced the Sonnets to Orpheus in three days as one of dictation by a force that overtook him. He said it was *'The most mysterious & most enigmatic dictation I have ever endured & achieved; the whole first part was written down in a single breathless obedience.'*

Song and Breath

The first poem, in the Don Paterson version, is given the title *Breath*. It is a reflection on breathing and creativity. This poem is powerful and generated some discussion:

Breath, you invisible poem –
pure exchange, sister to silence,
being and its counterbalance,
rhythm wherein I become,

ocean I accumulate
by stealth, by the same slow wave;
thriftiest of seas… Thief
of the whole cosmos! what estates,

what vast spaces have already poured
through my lungs? The four winds
are like daughters to me.

So do you know me, air,, that once sailed through me?
You, that were once the leaf and rind
of my every word?

The breath holds the visible and the invisible. It is a bridge between silence and words. The air transformed into a song. But this is not forced. Poetry is not confined but given. Barbara complemented this poem with a reading from the *Second Elegy*:

But we, when moved by deep feeling, evaporate; we breathe ourselves out and away…

She concluded her commentary on this poem by reciting Sonnet 1:3:

… song is being. ..

True singing is another kind of breath.
A breath of nothing. A sigh in a god. A wind.

A song comes from a different realm from language. (We noted that McGilchrist, in his book *The Master and his Emissary,* says that if the left

hemisphere of the brain is impaired, language is impaired but not songs because songs come from the right hemisphere.)

Ibn Arabi, the Islamic mystic, used the idea of breathing to suggest that all creation came out of the breath of God the Most Merciful. The soul in Arabic has also the meaning of breathing. So, breathing brings life to the world. It also involves inhaling and exhaling and so the world is re-created a new with every breath.

Time and Transience

Eliot said that poetry says something before it is understood. The truth of poetry may lie beyond the psychology of the poet who said it. In his sonnet *Time*, Rilke says:

Is there really such thing as time-the-destroyer?
When will it shatter the tower on the rock?
When will that low demiurge overpower
this heart, that runs only to heaven's clock?

This was supported by a reading from the *Second Elegy*:

We alone/Fly past all things, as fugitive as the wind.
.....
And those who are beautiful
oh who can retain them? Appearance ceaselessly rises
in their face and is gone….
....
alas, but that is what we are.

The Double Realm

Rilke identifies with Orpheus. The next poem is titled *Tone*. Orpheus was a great musician who visited the underworld looking for his beloved. He knew life and death. He has been compared to Jesus in Christian mythology. Orpheus is half man and half divine. On returning to the world (without his beloved) his songs are full of lament; eventually he was torn to pieces by the Maenads but his head went on singing, and his lyre, taken to Apollo's temple, went on playing.

Only one who's also raised
his lyre among the shades

Rilke

may live to render up the praise
that cannot fail or fade.

Only one who tasted death's
own flower on his lips
can keep that tone as light as breath
beneath his fingertips.
....
Only in the double realm
is the voice both infinite
and assuaged.

The theme appears in the Fourth Elegy:

… transformations arising our of our own life-seasons…
……
But this: that one can contain
death, the whole of death, even before
life has begun, can hold it to one's heart
gently, and not refuse to go on living,
is inexpressible.

Paradisal Gardens & Being

Rilke had an affinity towards Islam. He makes references to Islamic themes, places and culture. In this poem on Gardens, he refers to Isphahan and Shiraz in Persis, famous for the gardens and mystical poetry of Hafiz. In the latter part of the sonnet *Gardens, he* may also echo here Goethe's *West - Eastern Diwan:*

And you must never think you sacrificed
all choice, when you made that one: to be!
Silk threads, you're woven into the tapestry.

With whatever image forms your inner tryst –
even for one second, in the years of grief –
know, implied there, the whole glorious weave.

Last Erotic Encounter

True to yourself
be careful and admit it,
be aware of your own insignificance.
Suppress, without a wagging finger,
that temptation with the unsayable,
lurking like a hidden spider
next to its web in the emptiness
that surrounds the sunny sphere
from the abyss of darkness.
Try briefly closing your eyes
from reality and open them again
in the land between dreams.

Still in bed and within the tentacles
of a last erotic encounter
you hear the clatter of cups,
the laying out for breakfast.
Still naked between the silken sheets
you feel the arousal of a last embrace,
the kiss of a long-lost lover
languishing on your lips…
as if this dimension were the true one,
not the other calling to feed your body.

A feeling of ambiguity to be precise;
the voice in the background,
knocking at your door reminds you
the time and rips you out of emotions
as to fling yourself out of bed
in an attempt determined to not allow
this other reality anymore.

The truth is that the voice calling for breakfast
is the true master of the situation.
With some gesture of gratitude
you sit down at the breakfast table
praising the good variety of jams,
the crisp and buttery croissants,
the excellent cups of coffee.
And in an unheard cry of anguish
you beg for forgiveness.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Adorno: Constanza

CHRIS **NORRIS**

The love which in the guise of unreflecting spontaneity and proud of its alleged integrity relies exclusively on what it takes to be the voice of the heart, and runs away as soon as it no longer thinks it can hear that voice, is in this supreme independence precisely the voice of society.

Adorno, 'Constanza', 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.)

I write or speak 'I love you', and the phrase
Comes back at me in quote-marks, seeing I
Spent so much time rehearsing all the ways
That love's the bourgeoisie's great alibi.

'Heart's comfort': thus a heartless world portrays
State X that waters tear-ducts long run dry,
That shrouds harsh outlines in a gentle haze,
And bids hard-bitten moguls yield a sigh.

Worse still: the more word gets around, 'love pays!',
The more we're taken in and pipe an eye
At love-scenes expertly devised to raise
The feeling-stakes till even experts cry.

Don't call me cynic: I'll be quick to praise
The lover who gives bourgeois love the lie,
Who vows to keep faith all his mortal days,
And not give love's roulette another try.

Credit where due: if the false Don betrays
Those women and himself, then how deny
The truth his faithful opposite displays
To words that no fresh vow can falsify.

Yet there's a tipping-point where virtue strays
Into the realm where dubious motives pry,
Where the fake lure of bourgeois love-talk lays
Its trap, and who's to say you're the good guy?

Adorno

It's that same cult of feeling, those clichés
They put about, the heroines who'd die
For love or couples love-struck at first gaze,
That let the Don Juan echoes multiply

Till every fresh endearment just conveys
The pressing bourgeois need to find some high-
Toned state of mind or soul that might erase
The trademark tags from which all traders shy.

Small wonder if such thoughts are apt to faze
Those long-time lovers – like myself and my
Dear Gretel – whose entwined life-resumés
And shared ordeal beneath a foreign sky

Hold proof against the bourgeois love-malaise,
The feeling-blight whose symptoms can't apply,
I'll have you know, to seasoned emigrés
With theories primed to tell the sufferers why.

Yet still the thought returns: no end of ways
Heart hoodwinks mind and then's self-hoodwinked by
Its own complicity with every phase
Of love's old trade with feelings gone awry.

Don Juan

The Wednesday

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