

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

From Understanding to Reason

The distinction that Kant made between reason and understanding has far more reaching consequences which we do not recognize at first glance. The split between continental and analytical philosophy could be traced to this distinction. Continental philosophers are fascinated by ideas related to reason, such as the sublime, the Absolute, Being, Freedom. These are transcendental ideas. Analytical philosophy is concerned with conceptual analysis, empirical facts and the insistence on immanence. There are truths on both sides but the connecting factor between the two is rarely noticed. That is because both reason and the understanding are components or faculties of 'pure reason'.

Kant thought that reason is a higher faculty than the understanding. The demands of reason are different to those of the understanding. Reason asks for the totality of experience and it is concerned with morality, aesthetics, God, freedom. All these form the 'frame' of the meaning of human life. These are questionable from the point of view of the understanding which can only think the content given to it by the senses. The understanding also thinks in a fragmentary, piecemeal way. The claims of the two faculties seem contradictory and Kant called these disagreements 'antinomies'. But reason does not contradict itself. Reason and understanding should be reconciled with each other, and this is only possible if one observes the limit of each.

What sort of contradictions are there? The understanding follows Kant's restrictions on knowledge. Science follows the understanding and limits itself to facts and satisfies the condition of the possibility of experience. Positivist philosophy, and related schools of thought, move in the same direction as science. But they go wrong when they overstep the limits of their founding principles. For example, the positivists used the verification principle to judge whether some statement has a meaning or not. But the objection that was raised against the positivists is

what is the ground for accepting this principle itself? It is not an inductive, empirical principle but an a priori principle, just like the metaphysical principles that the positivists deny. It seems here the understanding needs a helping hand from reason. Also, positivism, and the schools that share a similar conceptual scheme, deny metaphysics but metaphysics doesn't fall under its jurisdiction, it is the realm of Ideas that reason deals with. Take for example freedom. Positivism, science, naturalism, physicalism, all have a problem with freedom. Yet, we do intuitively feel we are free. This feeling does not come from the understanding but from reason. Similarly, with meaning and truth. Theories of meaning and truth in philosophy with a scientific bias try to reduce these major demands of reason to natural facts.

These differences and antinomies do not show the contradiction of reason but they may point out ways of reconciling the two through dialectical moves, where opposite views could be reduced to the partiality of the understanding. Knowledge then moves from the point of view of the understanding to that of reason where it becomes absolute knowledge. But it could also mean that each realm could be explored in a pluralistic way, so that we have a philosophy based on reason, as in continental philosophy, and another philosophy based on the understanding as in the analytical.

There was at one time a strong emphasis on systematicity in philosophy. That was the time when philosophy was considered the science of all sciences, i.e. reason governs the understanding. But now, when philosophy has become a science amongst other sciences, it has lost its privileged position, i.e. reason has lost to understanding. It is here that philosophy lost its essential function of connecting to human needs of meaning, freedom and all the other valuable values.

The Editor

Heidegger's Failure

Heidegger, like Hegel before him, has a strong historicist tendency to see his own philosophy as the culmination of all Western philosophy before him. In my essay 'Heidegger and the Problem of Metaphysics' I considered critically 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' (1966) and referred also to his inaugural lecture 'What is Metaphysics' (1929). These are short pieces. My task here is to criticize the lengthy consideration of metaphysics in the lectures *Introduction to Metaphysics* given in 1935 in the Hitler period and published in 1953 in the post-war period. My page references will be to the translation by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt and published by Yale in 2000.

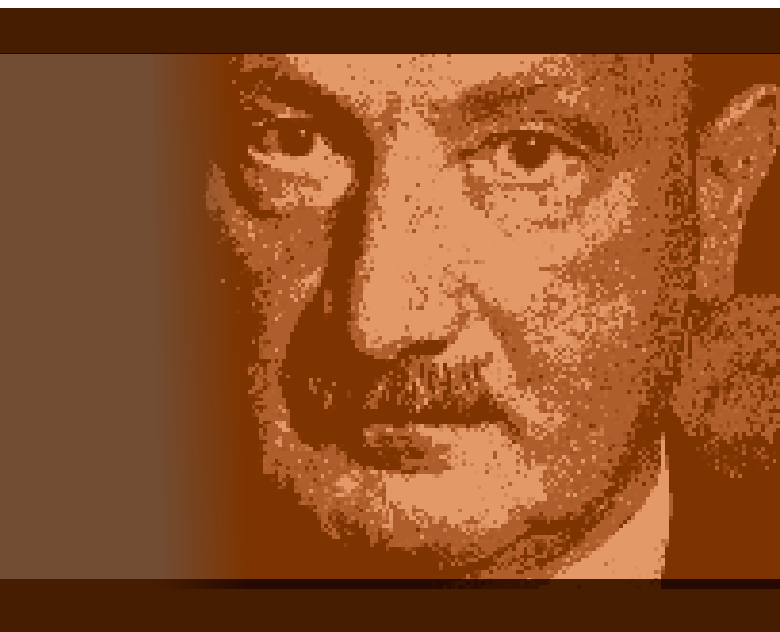
EDWARD GREENWOOD

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Heidegger was a duplicitous character. As his translators tell us in their introduction, the passage containing criticism of Nazism (and very inadequate and badly put criticism it was) was not already in his draft (though undelivered) in the Nazi period, as he claimed, but added in the post-war period. In the work, Heidegger claims that 'philosophy necessarily remains untimely' (p.9). This is patently not true of his own. In this matter he is the complete antithesis to his nemesis Nietzsche on whom he wrote a thousand pages. From the second 'Untimely Meditation' on history to the end of his life Nietzsche always thought against the grain of his own times. Heidegger, on the contrary, always trimmed his sails to the prevalent winds of the *Zeitgeist*. When a philosophically influential translator of his work into French Jean Beaufret championed him in the (for both) tricky post-war period he suddenly started to speak respectfully of Sartre whose *Being and Nothingness* he had hitherto dismissed as 'Dreck' ('rubbish'). But Heidegger's political duplicity is not my concern here. In this essay I want to bring out the total inadequacy of *Introduction to Metaphysics* as regards the problem with which it purports to be dealing.

Heidegger is essentially an inflationary thinker. A bit of post-Wittgenstein deflation is called for. Bede Rundle writes in the Preface to his book *Why there is Something rather than Nothing* (Oxford, 2004) 'A distinctive feature of philosophical questions

lies in the way they transform under scrutiny, giving way, as the nature of the issue becomes clearer, to a series of sub-questions not obviously related to the original query.' In an Oxford philosopher the issue does become clearer. In the case of a German post-Idealist such as Heidegger it becomes murkier. The analysis of concepts is replaced by a forced and dubious exegesis of texts.

Heidegger too claims that a philosophical question unfolds, though some might claim he replaces unfolding by a further folding and tying of knots. He formulates his question in the opening sentence 'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?', the very same question he had posed in the 1929 lecture. He sees the question not as arising from natural science, but from a poetic way of thinking. He acknowledges that Nietzsche in *The Twilight of the Idols* had attacked the exaltation of 'Being' and seen the term as 'just the name for a huge error!' But he then simply brushes Nietzsche aside as a sort of victim of long-standing misapprehension without really answering him. Walter Kaufmann endorsed Nietzsche's view which I too think is the correct one. Heidegger does not quote the following passage from the opening of the section entitled "'Reason" in Philosophy' which, so to speak, condemns his whole enterprise in advance. Nietzsche writes of philosophers: 'So they all believe, desperately even, in being. But since they can't get hold of it, they look for reasons why it is kept from them.' Heidegger's long and vain dealings with the notion of the concealment of



‘Being’ in a nutshell.

Heidegger then launches into a sort of philosophical geography in which the Germans are seen as ‘the metaphysical people’ (one of the things about them Nietzsche could not stand) as opposed to ‘the technological frenzy of America or Russia’ as though Germany had not been a country of technological innovation, overtaking Britain in technological industries by 1900, and, notoriously, the first nation to use poison gas in the Great War. He tells us that the term ‘ontology’ (not of course the activity) came into existence in the seventeenth century, but only served to obfuscate the problem of ‘Being’. He himself does not want to discuss ontology in the way that Kant did, but instead ‘to restore the historical Dasein of human beings’ (p.44). This involves regarding philosophy not as supra-historical, but rather from a historical standpoint (p.45). Present day Germany has forgotten the true greatness of German Idealist philosophy and no longer understands the world of *Geist* (pp.48-49). Spirit has dwindled into a sort of cultural industry.

The second chapter brings us to one of Heidegger’s favourite resources, a philosophical, as opposed to a philological, concern with grammar, and in particular in the second part of the chapter with etymology. He asks us to get away from a consideration of the infinitive form ‘to be’, (Greek ‘einai’) and move to the conjugation ‘I am, you are, he is.’ (p.73). He sees his time as not the time

of the ‘I’ but of the ‘We’. The etymological section concerns itself at considerable length with the Indo-European roots of the word ‘Being’ (p.74). There is a certain smack of modish Aryanism here. The relevance of all this to the fundamental question of metaphysics (the question is restated on p.77) remains unclear.

The third chapter raises the question of ‘the essence of Being’. More linguistic history which, as Heidegger’s acknowledges, does not make explanation clearer, but only more obscure (p.80). The fact that the meaning of the word ‘Being’ remains ‘an indeterminate vapor’ does not mean that we do not understand it (pp.85-86), but that understanding is not just a fact about us like the fact that we have earlobes. Once again, the word ‘Being’ must be taken as a point of departure (p.89). The search for ‘Being’ is a voyage on which Heidegger is forever embarking, but never arriving. He then gives us the familiar distinction between the ‘is’ which posits existence as in ‘God is’, the equivalent to ‘God exists’, and the ‘is’ of predication. The fourth chapter brings us to Parmenides’ poem on the subject of Being and moves on to a not unwarranted excursus on what Heidegger sees as the Christian misuse of Greek philosophy in the *Gospel of St John*’s appropriation of the term *Logos* and elsewhere. Heidegger defends his method of ‘violent’ interpretation of texts. Heidegger, as we have seen, emphasizes the poetic element in the thinking of Heraclitus and Parmenides (p.154). It is both a relief and delight when he quotes at length the great ode about humanity from Sophocles’ *Antigone* (lines 332-375). There is certainly something ‘deinon’ (‘uncanny’) about human beings. The impressiveness of the Sophocles, however, only serves to bring out a certain tawdriness in Heidegger’s surrounding prose. It feels as though Heidegger is leaning on this great poetry, hoping that something of its impressive power will somehow leach into him. It doesn’t.

Heidegger deprecates the current value philosophy (axiology). On p.224 he also attacks Nietzsche’s central concern with value claiming that it led to his never reaching ‘the genuine centre of philosophy’. This is an achievement Heidegger clearly wishes to claim for himself. A reading of *Introduction to Metaphysics* should convince us that the claim is an empty one.

Bridge to a Parallel Reality

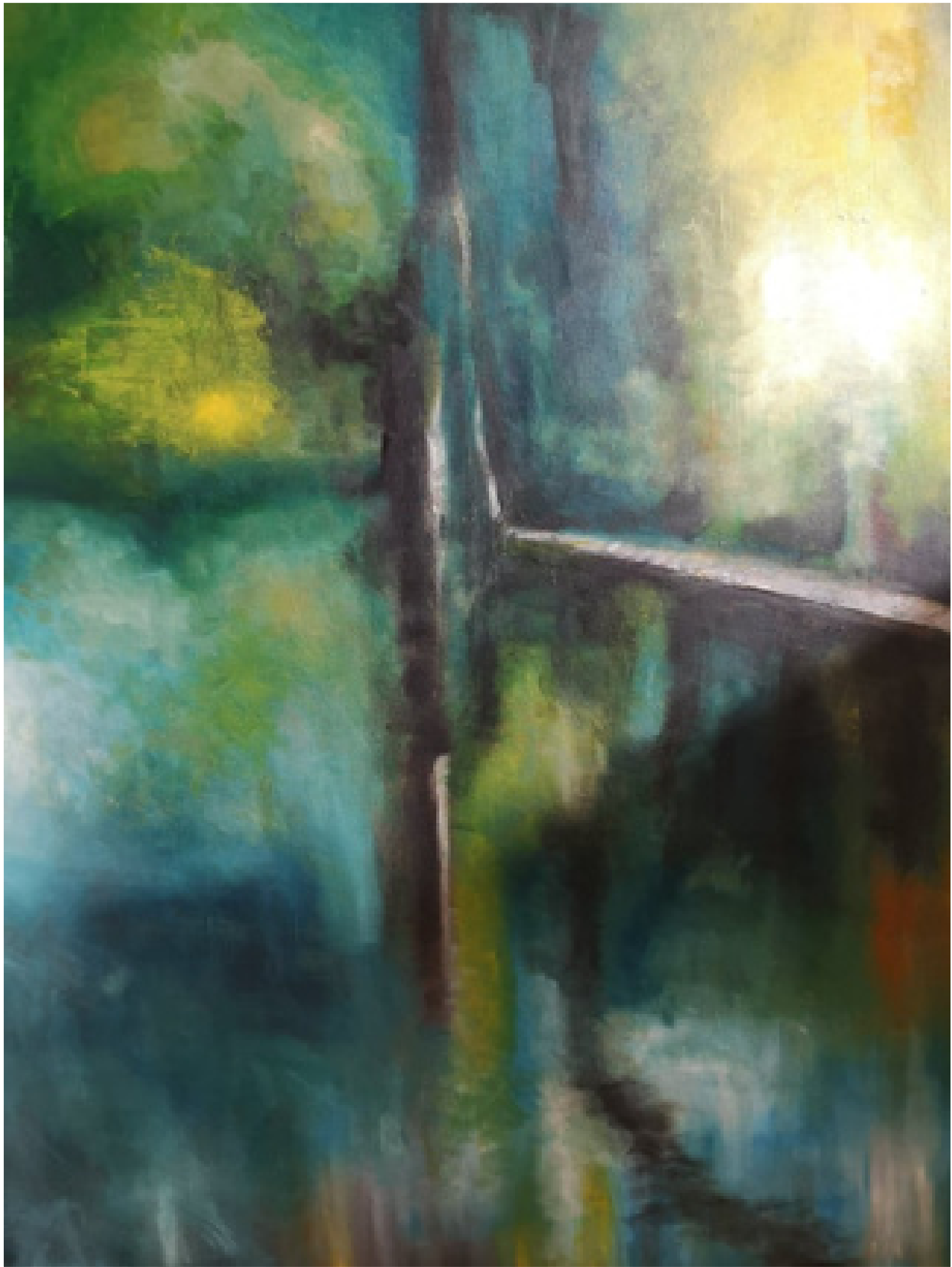
Creative writing has long borrowed the notion of ‘another world’ from myth, legend and religion. Heaven, Hell, Olympus, and Valhalla are all ‘alternative universes’ different from the familiar four-dimensional reality we all live in (if we’re not living in a simulation that is). Plato reflected deeply on the parallel realities, resulting in Platonism, in which the higher reality is perfect while the lower earthly reality is an imperfect shadow of the heavenly.

The concept is also found in ancient Hindu mythology, in texts such as the Puranas, which expressed an infinite number of universes, each with its own gods. Similarly, in Persian literature, ‘The Adventures of Bulukiya’, a tale in the One Thousand and One Nights, describes the protagonist Bulukiya learning of alternative (many) worlds

that are similar to but still distinct from his own.

Bridging to another reality tries to visualise this concept and evokes a transition from our reality to another. It is unclear whether the destination reality is actually another parallel universe or simply another dimension within the same space-time. The centre part of the painting appears to suggest an aperture of sorts – a threshold linking one reality to the other. The fusion of colours, some bright and others dark, is the artist’s impression of what would be experienced by the human eye at the crossing. We might never know for certain whether there are other parallel realities or not; what is sure is that thinking about such possibilities may help us to learn more about the reality we experience every day.

Artwork and contemplation by Dr. Alan Xuereb



‘Bridge to a Parallel Reality’.
(80x100 cms, oil on canvas, Tawern, Germany, 2019)

Adorno - A Confusion



CHRIS NORRIS

In my childhood, some elderly English ladies with whom my parents kept up relations often gave me books as presents: richly illustrated books for the young. All were in the language of the donors: whether I could read it none of them paused to reflect. The peculiar inaccessibility of the books . . . filled me with the belief that in general objects of this kind were not books at all, but advertisements, perhaps for machines like those my uncle produced in his London factory.

The archaic, passionate nouns of the original [Brahms song] have been turned into catchwords for a hit song, designed to boost it. Illuminated in the neon light switched on by these words, culture displays its character as advertising.

Theodor Adorno, 'English Spoken', in *Minima Moralia*.

Those English aunts have much to answer for.
They gave me wondrous picture-books to read.
The pictures met my every boyish need.
Surely the texts had kindred gifts in store?

Not proper aunts, but ladies guaranteed,
My parents thought, to help the boy explore
Those topics recommended all the more
By text and image deftly inter-keyed.

One point the aunts elected to ignore
Or simply, being English, failed to heed,
Was that my speaking German might impede
My figuring out the image-text *rapport*.

It left me, decades later, up to speed
With English, yet still seeing nothing more
Than ad-man tricks or senseless signs galore
When faced with any illustrated screed.

* * * * *

Adorno

The doubt remained, the book-contagion spread.
O why those garish pictures, words opaque,
Mute titles flagged up clear in nights awake,
All pleading yet refusing to be read?

My English uncle's factory would take
Out whole-page ads to keep the readers fed
With pictographs that kept his firm ahead
And them supplied with things he used to make.

That old delirium, one I've scarcely shed,
Had me soon thinking all the content fake
In books and pictures, done for profit's sake
Or market-share, whatever Uncle said.

It's not the sort of feeling you can shake
Off once it's got to you, that sense of dread
When first you light upon, then lose some thread
Of sense that tells you: this is make-or-break.

* * * * *

Now I'm an exile, here in Disneyland-
Writ-large, Los Angeles, and the US
Strikes me as ad-man's paradise, no less
Than Uncle's mag-shots for the family brand.

Brahms

It's cheap tunes for cheap sentiments ('God bless
America'), myths fake or second-hand,
Along with twists on Custer's doomed Last Stand,
Plus daily updates peddled in the press.

Just listen to that song of Brahms, now bland
As some love-crooner's ditty as they mess
With Heyse's words and turn to mawkishness
Those lines that once made hopes and hearts expand.



Mozart

On every front our intellects regress,
Mine as the words grow dark when closely scanned,
Theirs through consumer-habits planned or canned
Till all but we dark-dwellers acquiesce.

* * * * *

See how that lyric piece acquires the sheen
Of Broadway lights, the glitzy neon glow
That says: 'here's what you arty types now owe
To advertising and the silver screen!

Just drop the art-talk, let the aura go,
Bathe neon-lit, enjoy the culture-scene,
Make stimulus-response your fixed routine,
And don't have old Adorno spoil the show'.

It's like the ads for Uncle's new machine –
Sound product, no doubt, though the streamline flow
Of imagery says smoothly: 'Got the dough?
Then we'll keep operations squeaky-clean'.

That's why I'd look at books and hardly know,
At times, what all the hieroglyphs might mean,
Or whether all those pictures in between
Meant *ad*, not *book*, best fitted each tableau.

* * * * *

Maybe the culture-industry's now played
A final, killer trick; outsmarted me,
Its arch-decipherer, with the master-key
That sets my reading skills to entry-grade.



Schubert

Perhaps – more welcome thought – it's helped to free
For me what each Parisian arcade
Showed Benjamin: how, as old fashions fade,
They leave a breathing-space for reverie.

It's there my English aunts and uncle made
Their deepest mark: by bringing me to see
Each text as an oneiric spelling-bee,
An interzone of sense-for-image trade.

Yet always it's the culture-industry
That's there already, some old hit-parade
Motif that haunts the Mozart serenade,
That overlays Brahms' lyric melody,

Puts Schubert *Lieder* firmly in the shade,
Demands the poets bend a votive knee
To Tin Pan Alley, and – the powers decree –
Count Europe's culture-debt far underpaid.

The 'Green George' Patron Saint of Springtime

*The Raising
of Glicarius'
Oxen. 14th
century wall
painting,
Struga,
Macedonia*



The emergence of the cult of St George in the Hauran region of modern Syria and Jordan in the 4th century almost certainly involved the convergence of a devotion to a Christian martyr with a much earlier 'pagan' cult connected with the fertility of crops and herds at springtime. Certainly, the feast day of St George on 23rd April has long been recognised as having significance as a spring festival and that the name George has agricultural roots; the two Greek elements of the name, *geo* (earth) and *ergos* (work) mean that George was seen as an earth worker or farmer.

ADRIAN RANCE-MCGREGOR

A 4th century treatise on agriculture known as the *Nabatean Agriculture* describes the story of a Mesopotamian god called Tammuz associated with fertility and vegetation and who was killed several times by a king. It is possible that there is a convergence between Tammuz and St George and that the repeated deaths of St George in his martyrdom is a retelling of the story in a Christian context. Several themes such as that of St George being crushed under a great stone and being ground to dust in a brazen ox and being given a magic potion are mirrored in the annual lamentations of the death of Tammuz. The springtime commemoration of St George on 23rd April, the connection with the story of Tammuz and the agricultural nature of the miracles of St George, and indeed the name itself, all point to the possibility that the emergence of the cult St George was influenced by earlier fertility rites and traditions - see Burrows, E (1939), 'The Name of St George and Agriculture', *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 40, No 160, pp. 360-365. The late 4th century *Pilgrimage of St Silvia of Aquitania to the Holy Places* describes the feast day of a St Elpidius as being held at the saint's tomb at Cherrae, near the present-day border between Turkey and Syria. The feast was held on 23rd April and was clearly a very significant feast as it was attended by monks from all over the region. Elpidius never appears in the lists of martyrs known as martyrologies and it has been suggested that the commemoration of St Elpidius, which could have been connected with a harvest festival held in the region on 23rd Nisan (April) may have been replaced by a commemoration of St George.

The first written accounts of St George in the apocryphal 'Passion' or 'Acts' of St George connect the saint both with the resurrection of Christ and the annual emergence of new life in springtime. The saint himself dies and comes back to life three times and he miraculously brings new life to plants and animals. There is the episode in which St George strikes a dead ox with a stick and brings it back to life and there are the episodes in which he miraculously transforms the wooden post of the poor woman's house into the living tree from which it had originally been made, and in which he makes the wooden legs of the chairs, upon which his tormentors sit, sprout and give forth fruit according to the tree from which they had been made.



19th century engraving of the blessing of cattle on St George's Day in Russia.

There are two strands in the later development of the St George story which point to possible origins in pre-Christian fertility cults. The first is the conflation of St George with the Muslim saint, Al-Khidr which has been explored in an earlier article published in *The Wednesday*. The second is the well-documented veneration of St George as a patron saint of new crops and livestock and the arrival of spring in the Slavic countries of Eastern Europe, Russia and the Baltic states.

The anthropologist, James Frazer recorded how the Slavic people of Carinthia (now part of Austria) celebrated St George's Day with the 'Green George'. On 23rd April a tree felled the previous day was decorated with flowers and then

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taken in a procession led by a 'Green George', a young man covered in green birch branches. The procession goes to a nearby lake or river where the Green George is thrown into the water: if he is to escape a ducking, the agile young man has to quickly substitute himself for a dummy that is thrown into the water in his place. In this way rain will come to water the spring crops. In other places cattle are decorated with a crown and driven into the fields with the chant:

*Green George we bring,
Green George we accompany,
May he feed our herds well,
If not to the water with him.*

The Festival of Green George has been celebrated in Transylvania and Romania as the principal spring festival either on 23rd April or on Easter Monday. On the eve of the festival a young willow tree is cut down and decorated with flowers and set in the ground. Pregnant women will place an item of clothing under the tree and leave it there all night. If in the morning a leaf of the tree has fallen onto the garment then they know that they will have safe delivery. On the morning of the festival a Green George, a young man covered head to toe in green leaves, ritually feeds the cattle to signify that they will have sufficient feed during the year and then he takes three iron nails which have lain for three days and nights in water and knocks them into the wood of the tree before taking them out and throwing them into the water to propitiate the water spirits.

In Russia the springtime role of St George is remembered in proverbs such as *There is no spring without George* and *with his key George makes the grass grow*. In Siberia the availability of fish with the thawing of the winter ice is remembered in the proverb *St George comes with his fish basket*. The folk traditions of Estonia include a belief that the earth is poisonous until the spring growth of vegetation has started. This is remembered in proverbs such as *Before St George's Day one must not sit on the ground as the earth has not been able to breathe yet and so it may cause diseases*. Walking barefoot on the cold winter ground was thought to cause skin disease and a tradition existed that the dew would be harmful on St George's Day and could cause horned cattle to lose weight, cows to lose milk and for calves to lose their eyesight.

The way to avoid these disasters was to flog the cattle with catkins when they are let out to graze of St George's Day. If one wanted to achieve a fair and beautiful skin, it was recommended to clean the face with snow or birch sap on or before St George's Day.

The widespread depiction of St George as a mounted warrior saint led to his adoption as the patron saint of horses. A folklore tradition recorded in Estonia tells of a belief that '...one would not go out with a horse on St George's Day: this was to the memory of his once fighting a winged snake – something like a devil. Jūri had been on horseback and won a victory, so it's something like a horses' holiday'. The Setu people in Estonia have the tradition of bringing horses into the church for a ceremonial blessing on St George's Day:

On St George's Day the horses were taken to the church and unharnessed. There were horses from every village. They were gathered on an open place. There the priest burnt incense and blessed them. There was a pail with water and a whisk in it, with that whisk he threw water at the horses and said, "St George keep the horses from misfortune". An icon with St George was also in his hand. Then the people said, "Now the horses are blessed." Everyone had his herd-children also along at church. The herd-children stood all near the priest. Then the priest blessed so that St George would let everybody live in peace, people as well as the animals.

St George's Day is also connected with workers transferring their employment from one farm to another. One proverb is *George will bind, Michael will unbind it, George's Day will bring an after-meal nap, a sheaf of rye will take it away*. Bonfires would be lit on St George's Day so that the new farm workers could get to know each other. In another tradition the sowing of oats had to take place before St George's Day. In Russia there is a proverb: *When George comes the plough will go to the field*. And in Finland, *George will take the plough to the field*.

On 23rd April cattle and horses were blessed in ceremonies marking their being turned out to pasture, although in Northern Russia and Siberia



Al-Khidr, a Persian manuscript, 16th Century

the animals would be blessed on St George's Day but as snow was still on the ground the animals would not be put out to pasture until St Nicholas' Day. Rain on St George's Day was a good sign. *If there's water on George there'll be green on Nicholas.* A typical ritual on St George's Day would be to gather the cattle, to circle them three times with an icon of St George and to feed them a special bread baked on Holy Thursday. This might take place at a special chapel dedicated to St George. The herdsman would be offered gifts of bread and salt and money which he would then offer to St George.

St George is also known as the ruler of wolves and he was known to instruct his wolves not to kill domestic animals after St Georges Day. Amongst both German and Slavic people this belief led to the identification of St George as a forest spirit who would guard the cattle. As patron saint of wild animals it was common in parts of Russia to light candles before an icon of St George on 23rd April to protect the herds from wolves, and if, by chance a wolf did eat an animal then it was presumed that it happened by permission of the saint. Hence a Russian saying *If a wolf has something in his teeth – George gave it.*

The saint also had power over snakes and one story is told of a shepherd who sold a poor woman's sheep and claimed it had been eaten by a snake, St George punished him by sending a snake to bite him but after the man had repented the saint cured the wrongdoer. Estonian folklore about St George contains many stories about the magical power of snakes to bring good fortune in everything from protecting cattle to curing toothache and many other ailments and protecting one from misfortune such as ending up with an angry master. A stick

that had been used to kill a snake would, if placed under the eaves of a house, protect it from fire. The belief that if the snake was killed before St George's Day the magic would be more powerful is recalled in a proverb *Before St George's Day the snake is stronger medicine than after.* Charms with an image of St George killing the dragon known as George's thaler, were believed to bring luck. In some parts of Estonia St George's Day on 23rd April was a day in which women in farming villages would dress up and buy brandy and sweets and, once the ritual sprinkling of the animals with holy water had been completed, would go through the village singing and dancing and getting drunk.

In Russia there are two feast days for St George; a spring feast day on the 23rd April which, as we have seen, marked the start of the agricultural year and an autumn holiday on November 26th known as 'Yuriev's Dien'. This was a day on which peasants were free to leave an employer and move to another area and so it was a day for settling accounts, and hence a day associated with freedom. However, in the year 1597 the day of freedom was changed into a day of bondage. At that time Boris Godunov was acting as regent for his brother-in-law Tsar Feodor, son of Ivan the Terrible. In an attempt to gain support from lesser nobles, who were always complaining of a shortage of peasant workers, he decreed that any peasant working on privately owned land on St. George's Day, November 26, would become a serf, the legal property of his master. So legal enslavement was introduced, and persisted for nearly 300 years, until the 'Tsar Liberator' Alexander II abolished serfdom in 1863. The sad and inevitable consequence of Godunov's iniquitous decree was that Yuriev's Dien lost its connotation of freedom and became an expression for enslavement. The bitter feelings

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of resentment and deprivation thus engendered became crystallised in proverbs to describe disappointment such as *There's a Yuriev's Dyen for you* or *So much for Yuri's Day*. The Russian word обьегорить meaning to deceive or fool someone, literally means to Egor around, with Egor being a variant of the name George.

An unusual remnant of what might have been a widespread folk tradition associating St George with livestock survived into the 19th century at the Monastery of Ilori, near Mingrelia in north-western Georgia. The earliest account dates from 1672 when a French traveller, Jean Chardin, made a detailed record of the miraculous appearance each year on the eve of St George's day of an ox which presented itself at the church of St George at Ilori. On the feast day a young man specially selected for the task sacrificed the ox with a hatchet and the meat was then shared in ritual portions and given to the local leaders and landlords and to the local people who ate their share with a reverence normally reserved for the bread of the Eucharist. The movements made by the ox during the sacrifice and the examination of its droppings were carefully examined as auguries foretelling the fortune of those taking part. Local people believed that St George had stolen the ox so that it could make its way to the church and offer itself as a sacrifice.

The Belgian historian of religion, Frank Cumont links the Ilori St George tradition with the ancient Iranian cult of Mithra in which Mithra is known as the 'bull thief', but recent research makes an intriguing connection with the cult of Roman Mithraism in which the central ritual is the *tauroctony*, the ritual slaying of a bull by Mithras. Mithraism emerged in the Roman Empire as a secret mystery religion popular with the army and officials of the Empire and was roughly contemporaneous with early Christianity. The origins of the religion are obscure, but it almost certainly drew on elements of the much older Iranian cult of Mithra. One suggestion is that it grew out of the discovery by the Greek astronomer Hipparchus of the effect now known as the 'axial



Mithras killing the bull

precession' or the 'precession of the equinoxes' arising from the 'wobble' of the earth's rotation, the effect of which is to alter the position of the sun at the spring equinox in relation to the constellations. Hipparchus discovered that the spring equinox sun was formerly in the constellation of the bull Taurus and had moved to the constellation Aries by about 2000 BCE. This discovery suggested an apparent disturbance of the order of the cosmos which could only have been caused by a great god; a figure who was to emerge as Mithras who re-enacted the event with the ritual killing of the bull, which was then shared in a great feast.

The ritual sacrifice of the bull at Ilori raises the intriguing possibility that the association of St George with the ox is a Christian counter narrative to the Mithraic sacrifice of the bull. Firstly one can see a springtime association between the two narratives: St George is widely seen as bringing the death of winter and the new life of spring, and the killing of the bull by Mithras may be connected with the passage of the sun out of the constellation of Taurus at the spring equinox. The counter narrative can then be seen in the manner of the feast following the death of the bull. The Mithraic ritual feast was held in secret and offered only to the initiates whereas the Christian feast at Ilori is eucharistic; the meat is offered to all with a reverence normally reserved for the bread and wine of the mass. The counter narrative is perhaps

most clearly expressed in the Passion of St George when the saint brings an ox back to life. An event commemorated in the wall painting of St George's raising of the oxen at the church in Struga, Macedonia. St George bringing the ox back to life is also incorporated into the sequence of scenes on a Georgian metalwork cross from Gori-Dzhvari and the ox is also found beneath an equestrian St George on a Georgian metal icon from Eldati.

The resurrection of the ox is one of the miracles of St George accounts of which date to the 5th century. The story recounts that in the days of Theodosius there was in Cappadocia a peasant called Theopistos who went to work in his fields but during his afternoon nap his oxen disappeared. He looked for them for over a week and eventually prayed to St George and promised to offer one of his oxen to the saint if he would arrange for their safe return. The saint appeared to Theopistos in a dream and showed him where the animals were safely feeding. The farmer then reneged on his promise and offered to sacrifice a kid instead of the ox he had promised. St George again appeared in a dream to demand his sacrifice and the farmer offered a kid and, in addition, a goat. The saint appeared in a third dream and told the farmer that he now had to offer all his livestock to make up for his dishonesty and that if he failed again he would kill all the animals and burn down his house. The frightened farmer immediately sacrificed all his oxen, his goats, his pigs and his sheep and prepared a great feast to which all were invited. As the people gathered around the table St George appeared on his white horse bearing a cross in front of him, miraculously multiplied the loaves of bread, made the wine abound and, before he galloped off he gathered up all the bones of the slaughtered animals which he then brought back to life. Theopistos and his wife and family then lived happily ever after.

Many contemporary books and articles on St George refer to the saint being a patron of farmers, but it is better to describe him as the patron of spring and the start of the agricultural year. The survival of remnants of his role as the 'green man', both in folk memory and in religious practices in parts of the Middle East, marks him out as the saint who kills the dragon of winter and brings vernal new life to crops and herds.

- *A long version of this article will appear in a forthcoming book on St. George. References were removed for a lack of space.*

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