

The Wednesday

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Editorial

A Vision of Philosophy

Just over twenty years ago, Yale University asked a group of distinguished American philosophers to take part in a conference on the question *What is Philosophy?* (1998). The proceedings were published later on under the same title. The amazing fact is that this simple question came as a surprise and an embarrassment. Philosophers tend to think about philosophical matters but rarely subject philosophy itself to a close scrutiny. One of the participants in the conference was Barry Stroud who died last week. His paper avoids answering the question ‘What is philosophy?’ directly, but instead we are presented with his vision of philosophy.

Stroud insists that there are genuine philosophical problems and these problems are related to life outside philosophy. He also suggests that philosophical problems represent the concerns, aspirations and interests of the philosophers themselves, arising from the philosophical tradition or from outside philosophy.

He thinks that the question ‘What is philosophy?’ in its general form, standing on its own, is not to be answered. ‘We have to participate in, not just comment on, philosophical thought.’ A philosopher’s conception of philosophy is in his or her actual work.

For him, philosophy is ‘reflection on very general aspects of the world, and especially those aspects that involve or impinge on the lives of human beings.’ I take it that he means philosophy is about the world and not about a piece of language. But he also allows philosophy to reflect on itself, although such reflection is not empty but should involve some other pieces of philosophy. So, he thinks that one can show what is going on in a piece of philosophy, one’s own or another’s, rather than generalising about the definition of philosophy.

A few things I share with Stroud. The first is that philosophy flourishes in certain social conditions,

although he didn’t specify these conditions. The second is that philosophy is to do with the fundamental relationship of human beings to other human beings, the universe and human finitude. The third is that the professionalisation of philosophy renders it sterile in most cases. The fourth, is that ‘philosophy depends on undying curiosity, and the pursuit of limitless inquiry’.

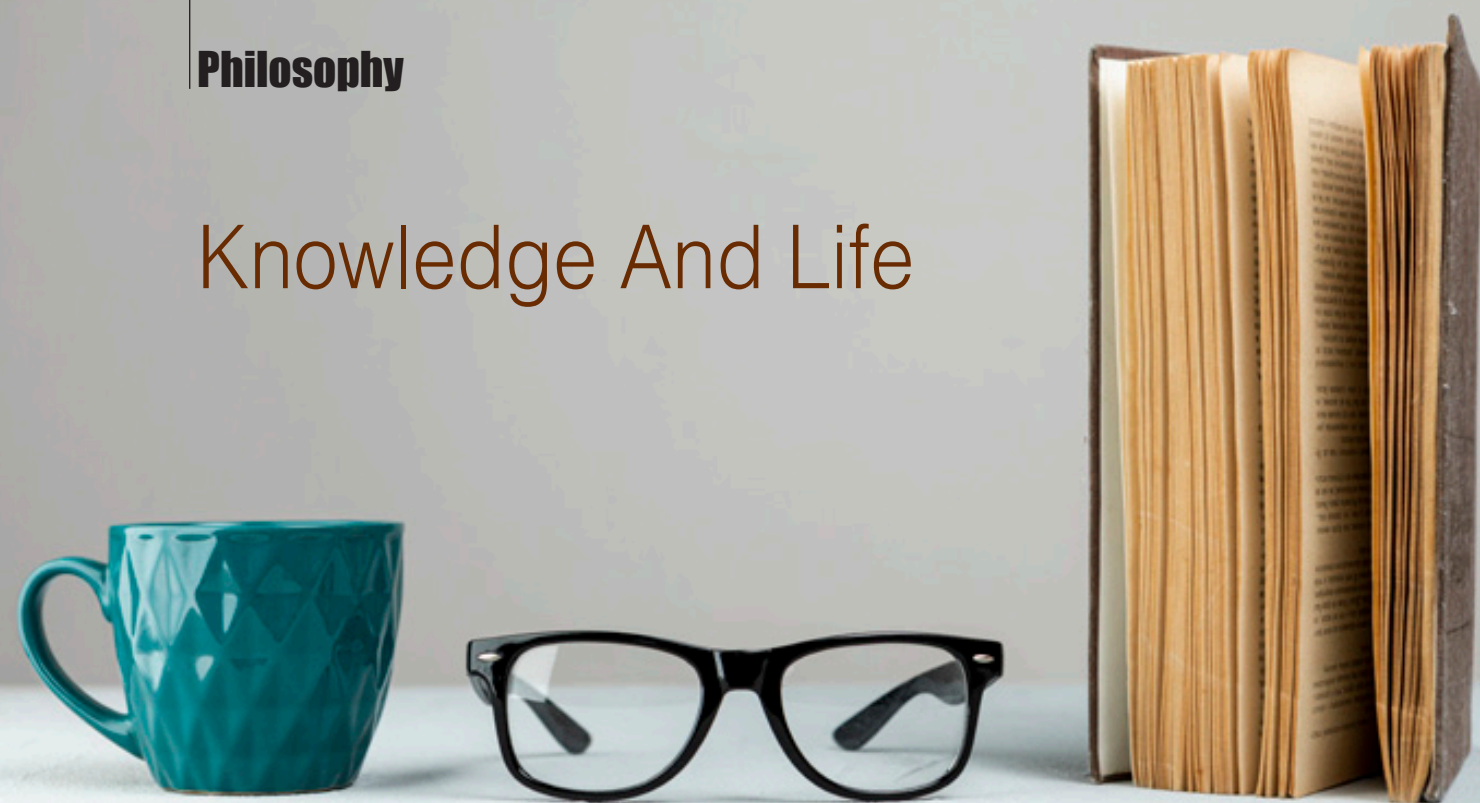
Stroud insists on the value of the history of philosophy for philosophical thinking. You have to understand the question, contextualise it within a tradition to know its source and motivation. This might seem obvious, but the dominant view of philosophy nowadays is that it is either about solving problems (not historically based), or about dissolving problems (linguistic analysis). Philosophy has been assimilated to science and Stroud was against this trend.

He also held the view that there should be a continuous self-reflection applied to the philosophical process itself. But, as we saw above, he warned against empty reflection. Reflection should have actual content or ‘data’, a ‘not philosophy’ to work on, otherwise the intellect ends up destroying itself.

I think Stroud’s vision of philosophy is correct. However, more can be said in answering the original question above. Heidegger who raised the question *What is Called Thinking?* posed the question in the context of lecturing on Nietzsche’s philosophy, and he was problematising the question of thinking, a point that we might come back to discuss in another issue. He might be suggesting prioritising the inquiry into thinking and philosophy before applying them. I also think that the attempt of Deleuze and Guattari to answer the question *What is Philosophy?* is a major philosophical work in its own right. Perhaps continental philosophy is more open to this question because it doesn’t shy away from idealism and rationalism, unlike the philosophy that adheres to empiricism.

The Editor

Knowledge And Life



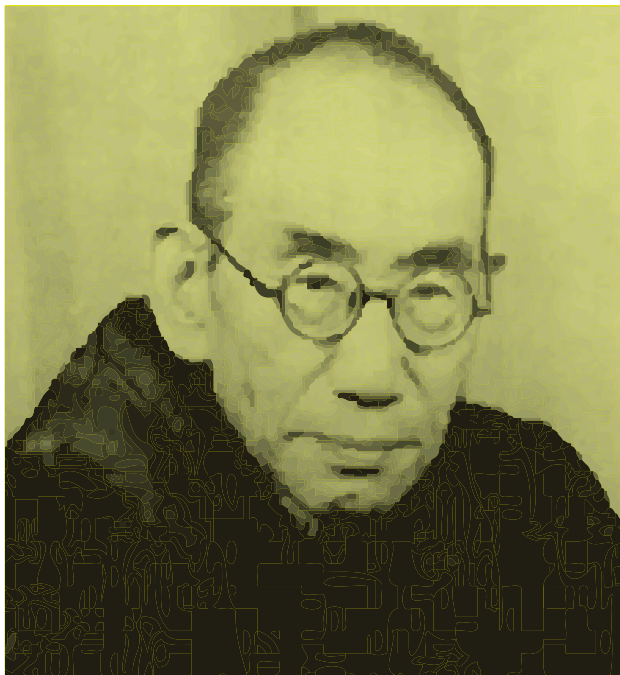
How do we know that we know anything? An immediate response to this question may be: ‘I know because I know.’ That response would lay a person open to a Socratic dialogue and Socrates had a reputation for questioning a person’s assumptions to the point of destruction, where unexamined ideas were shown to be just that. Logically in order to know, a person needs a faculty for knowledge. The Platonic view was that knowledge was essentially the recovery of memories forgotten at birth.

WILLIAM BISHOP

2 **T**o exist is one thing and to know that you exist is another level of knowing. For Aristotle it took like to know like, and if this is so then knowledge gained in this way might include only a part of all that there is to know. This is where the idea of God’s omniscience is relevant as voiced by Boethius where in the eternal mode of being, God as the Supreme Being (or even Being itself) knows all from the past and future all at once in an eternal present. Such an idea of knowledge is virtually beyond human comprehension, but if there are levels of ability to know, then the ‘great chain of being’ pictures these well as levels or steps proceeding downwards from the highest divine level, through the nine angelic hierarchies to the human, animal, plant and mineral level.

The presumption I am making (apart from the presence of God and the angels) is that reality is so rich that human faculties of knowledge can take in only a limited part of it. Indeed Isaac Newton is said to have spoken of having the sense of playing on the seashore while a whole ocean of potential knowledge lay before him.

There do appear to be aspects of reality that can be known, given a suitable faculty for knowing, and there are levels or dimensions of reality that can be accessed by observation and reason, and by faculties of soul and spirit. It was Jesus of Nazareth who was reported to have said that if you knew the truth it would set you free. Well there is a sense in which truth is One, and from this One

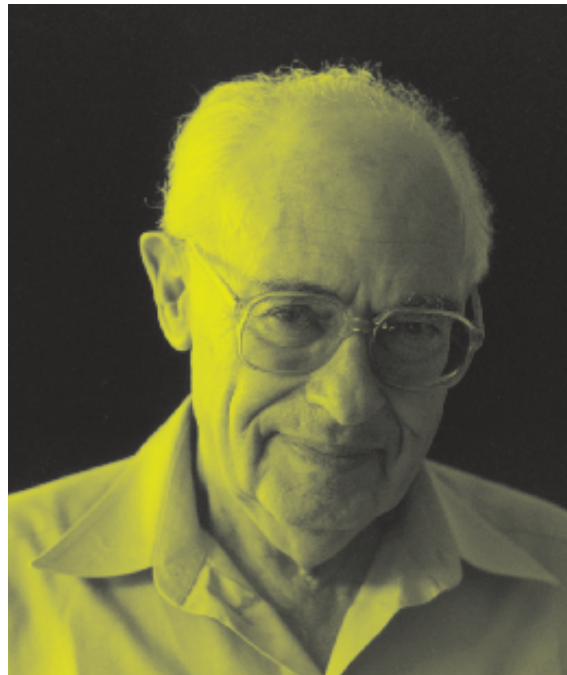


Kitaro Nishida

proceeds the many that includes everything. A logical consequence of this is that if one knows the One then one knows the truth.

Plotinus (c.204 - 270) was deeply engaged in ways of knowing the One. He acknowledged the idea that it takes *like* to know *like* and took steps to perfect himself. Yet what was for him a mystical experience of the One is not really translatable into meaningful language because the experience would seem to defy the capacity of language to convey it. This is assuming that mystical experience of the One is knowledge of the 'Unknowable' Divinity. But by its 'subjective' nature the experience cannot be proved (or disproved), and might in fact have been an experience of high divinity but not of the Supreme One. Nevertheless for Plotinus this was a meditative experience, or form of knowing (perhaps by the will), going beyond the capability and reach of reason.

The Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida (1870-1945) wrote about contradictory logic: that which is and yet is not, which is a unity of opposites but different from the dialectical logic of Hegel. An example of such logic is: 'the One and the many'. In his essay: 'The Logic of the Place of Nothingness and the Religious Worldview', Nishida applies



Georg K hlewind

this logic to religious experience, arguing that God appears to the religious self as an event of one's own soul and that to appreciate this another person needs to have personally experienced religious sentiment. Nishida contends that the religious form of life does not fall within the sphere of mere reason but that religion arises when considering the meaning of our own consciously active self.

The certainty of knowledge is an important consideration if we want to relate to reality in an appropriate way and not base our lives on mere opinion, dogma, political ideology, or wishful thinking. But it is difficult to obtain certainty and that is why it is important to question the foundations that support our knowledge. If certainty is impossible to achieve then actions taken in life may have to be based on common sense as an act of faith. The contrary position is to act from a strong emotionally held view.

Knowledge enables creation, organization and control and in that sense represents power, and power can be applied in a beneficially moral way or in a detrimental way. Knowledge has an independent status but how it is used depends on human morality. We are familiar with the use of power for purposes of domination, and yet there

is a power, which almost seems not to be a power, which the attitude of domination will consider a weakness, and this is love.

Love penetrates surfaces to reach deeper into knowledge. It is of a different order than mere intellectual knowledge, which is knowledge by association or vicarious knowledge, which is not participated in experience. The source of love is identified with the Supreme Deity. It is invincibly powerful and yet does not force its presence and action on anyone. It is a power that acts through invitation. Socrates praised love in the *Symposium* by Plato, where we learn that the wisdom of Socrates was a gift from divine love. Indeed at that time philosophy was called 'love of wisdom'.

We live in a world where power is often used in an incredibly selfish way and yet if the spirit of love could penetrate today's mood and atmosphere this could be transformed beyond recognition for the better. Why does this not seem to be possible? Because in spite of (according to some ancient philosophers) love binding the cosmos together and creating cosmos from chaos, love does not force itself on people and situations. Among other things in Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* there is the wish: "O happy race of men if love who rules the sky could rule your hearts as well." We may conclude from this that we are not a 'happy race of men' (or women) today, except perhaps in some sheltered quarters.

Apart from knowledge obtained by the intellect there is practical craft knowledge where the muscles have learnt a working skill. This is where certainty of knowledge is possible. The traditionally acknowledged faculty of intuition as direct knowledge was 'officially' dismembered with the onset of the scientific method encouraged by Francis Bacon (1561-1626), which limited knowledge to what would fit the scope of the method employing observation and experiment followed by logical and mathematical reasoning. In fact hypotheses form an integral part of the scientific method. A measure of certainty is thought possible here if conclusions prove to be unfalsifiable, although positive proof may be impossible to obtain. The authenticity of the knowledge is entirely dependent on the assumptions on which

the science is founded. Psychological knowledge or knowledge of the soul may be *felt* knowledge but when it comes to certainty in the domain of the spirit, uncertainty abounds unless 'events of the soul' are *understood* or a stance of steadfast faith is adopted towards trusted sacred writings and sources of information. But faith can also be accompanied by doubt, so *experiential* knowledge will provide assurance of the reliability of the knowledge if the true context of the experience is understood.

It is questionable whether knowledge acquired second-hand by reading or other forms of instruction is true knowledge in the sense of experienced knowledge since it is 'assumed knowledge' and not entirely *ours* so is always open to doubt. Philosophers in the ancient world, including Plato, developed a natural theology by basing their reasoning on *experience* of nature and *ideas* in astronomy. Their God was founded on reason, but that is not to exclude experience of the divine. In fact Greek religion was full of divinities (gods) and Socrates made it a priority to honour the gods in festivals and ritual. This ancient Greek attitude of respecting the gods and an accompanying mood of wonder is far removed from our secular society today, but is not so distant that recovery of it in a new form is out of the question.

Kitaro Nishida pointed out that Kantian philosophy asserted that cognition happens when what is given in sensuous immediacy is formed by abstract logical categories of understanding, but in Nishida's view negating the immediately given and moving away from sensuous intuition by applying the abstract logical categories of understanding was not the path to truth. And in his own way the Hungarian philosopher Georg K hlew nd would have agreed with this; in his *The Logos Structure of the World* we read: 'Reality actuates cognition itself. But in the process of cognition, "reality" *becomes* reality. Cognizing and cognized reality coincide and become one in our experience of them in the immediate present: they *are* this experience.'

This argues for Nishida's logic of *paradoxical identity* (the logic where opposites remain in dynamic tension in a condition of non-duality).

For Nishida this immanent and concrete logic was the condition of existential religious experience (in the sense of Zen where the ordinary can be understood as religious: the Absolute experienced by the relative as a monad experiencing the expression of the Absolute). An example of this is seen in the simplicity of the haiku of Basho, with its Zen quality of attention to everyday reality. The goal of true religion, according to Nishida, should lie in grasping eternal life in its own immediacy in our lives. Leibniz's idea of the monad (referred to by Nishida) is fruitful here with its microcosm-macrocosm relationship indicating the paradoxical identity of the 'Many and the One'.

Nishida recognized that Western philosophy had developed on the basis of abstract logic and represented the standpoint of abstract free will and not common experience with its religious character. While he understood Western philosophy applied object logic that reifies life into things, his emphasis was on the living process before *experienced-life* crystallized into a fixed form. Indeed the interpretation of the dual world theory (the ideal and the actual) in Plato's philosophy can well be a *misinterpretation* while in fact Plato's view coincides with that of Aristotle who envisaged the idea within the 'things' (the physical phenomena) acting as the organizing principle, the FORM. This is a point of view that Goethe exemplifies in experience, 'seeing' (through connection with the imagination) the idea *within* living plants. It can be argued that for Plato *semblance* applied to the idea within the *mind* while the reality is the idea itself (that is also within 'nature'). With direct (intuitive) vision 'sensual immediacy' can reveal a religious dimension for those with eyes to see, bearing in mind it is the *mind* that 'sees'. It is here where beauty and wonder in their vitality eclipse the categorizing and analytic mind.

Finally, in relation to Plato's idea of knowledge as recovery of memory, in *Becoming Aware of the Logos*, Kühlewind refers to the biblical Garden of Eden, where before the Fall (into materiality) the *Tree of Life* and the *Tree of Knowledge* was one tree (when the human was androgynous). Man was then *within* the garden and inner and outer didn't exist. But after the Fall man and woman 'went out': 'out of *life* and reality'. But this expulsion and



Boethius

ability to see the outside enabled the development of an independent 'I', and then later through love the possibility of return 'within' (love as the fruit of 'living cognizing') through experiencing the 'light of life' (cognition), which establishes the unity broken in primal history. Kühlewind remarks that the *life* meant here is a *living reality*, neither outside nor inside but found by experiencing the presence of the processes of consciousness. This reveals a living world 'where thinking grasps life' and 'is also grasped by life'. For Kühlewind it is this 'cognizer', the 'I' in man that has eternal life: Letter 1 John 5:12 in the *New Testament* says: 'He that hath the Son hath life'. The Son is the cognitive principle in man, the 'light of man'; and from a Christian perspective the Son and the Logos are one and the same.

It is of interest for us to note that the contradictory logic of Nishida bears a close resemblance to this 'unity of knowledge with life', this participation in the divine.

He Was Always There

He was always there.
His friendship could not be bought,
as little as you can buy fresh air.
He survived everything like a tree over the years.
He upheld the fog, the flickering of the sun,
and the long nights in his branches.

He would call late and ask, *how are you?*
without saying his name.
His reassuring voice would whisper like the wind:
Calm down, do not worry, everything will be fine.
He could feel my tiredness, my worries
and my pain without me having to tell.

He was ill for years, but I only thought about myself,
my own difficulties and my own loss.
He had known about 'in vain', became unable
to work or devote time for personal friendship.
He could only just carry the night, the fog
and the long-lasting rain, which he wore
like a dark heavy cloak, in utter silence.

Then I waited in vain for his calls
and wondered about his quiet way of dying.
People who walked with him
never noticed his illness. Why
bother about the crown and the roots
of others? He was there, the tall stem, his hands,
the protective branches.
Everything was still there, the colourful autumn,
the possibility of a new spring.



Poetry and Art

Nobody knew he was losing blood.
His amber skin still looked healthy enough,
but the resin slowly dripped from the cracked tree bark.
Only the paper-thin skin of his hands
showed signs of an increasing transparency
compared to that of a young birch tree in spring,
where on delicate easy-to-find branches young birds nestled,
ready for an easy escape.
I often flew away from him, uninterested, without care.

I never found out the cause of his illness,
a man still young in the tangle of his thought.
Threatened by storms, he still resisted;
his roots, however, slowly narrowed.
The breathlessness of his heart was a result
of not being understood for years.

His ability to maintain friendships
was as unsuccessful as clinging to life with dying roots.
But he tried, in the rush and hush of the world,
in spite of more and more restrictions.
His friends expected this or that from him.
They took advantage, even though
they pretended to love him.
But I saw no hope for him anymore.

So many others died around him
Each one involved with their own battle,
sucked deep into a war of venules and capillaries
and unsuccessful exchanges of intracellular fluids
underneath the increasing moss.

A tree needs effective veins to pump its sap
into the hidden network of roots and ramification.
Our friendship died in the lack of this attempt.
The fear of losing narrowed his heart.
If you cut out the crown, split the trunk and cut off branches,
then a tree will not survive.



But why think about trees, but not talk about a human being,
a dying man?
Sometimes I wanted to have been there, when he gave up,
before his irrevocable fall, that made him disappear, to wherever.
But then again, I wanted to see him fall like a man, witness
his courage until his last breath.

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Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

On Truth and Happiness (Adorno)



CHRIS NORRIS

True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.

Love you will find only where you may show yourself weak without provoking strength.

Adorno, 'Monograms', in *Minima Moralia*, trans. Jephcott


To happiness the same applies as to truth: one does not have it, but is in it. Indeed, happiness is nothing other than being encompassed, an after-image of the original shelter within the mother.

Adorno, 'Second Harvest', in *Minima Moralia*

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It's truth that understanding falsifies
By holding firm to some fixed master-thought,
Denouncing error like a thief who flies
The scene yet turns state's evidence when caught.

Frame concepts as you may, they're under-size
And leak truth-content till the thinker's brought
To test what comes of thinking otherwise,
Of stretching dialectics live and taut.



The concept-master warns, 'Beware the spies,
There's harm afoot, stay watchful, clear the court!'
While dialectics ventures to advise
'Stay tuned, keep moving, jump the juggernaut!'

For there's no understanding that applies,
No concept that fits content as it ought
Where truth can figure only in the guise
Of what's squeezed out, distended, or cut short.

Who says 'I know the truth' is one who tries
To fob us off with untruths of the sort
That monologic fails to recognize
Since else its master-plan would self-abort.

Who says 'There is *a* truth', yet quickly shies
From stating it – from tipping its full quart
Into thought's puny pint-pot – snaps the ties
That hold us anchored fast in falsehood's port.



Poetry

Give ear to Blake: eternity's sunrise
Is where they live whose aphorisms thwart
The Owl of Minerva who'd analyze
What keeps its dawn so dark and error-fraught.



So too with happiness, likewise a state
Of perfect truth-relatedness you bear
To life or love, yet cannot estimate
How much falls to your own or fortune's share.

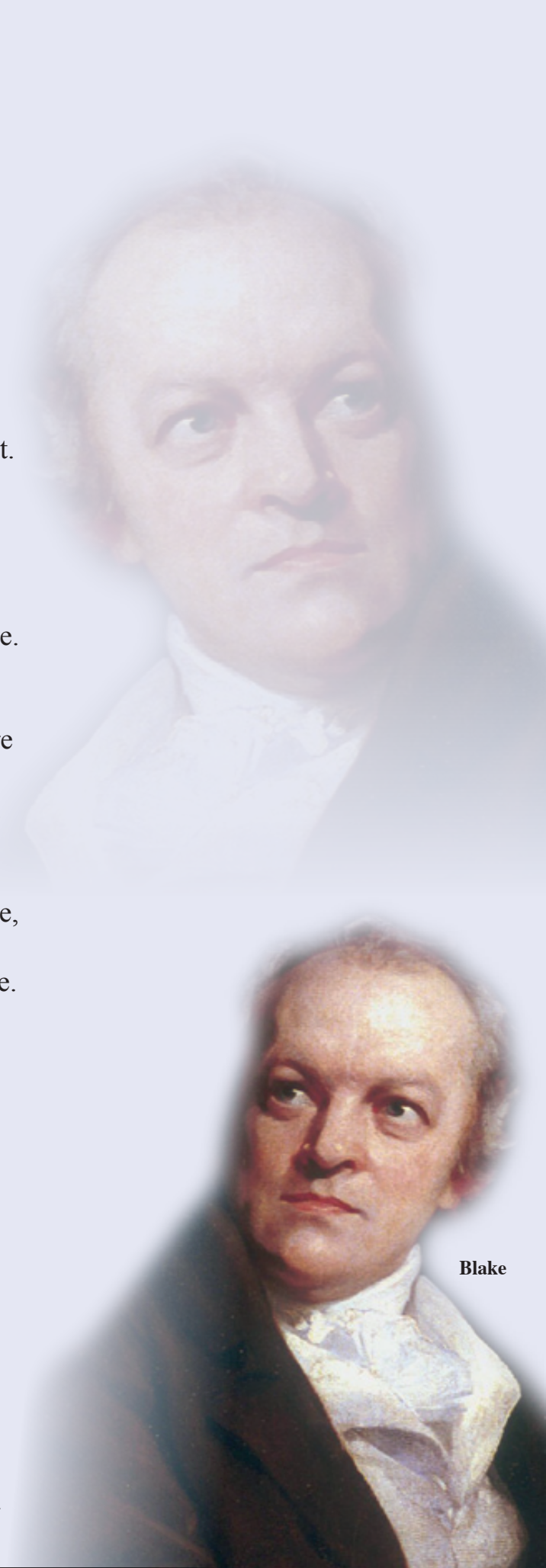
Again, reflection always comes too late,
Strikes *après-coup*, bids consciousness beware
How its insensate meddling may negate
The happiness that once dawned briefly there.

Say, if you like, we thinkers meditate
How best to steer just wide of Descartes' snare,
Let cogito rest easy, and create
A space for thoughts beyond its spotlight glare.

Or say: the thinking-cap had better wait
Till happiness seeks out a place elsewhere,
A place where it can quietly contemplate,
Not fully grasp, how everything's set fair.

Check pleasure-quotients at the standard rate,
Not zones of happiness, since they're
Not intervals that simply aggregate
But moments out of time, beyond compare.

Bourgeois ideologues may talk of fate,
The lucky break, the moment rich and rare,
A fate benign in kind (though they placate
The bourgeois gods by adding woes to spare).



Blake

Twixt bliss and thoughts of bliss we alternate,
We prying housemaids, taking every care
Lest happiness exceed its use-by date
And thought give notice: 'nothing to declare'.



It's where thought meets a limit-point, where those
Thought-tantalizers, truth and happiness,
Demand it draws reflection to a close
And risks one let-down *denouement* the less.

It's how contentment happens, how it goes,
How stray thoughts find stray moments they can bless,
Not thoughts pursued with fixed intent to pose
The question: how conceive such pure largesse?

No 'state of mind' or 'mood' this thing bestows,
This happiness some gesture may express
Or fleeting tone of voice that no-one knows
Quite how, as knowing goes, to repossess.

The gap's an existential one and grows
The more as each new let-down brings distress,
Or each precipitous descent to prose
From lyric heights now lost with no redress.

The notion of things falling out just so's
A large part of it, sanguine types profess,
Though casting back a warm romantic glow's
What underwrites its Hollywood success.

That frown of puzzlement is where it shows,
The meditator's quickening shift of stress
From pure beatitude, lest thinking slows
To zero-point, then starts to retrogress.

What they so fear is just what 'happy' owes
To 'happen'; how chance vistas iridesce,
Still points emerge amidst chaotic flows,
Or truths negated yield a hard-won yes.



The Owl of Minerva



Are Thoughts More Certain Than Observations?

DAVID JONES



If the word ‘thoughts’ is used to identify, ‘fully wide awake and conscious thoughts’ then it would seem to follow that thoughts might be said to be *necessarily* known. But does this type of ‘directness’ also necessarily provide *complete* knowledge? If that were so, then knowing a ‘triangle’ would necessarily include knowledge of all of Euclid’s theorems ‘directly’. It could be claimed that ‘touch’ provides a more ‘direct’ experience than ‘thought’, but even ‘touch’ is subject to this ‘incompleteness’ feature, which is illustrated in the story about several blind men who each touch an elephant and describe it in different ways.

The word ‘thought’ is used somewhat generally to refer to several different types of inner awareness. Most of these types of awareness are *passive* and do not require the experiencing person to *actively direct* their attention and happen only as a unconscious *reaction* to a stimulus from the senses or instinctual drive. Thought images of outer objects might be regarded to be less real than the inferred objects that they are images of. On the other hand, thinking can sometimes be an *activity* in which the attention of the ‘thinker’ is fully, and in full consciousness, *directed* and observed. In this case, the thinking is entirely what the thinker intends the thinking to be and might be considered to be completely known in the same way that the designer-maker of a device necessarily knows what was done to make the device even though that ‘designer-maker’ would *not* necessarily also know all the consequences for the world of the existence of this new device. Over and above the ‘picturing’ of particular objects in the world there is another level of observation which is *the awareness of similarities and differences*. This is a

more pure type of thinking which is not subject to the ‘limited reality’ or incompleteness of sensory images.

Empiricists and Scientists do not need to be concerned about these things because the subject matter of their interest is only to observe the regular patterns of behaviour in the natural world and then make use of those patterns deterministically, as is the case with technology, without claiming to know why those patterns of behaviour are the way they are, only knowing *that* they are. Gravity is a good example of this principle. However, the fact that some features of the world display patterns of behaviour which enable reliable predictability in technology does not prove that there cannot be anything that is not predictable. The logical domain of the predictable is the narrow domain of the natural sciences.

Knowledge and the obstacle to knowing

The character called Socrates in Plato’s dialogues describes himself as having no knowledge of his own but of having a talent of ‘bringing to birth’ knowledge that is within others that they have not yet become aware of. He does this by asking them questions about the knowledge that they believe that they have. When you believe that you have some particular knowledge, it may be the case that what you take to be ‘knowledge’ is actually really an ‘epistemological obstacle’ to knowledge because it blocks the view towards seeing something that you do not already ‘know’. The soul-comportment known as ‘wonder’ is an openness to see the unexpected and a wish to learn something new. It is not that other comportment of seeking only to confirm what is already known.

Art and Suffering

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 14th August 2019

RAHIM HASSAN

The question of time, suffering and art came up in our last meeting and there were different views. The original question was about time experience by the clock and time experience subjectively under certain moods or stages and circumstances of life. This brought us to the question of suffering.

It was argued by some that present society does not prepare us for coping with suffering. It was also argued that technological advances make culture look more optimistic and there is the belief that scientific progress will sort out the causes of suffering. But this view was challenged on the basis that this might be a surface effect and deep down we are not satisfied that suffering is not likely to befall us or others. Take the sense of connection that technology has allowed through means of communication and social media. This may be what everyone has longed for – a world in which we are not left lonely but are well connected. But is this the case? The connection seems to be at a distance and sometimes with unknown people or faces.

Can art relieve us of suffering? One view is that it might do so, particularly when it is creative art. Not all artists are creative. The idea of creativity is that of breaking through the present by creating new things, challenging what has been accepted, and pushing out the boundaries of experience. The imagination plays a major role here. Some artists bring something from the past – vision, style and technique. But the creative artist brings something new to the present.

It was objected that not all creative artists are happy. However, suffering may be essential for their creativity. It was also objected that the artist should grasp the present. But the reply to this was that creative art should look through what is present to something beyond the eye. It was then pointed out that not all art is about suffering. What about music and dance? But again, we remember that the blues produced interesting music based on suffering.

The real problem is that the arts are being confused with entertainment. This needs full treatment in another meeting.

The Wednesday

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A Simple Gait

—————  —————
(*Reveries of a Solitary Walker: Rousseau*)

Somewhere along this forest path,
I stretch my legs in steady steps.
My pace, a breathing space to calm me.
Though here and there a stumble, I am released,
for a while from the clutch of pain,
or even suffocating pleasure.

I can stop and lean against rock or trunk
or sit on the ground to consider nature,
blooming, swelling, finally a withered flake.
This is the shape my consciousness takes.
A stretch further perhaps I'll see a sunset.
When?..... I don't need to know.

The past is a sudden swarm of thoughts.
Like insects, hovering dipping and stinging,
delivering itches and swellings, though
as with all nature they seer then all fade,
leaving me to continue my steady pace.

David BurrIDGE