

# The *Wednesday*

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Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



## Editorial

### *Ontologising Philosophy*

We discussed last week the idea of psychologising philosophy. The idea simply put is that a choice of a philosophy and a philosopher is related to the individual's outlook and interest. It doesn't mean that we make the person the measure of all things, as the Sophist Protagoras once claimed, but rather we make philosophy closely related to the individual and social life. But, surprisingly, the same idea could be expressed from the point of view of ontology. Choosing an ontological perspective for one's philosophy does express what one values about philosophy and whether the idea of philosophy as a personal, social task is at stake here.

It is almost always the case that the choice of an ontological commitment is at the heart of a major philosophical movement. This can be seen since the beginning of modern philosophy. Descartes put on the philosophical agenda the task of producing a theory of knowledge of the self, God and the world. Kant came up with his limit to knowledge which altered ontological and metaphysical commitments for more than 250 years. He was soon to face up to a number of attempts to break out of this limit, but with the advance of science, his view was radicalised further and has been followed up to the present moment.

The split in modern philosophy between continental and analytical philosophy is rooted in Kant's theory of knowledge. Some take Kant to have eliminated metaphysics and limited knowledge to the conditions of possible experience. They opted for historical ontology, ontology of actuality and objects-oriented ontology. Others thought that there are resources in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* that could be explored in a different direction. If there is a realist, empirical reading of Kant, there are also idealist, imaginative readings. This second approach not only defends ontological commitments which

are based on and going beyond Kant, such as the super-sensible, but also the role of the imagination as a productive faculty and not just a reproductive one. It can bring into the world figures and ideas that go beyond the functional purposes of everydayness. It provides alternatives and produces art, poetry, as well as scientific and philosophical theories.

To put this in another way is to say that the imagination in Kant's philosophy works on one level as a mediating role between the categories of our understanding and sensibility, to make sense of our experience of the material world; but it also plays an immediate role in producing in us all the meaning we need to make sense of our lives, on both personal and social levels.

But this is not the whole story. Kant gave the imagination a role of helping the understanding in connecting with sensory input (the manifold). But the understanding is not the highest faculty of the mind for him. Reason as the realm of ideas governs the function of the understanding and sensibility. Kant did show in the antinomies that for the most part the demands of the understanding are in conflict with the demand of reason. What a minimalist conception of ontology does is to get rid of reason and the ideas of reason and to focus on the understanding. If this suggestion and trend is allowed to dominate philosophy, it will impoverish the life of the individual, society and the relevance of philosophy. But this is not the only option. If it is, then we have only half of the truth, the fragmented truth at the level of the understanding and not the totality of knowledge and life that reason could provide. If we follow reason, then the ontological commitment becomes more open, rich and useful for the philosopher and his readers.

*The Editor*

# Heidegger

## And The Problem Of Metaphysics

Leibniz's question 'Why is there something rather than nothing' puzzled philosopher for centuries. Heidegger took it as a clue to his metaphysics. It formed the basis of their metaphysics. The article below looks at Heidegger's answer.

EDWARD GREENWOOD

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From his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* and his short essay 'What Is Metaphysics?' through his thousand pages on Nietzsche and his book *Introduction to Metaphysics* of 1953 and finally his essay 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' of 1966, Heidegger makes his pronouncements on an activity Nietzsche thought he had brought to an end, the activity of creating a metaphysics. Heidegger's pronouncements are, of course often couched in a riddling idiom far away from the clarity and wit of Nietzsche's writings. The Greeks called Heraclitus 'the dark riddler'. There is much of the dark riddler about Heidegger, but of course without the brevity of the style of the Greek philosopher.

Heidegger's magnetic power as a teacher is attested by the admiration (though often qualified) of such distinguished pupils as Hannah Arendt and Karl Lowith. Not for nothing

was he called 'the magician from Messkirch', the village where his father had been sexton of the catholic church, and where, thanks to his winning of scholarships, it was thought he was destined to be a theologian. In a way he realized that expectation, for his work joined the kind of German philosophy which Nietzsche, the real destroyer of metaphysics, had called 'concealed theology'.

It is never entirely clear from Heidegger's writings on metaphysics whether he approves of the enterprise or wants to destroy it by an *Abbau*, a word which can be translated as deconstruction. This is, of course, the name the later once fashionable French school of philosophy whose leading proponent was Derrida, adopted. In one of Heidegger's last works 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' (1966) the very first sentence runs 'Philosophy is Metaphysics.' We are then told



**Kant**

Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole - the world, man, God - with regard to the belonging together of beings in Being'. There is, of course, an ambiguity in the word 'end' which can mean culmination or aim. He goes on to disclaim the former meaning. By end he does not mean culmination but rather that 'philosophy means the completion of metaphysics.' But, of course, the word 'completion' also carries a certain ambiguity. He goes on to say that there is no progress in philosophy. This is of course not true, for Wittgenstein did give us a new method, that of 'philosophical grammar'. He then says that completion means 'that place in which the whole of philosophy's history is gathered in its utmost possibility'. This is presumably Heidegger's lecture hall. This is the sort of claim Hegel had made earlier. Heidegger then identifies metaphysics with Platonism, by which he presumably means a two-world theory which affirms an accessible world of ideas as the real world as opposed to the unreal sensory world in which most human beings (the unphilosophical) live. He sees Nietzsche's stance as 'reversed Platonism', the term Nietzsche himself had used, but then slyly suggest that in simply reversing Platonism Nietzsche is still somehow still mired in metaphysics while Heidegger has extricate himself from it and will help us to do



**Husserl**

the same. This is the 1960's, so to keep up with the fashion, Heidegger even brings in Marx, a figure he would never have mentioned in the Hitler period, as helping philosophy towards its end.

Heidegger claims that in respect to the scientific technical world (and we can now add the world of artificial intelligence and computing, to his talk of cybernetics) the whole educated world has become a unity. But what is the relation of a sort of thinking that is neither metaphysics nor natural science to such a world? Heidegger rightly sees that the natural sciences deal with entities and causal processes that would be there even if there were no human beings to think about them at all. Following Descartes, Hegel and Husserl, Heidegger still thinks, however, that philosophy has its own subject matter. That subject matter is intentionality, what Heidegger calls 'the subjectivity of consciousness'. Philosophy, for Heidegger, is not concerned with the content of this transcendental subjectivity, but rather with finding a method for dealing with this transcendental subjectivity itself. He wants to go beyond Descartes, Hegel and Husserl who, in his view, fell into various errors.

It is here, however that he seems to start moving

beyond philosophical discourse into the realm of poetry. He begins to talk in metaphorical terms of the forest and the clearing. Our old and dangerous friend intuition is invoked. Plato and Parmenides are quoted. The philosopher is steadily replaced by the magician as the essay proceeds. He becomes analogous to the epopt of the Greek mysteries who is going to draw back a curtain in front of his initiates to reveal what was up till then concealed. We have reached 'the certainty of the knowledge of Being'. We get the surprising claim that 'Hegel, as little as Husserl, as little as all metaphysics does not ask about Being'. This is astonishing because, as Heidegger well knows, Aristotle had raised the question of what Being qua Being is over two millennia before Hegel in book *Zeta* of his *Metaphysics*.

The mystery (or should we call it mystification?) deepens. *Aletheia* grants unconcealment, but *Aletheia* itself remains concealed somewhat like Kant's noumenon. Heidegger himself asks whether all this might be dismissed as 'unfounded mysticism or even bad mythology, in any case a ruinous irrationalism, the denial of *ratio*?' But he then cunningly identifies ratio with 'the technological-scientific rationalization ruling the present age' in a way which influenced Habermas, a rationalization which is concerned only with what is demonstrable. Heidegger then asks 'Does not the insistence on what is demonstrable block the way to what is?'

In defending his type of discourse Heidegger quotes Aristotle's remark in the *Metaphysics* book 4 'For it is uneducated not to have an eye when it is necessary to look for a proof and when this is not necessary'. He might well have quoted the more familiar remark near the start of the *Nicomachean Ethics* which runs, in Terence Irwin's translation, 'Our discussion will be adequate if its degree of clarity fits the subject matter, for we should not seek the same degree of exactness in all sorts of argument alike... the educated person seeks exactness in each area to the extent that the nature of the subject

allows; for apparently it is just as mistaken to demand demonstration from a rhetorician as to accept merely persuasive arguments from a mathematician. Further, each person judges well what he knows...because the good judge in a particular area is the person educated in that area, and the universally good judge is the person educated in every area'.

But who is the person best able to judge Heideggerese except Heidegger himself? But can you be judge in your own cause?

It is strange that though the discourse on Being is still central to 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking', the concept of the 'Nothing' so infamously central to the inaugural lecture of 1929 'What is Metaphysics?' is not mentioned. It is in that work that the expression 'Das Nichts Nichtet' 'the Nothing noths' occurs. When the expression was drawn to Wittgenstein's attention he did not dismiss it as meaningless, as a follower of Carnap might have, but saw it as expressive of a mood.

The end of the lecture asks the sort of question only a philosopher would ask, and which puzzles the non-philosopher, the question 'why are there beings at all and why not rather nothing?' - this, for Heidegger, is the basic question of metaphysics. As I hope to show in another paper it was a question he could not hope to solve by what he regarded as his distinctive phenomenological method which he saw as very different from that of his teacher Husserl. As Herman Philipse shows in his masterly study *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being* the questions Heidegger treats of and the area in which he works are much better dealt with by such philosophers as Gilbert Ryle and Peter Strawson to whom I would add, as well as Herman Philipse himself, Bede Rundle and Peter Hacker. Bede Rundle in his classic *Why is there Something rather than Nothing?* shows the right path to take in philosophy the path of Wittgenstein's philosophical grammar, a path which leads not to knowledge, it is true, but to wisdom, the real goal of philosophy.

## *Sutra*

*No complaints week.*

A cow sits, spiritless,  
staked to the dirt  
by its bones.

*Our villages will prosper, if we prosper.*

A drowsy river turns,  
scuffs a meander,  
slurries tin cans.

*As we work, so we pray.*

Someone among the stones  
hammers fitfully  
making no progress.

*Delay breeds corruption.*

A buffalo drops to its knees.  
Ants telegraph it.  
Flies come miles.

*Courtesy keeps everyone happy.*

Vultures turn vigil into assault  
confusing their need  
with their greed.

*Erica Warburton*

*Sutra*: a concise verse or scripture within Hinduism.



# Recovering from Addiction: The Twelve Steps Program

## *Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019*

A member of our group led a discussion on the 12-step recovery process from addiction. This process started with an organization called Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935 in the USA. Unlike previous programs which tried to cure alcoholism, it focused on the idea of groups of alcoholics helping each other not merely to stop drinking, but to stay stopped. The approach was formulated as a series of 'Twelve Steps' which each alcoholic could undertake with the support and advice of other group members to make radical changes to their habits of behaviour and thought in order to better manage the underlying factors that experience told them would eventually lead them back to alcohol abuse. In most cases these changes to their outlook upon life needed to be so radical that they were described as a 'spiritual awakening'. Here are some notes from the discussion.

### PAUL COCKBURN

How does recovery from addiction tie into philosophy? Analysis and logic are only tools in philosophy, which to many should be about the love of wisdom, how to live a good life, the purposeful and reflective life we want to live. The 12-step recovery process is an example of practical wisdom. It is aimed at addicts who have serious addiction problems, so desperate that their lives are out of control. They recognize they need a radical solution to their problems. An ancient tradition holds that 'in the wisdom of the Gods there is a compulsion which is forced on us'.

The 12-step process and much of the literature associated with it is presented in language typical of early twentieth-century USA, but their application has transcended cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries. The 12-step process is based on the theory that recovery from addiction is possible with the help of a higher power. It must be noted that the word 'God' appears many times in the 12-step process text. This higher power can be God in terms of the understanding of 'God' that the person in need has rather than a dogmatic religious God. In particular, the interpretation of the word 'God' is left entirely to the individual addict - it may

be a traditional religious deity, some abstract ideal, or some practical idea such as the support of the group. The 12-step process has many associations with religion, particularly Christianity, with its emphasis on confession, self-analysis, the invoking of a higher power, humility and repentance, but it is not aligned with any religion, sect, or denomination - it is regarded not as a religious program, but as a spiritual program.

Here are the twelve steps, with notes for each one expanding their content.

### The Twelve Steps

**1. We admitted we were powerless over [addictive substance or behaviour] - that our lives had become unmanageable.**

Here we admit that we should stop our addictive behaviour, and we have failed. This first step sounds defeatist, but many people are desperate at this stage. They may have tried to stop many times. They need to change, they are being forced to change, admit they cannot go on. They need to identify the addictive behaviour they are suffering from, whether it be taking drugs, alcohol, gambling, etc. They need to say to themselves 'I can't change,



maybe something else out there other than my own will-power can help me'.

Addiction may be more complex than say just drinking too much alcohol or gambling say. You may be addicted to the misery you experience from these behaviours and the continuous 'rescue' attempts – you are the centre of attention!

**2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

We are insane if our addiction is harming us so that our life is in danger. We need to be restored to the path we should be on, free from addiction. What do we do to believe we can do this? We need an experience based on faith, in this case the hope that we can change our beliefs and stop our addictive behaviour. We are in a powerless state - see step 1 - and change starts with hope and the faith that we can change.

**3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.**

If an alcoholic has turned to drink, we can be sure that the drink does not care what he

does. But if an addict makes a decision to stop drinking, the 'greater good' or 'God' does care.

**4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

Our morals are our true values, and if we do not live according to these values we should admit it and acknowledge that it is wrong. Addiction is like a blanket which covers the real need within us. We need to live according to our true values.

**5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

We need to be self-aware and accept that what we are doing is wrong, and confess it to another person. What has stopped us living according to our true values, are we afraid of people, of taking control, of being vulnerable.

**6. Were entirely ready for God to remove all these defects of character.**

Accept our responsibility for our defects, and ask God to get rid of them. We can't do it ourselves. God does the impossible, everything else he leaves to us. What stops us doing this - are we angry, do we not believe

## Follow Up

this is possible? We are alive, we do have the opportunity to practise in our lives the opposites of our defects.

### **7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.**

This step goes wider - the addict learns to look for opportunities in their daily life not only to abstain from addiction, but to grow spiritually in line with their true values in every aspect of their lives. Humility is key here, because the addict does [OR we do] not know in advance what further areas of growth will be revealed, nor how it will be accomplished.

### **8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and become willing to make amends to them all.**

### **9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would harm them or others.**

### **10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.**

### **11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.**

### **12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other [such addicts] and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

In our discussion we only reached step 7. We also discussed the role of authority in therapy. In counselling and in the 12-step process, there is no authority figure who tells you what your problems are and how you should cure them. In many therapies, such as psychotherapy perhaps, the 'expert' listens to your problems or symptoms and then diagnoses you according to a particular theory. Your symptoms are similar to a particular defined group, and there is a recognized recovery process you have to

accept, just as you have to accept the surgeon's diagnosis your gall bladder say needs removing. The advantage of counselling and the 12 steps is that there is no authority figure, you have to diagnose your own problem and cure it yourself (within a group and with the help of a higher power). Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), available widely now on the NHS in Britain, is perhaps sometimes a trivialising therapy, using a 'one size fits all' approach.

The therapeutic process seems to work similarly perhaps to a catalyst in a chemical reaction. The catalyst gets two chemicals somehow to react, and is not changed by the end of the process, but the other chemicals are. It is interesting that in step 12 the 'catalytic' process is spread to help other addicts.

Are we not all out of step with our core values? Would we not all benefit from some sort of process like this? Maybe not – perhaps we are not desperate like true addicts!

Another question occurred to me. Are those of us in the Wednesday group meeting every week to discuss philosophical ideas addicted to philosophy? And do we hope to find the answer or answers to the fundamental questions of our existence? What sort of journey are we on?

The whole 12-step process works in a group, and group dynamics must play a large role in the therapy. There is a strict format to the meetings, and 'sponsors' who have already been through the process help new members. The whole process is anonymous, and this can cause a problem for 12-step groups set up in prisons.

Following the example of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), a number of other groups have formed to tackle other addictive or harmful compulsive behaviours, and they are all Anonymous. They include: Narcotics, Cocaine, Gamblers, Overeaters, Sex and Love Addicts, Debtors, Over-workers, Emotions, Under-earners, and Al-anon for family and friends of Alcoholics, and Co-dependents (of various types of addicts).

## *'The Adventure of Feelings'*

*By Mike England*



## Late evening

The windows shone from the secluded house,  
its garden full of scented dog rose hedges -  
high up the clouds were covering the edges  
of light-blue sky as if they meant with pledges  
the night to rouse.

The bells of a near church were sounding low,  
as if they called from far away a land  
and secretly night rose its darkened hand  
and waved with stars as if she should command  
for time to slow.



*Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws*

### Out of Character

I am stupid, am I not? What more can I want? If you ask them who is brave... who is true... who is just... who is it they would trust with their lives?... they would say, Tuan Jim. And yet they can never know the real, real truth...

It is my belief that no man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge.

**Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim***

It may even be the case that there is no such thing as character, no ordinary character traits of the sort people think there are, none of the usual moral virtues and vices.

**Gilbert Harman**

If personality were typically structured as evaluatively integrated associations of robust traits, it should be possible to observe very substantial consistency in behaviour. I therefore contend personality should be conceived of as *fragmented*: an evaluatively disintegrated association of situation-specific local traits.

**John Doris**



**CHRIS NORRIS**

Quite 'out of character', his acting so.  
You trust to habit, but the mask may slip.  
The Dickens lot troop on and do their thing;  
Snap choices ditch whole lives of heretofore.

Shaming yourself is one way it can go.  
Lord Jim lived by the book but then jumped ship.  
No life but has some alien self to spring;  
No rest for him but sailing shore to shore.

Was that your secret-sharer there below  
Or was it just a panic-stations blip?  
Maybe, but if it's depth-reports they bring,  
Those moments, then they're signs we can't ignore.

Some think the self's a standing debt we owe  
To bygone selves, each personage a chip  
Off that old building-block, or phrase we sing  
*Con anima* yet strictly by the score.

For some it's more time's flow and counter-flow,  
Its memory-glissades, that ease the grip  
Of punctual selfhood by imagining  
Times past revisited *une fois encore*.

The Proustian take has its own drawbacks, though,  
As Marcel finds when selves and times-scales slip  
Too far from sync and so require he cling  
To cakes tea-dunked, then lodged in memory's store.

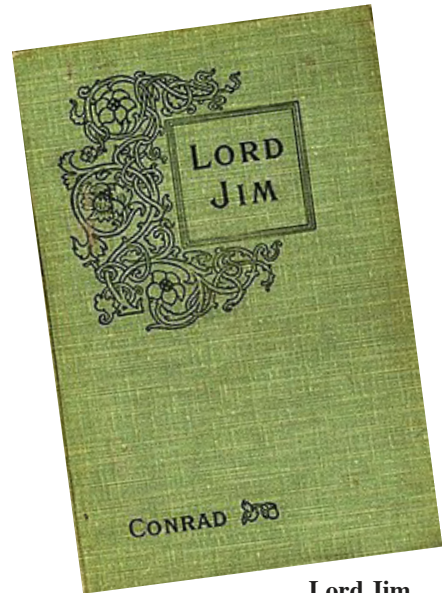
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Two different ways of coming not to know  
What's left of 'character' should something tip  
The balance or your reputation swing  
From guy they love to fellow they deplore.

It's down to figuring out the quid pro quo  
When ratings lift or take a sudden dip  
As Marcel muses, or the constant sting  
Of shame relived enacts the moral law.



Proust



Lord Jim



Conrad

No question: the resistless to-and-fro  
Of time lost and retrieved affords a trip  
Less arduous than the endless harrowing  
Of self-reproach that Conrad's sailor bore.

Let's say that character's what takes a blow  
When some till now disowned desire lets rip,  
Or some long-stifled impulse has its fling  
And conscience yields to instinct in the raw.

For *temps perdu* leaves ample room to stow  
Past foibles, faults and follies, or to flip  
From scene to scene so memory can string  
Itself along and hide each moral flaw,

While there's no life-redemptive light to throw  
On Jim's wracked 'character', no way to skip  
That fateful moment, save by reckoning  
With selves and consequences yet to draw.

## Moral Dilemmas and Moral Judgments

DAVID JONES



What are moral dilemmas? What are moral judgements?

A 'moral judgement' is not the same thing as a 'moral dilemma' which is a state of affairs in which an agent 'cannot do otherwise' than choose between two or more actions, all of which the agent would have preferred not to have acted in. Choosing not to act is also a moral action. Typically, in such cases, if the agent does nothing then the worst of the possible outcomes will occur and if the agent does act then he directly initiates a chain of events which also lead to an outcome that he would rather have not been connected to.

A moral judgement refers to the criteria that an agent, or viewer of another agent, uses to justify or criticise a decision about an action that could have been otherwise. A moral judgement is the *opposite direction* of the judgements involved in acquiring knowledge of the world. In the acquisition of knowledge of the world we want our understanding to best correspond to the way the world really is. Moral judgements concern the criteria we use to justify our intentions to introduce some change, or absence of change, in the world.

### *The Wednesday*

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