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The Wednesday

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Editorial

Rules of Engagement

A philosophical dialogue involves many points of view. Some of these can be totally opposed to each other. To have a fruitful discussion, one needs some rules that hold a normative force and are well known to the participants explicitly or tacitly. We have mentioned once in these pages the principle of charity but more on this subject came to my attention on this subject over the last month or so. For example, what happens when a speculative philosopher enters into conversation with an empiricist? The dialogue does not get started or moves in parallel lines without proper engagement.

There is an interesting case in Simon Critchley's book *A very Short Introduction to Continental Philosophy* where the views of Carnap and Heidegger on metaphysics come into conflict. Carnap of course denies metaphysics completely and Heidegger thinks the question of Being is fundamental. The dispute centred on 'the scientific conception of the world, advanced by Carnap and the Vienna Circle, and the existential or hermeneutic experience of the world in Heidegger.' Heidegger in one of his early lectures, 'What is Metaphysics?' defended metaphysics, and the question of being, saying that they cannot be reduced to scientific enquiry. The Vienna Circle maintained the opposite view, and called for 'science free from metaphysics'. Carnap, in his paper 'Overcoming Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language' denied that metaphysical statements are logically or empirically verifiable. Carnap left the engagement with Heidegger at that, while Heidegger kept his engagement with science and technology, while always giving priority to the question of being. But a continuation of the debate between metaphysics and 'scientific' philosophy within a conception of a plurality of views could have benefited philosophy more than the split that followed between Continental and Analytical philosophy.

The two diverging views in this case have come to be labelled Continental and Analytical philosophy. Many philosophers question such labels, especially when one considers the variety of approaches and questions which are included in the term 'Continental philosophy'. Critchley says that it is 'a projection of the Anglo-American academy onto a Continental Europe that would not recognise the legitimacy of such an appellation.' Another British philosopher told Baggini and Stangroom 'the analytical movement, as it was conceiving its own identity, in part conceived itself through its difference to this other. Continental philosophy came to take the place of all that is to be avoided if you were to be doing proper philosophy.' (*New British Philosophy: The Interviews*, P206).

But why is this the case? It is more fruitful to have a proper engagement with a different style and approach to philosophising. Sometimes you need a shift in your paradigm or the way you look at things and the world. You may need to go to the basics of the view expressed and check what follows for consistency. You may need to see how the starting point could be construed that may not look as strange as when it is first proposed. The question here is similar to how we understand other cultures. It is not by keeping to our conception of ourselves and our culture that we try to analyse other cultures but by trying to situate ourselves into that culture, which is distant in time or place or both, and trying to see how it makes sense or not.

An older solution to this lack of engagement is to say that there is a need to change the standpoint of philosophising from the empirical to the philosophical and from the understanding to reason. But this is a major task that requires a change of attitude and a fresh look at recent philosophy.

The Editor

Kant and the Absolute

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781 / 1787), Kant aimed to set out to limit the realm of pure reason in what it could achieve for knowledge of self and the world. Our knowledge contains a priori principles which precede our sensible intuitions, but which are nevertheless bound up with them. These form an essential element in the generation of our understanding. But he made it important to distinguish what can be known from what cannot be known.

DAVID SOLOMON

According to Kant, we cannot know things in themselves, only their appearances as they manifest themselves to us in space and time, which are the forms of our sensible intuition. Our knowledge of objects is none other than the product of concepts, which are categories of understanding (such as substance, accident, magnitude, cause etc.), applied to these intuitions. In effect objects for us consist of our experience of the appearances of things as they affect us as they are then organised by the rules of understanding which order and frame them. These objects are never the things themselves. Apart from the process of applying categories of understanding to possible sensible experience, there can be no understanding and no knowledge. According to this division, knowledge is nothing more than the exercise of understanding generated in this way. Beyond the sphere of appearances and therefore of understanding are the 'things in themselves' about which by definition we cannot know because we have no direct experience of them or access to them. We can only surmise that these things in themselves are the basis of their appearances. If pure reason, that is logic unconnected with any sensible intuitions, tries to go beyond what can be confirmed in possible experience it will go wrong.

Our use of the categories of understanding which are required for the cognition of objects out of sensible intuitions of appearances, nevertheless produce in us a demand and desire to go further and make claims about the totality of appearances. One of the categories of understanding for example is that of causation. A condition of our cognising objects out of appearances is that we experience them as being caused by something else. We will trace these causes as conditioned by other causes and so on in a chain of causality. Our reasoning demands that either this chain is completed by a

Schelling

Fichte

cause that is itself unconditioned or else there is a continuous circle of cause and effect which in its own totality is complete. This is the idea of an Absolute Totality which is the requirement of reason for completeness of a series of appearances. Similarly, a requirement of reason would be to trace the universe to either a definite point in time as its moment of origin or singular event, or to assert that the universe is eternal, having no beginning. Reason seems also the demand to seek out other absolutes in the boundary of the universe in space or else its complete boundlessness.

> *The first thing to be noted here is that the idea of an absolute totality concerns nothing other than the exposition of appearances, hence it does not concern the understanding's pure concept of a whole of things in general. Thus appearances are considered here as given, and reason demands the absolute completeness of the conditions of their possibility, insofar as these conditions constitute a series, hence an absolutely (i.e., in all respects) complete synthesis, through which appearance could be expounded in accordance with laws of the understanding.* **(Critique of Pure Reason, A416/ B443)**

And:

> *Second, it is properly only the unconditioned that reason seeks in this synthesis of conditions, which proceeds serially, and indeed regressively, hence as it were the completeness in the series of premises that together presuppose no further premise. Now this* ***unconditioned*** *is always contained* ***in the absolute totality of the series*** *if one represents it in imagination. Yet this absolutely complete synthesis is once again only an idea; for with appearances one cannot know, at least not beforehand, whether such a synthesis is even possible.* **(Ibid., A417/ B444)**

We can represent this totality in our imagination and abstract reason. But Kant is wary of admitting that this desire for completion can ever be satisfied. If our knowledge is only based on our sensible intuition, our attempt to grasp an unconditioned totality based on abstract logic will result in errors and contradictions. These he calls antinomies, and the danger of producing opposite conclusions through logical means confront us with the

pitfalls of pure reason. They mark the boundaries and limits of reason itself, and its tendency to contradict itself.

> *Now one can think of this unconditioned either as subsisting merely in the whole series, in which thus every member without exception is conditioned, and only their whole is absolutely unconditioned, or else the absolutely unconditioned is only a part of the series, to which the remaining members of the series are subordinated but that itself stands under no other condition. In the first case the series is given a parte priori without bounds (without a beginning), i.e., it is given as infinite and at the same time whole, but the regress in it is never complete and can be called only potentialiter infinite. In the second case there is a first [member] in the series, which in regard to past time is called the* ***beginning of the world****, in regard to space and* ***boundary of the world,*** *in regard to the parts of a whole given in its bounds the* ***simple****, in regard to causes absolute* ***self-activity*** *(freedom), in regard to the existence of alterable things absolute* ***natural necessity****.* **(Ibid, A418/ B446)**

And:

> *The absolute whole of the series of conditions for a given conditioned is always unconditioned, because outside it there are no more conditions regarding which it could be conditioned. But the absolute whole of such a series is only an idea, or rather a problematic concept, whose possibility has to be investigated, particularly in reference to the way in which the unconditioned may be contained* in it as the properly transcendental idea that is at issue. **(Ibid, A417/ B445 &A418)**

Through his division of Reason and Understanding, Kant cuts down what is available for knowledge. He made the solutions to certain questions inaccessible to reason or at least problematic. Our reasoning raises expectations that cannot be fulfilled. We cannot understand what the nature of freedom is (only that is important to guide us in enacting the moral law), or answer questions definitively about the existence of God or the origin of the universe, or the purpose of nature, but we need maintain the concept of these as ideals.

Kant placed a boundary between the world of appearance (the Phenomenon) and the world of pure reason, the things in themselves, the things that we can have no knowledge of (the Noumenon). The latter category contains the concept of freedom of the will, of the Self as substance which can also by implication be regarded as our immortal soul; of the universe as beginning in time or else as existing for all eternity; of the universe as being bounded in space or else as being boundless; or the existence of God; or the function and end of nature as a whole. Any reasoning about these, that departs from experience, will result in errors and contradictions and mark the inevitable tendency to error that is inherent in reason itself. For example, Kant rejected Descartes method of establishing the existence of the Self by means of reflection on doubt, his 'I think therefore I am' (Cogito ergo Sum). He accepts that our sense of ourselves as a continuous 'I' accompanies every intuition of things in the world (which he calls Apperception), and is necessary for cognition of objects of objects to take place. But from this it does not follow that the Self is established as an object, about which particular properties such as unity, simplicity and immortality can be established.

> *The identity of person is therefore inevitably to be encountered in my own consciousness. But if* ***I*** *consider myself from the standpoint of another (as an object of his outer intuition), then it is this external observer who originally considers* ***me*** *as* ***in time****; for in apperception* ***time*** *is properly represented only* ***in me****. Thus from the I that accompanies - and indeed with complete identity - all representations at every time in* ***my*** *consciousness, although he admits this I, he will still not infer the objective persistence of my Self. For just as the time in which the observer posits me is not the time that is encountered in my sensibility but that which is encountered in his own, so the identity that is necessarily combined with my consciousness is not therefore combined with his consciousness, i.e., with the outer intuition of my subject.* **(Ibid., A363)**

It is only from the standpoint of another that I am an object, because I am an object of his / her empirical intuition. But his / her intuition of me (his outer intuition of my subject) cannot be the


Critik
der
reinen Vernunft
von
Immanuel Kant
Professor in Königsberg.
Riga,
verlegts Johann Friedrich Hartknoch
1781.

First edition of the *Critique*

same as my own intuition of my Self. Similarly arguments that try to establish the existence of God or the existence of free will, will inevitably fail. But while these cannot be part of knowledge, such concepts are necessary as ideals that we hold before us for the sake of our actions. Acting ethically requires the idea of freedom even though we cannot have any knowledge of what freedom is. Our life in the world and our increasing knowledge of it requires the idea of Nature as a system of ends to make sense of it. This making sense Kant calls a regulative principle.

Kant's concept of cognition as understanding requires that this is only possible through sensible intuition. He briefly entertains the notion of 'intellectual intuition', the intuition of the I as an object of our own subjective activity of thinking, but he then rejects this as being insufficient for the establishing of an object.

> *Further investigation, however, going back behind the origin of these attributes that I ascribe to Myself as a thinking being in general, can discover this error. They are nothing more than pure categories, through which I never think a determinate object, but rather only the unity of representations in order to determine their object. Without an intuition to ground it, the category alone cannot yield any concept of an object; for only through intuition is an object given, which is then thought in accordance with the category*. **(Ibid, A398 – A399)**

Kant's division between the Phenomenal and the Noumenal world, with its distinction of appearance and reality, between what is known and what could only be thought to exist in an indeterminate way, between subject and object, between theoretical knowledge and practical action, and between what constituted knowledge and what only provided a regulative guideline: all this was unsatisfactory to his German idealist successors. In different ways they tried to construct a unified system that bridged these divides and everything that was implied by it. Johann Gottlieb Fichte tried to develop Kant's half admission of the possibility of the intellectual intuition of the I, so as to create one principle that included the chain of causes and effects in nature and the freedom of human action to affect the world. For him, the 'I' positing itself by its own activity was an absolute point of origin, and he attempted to work from this to base both the theoretical knowledge of the objective world as well as the freedom expressed through practical activity. The Absolute developed by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling was that which identified Subject and Object, subjective idealism and science, with each other. His one-time collaborator Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel developed a sense of the Absolute that consisted of evolution and process, the inclusion of successive stages of consciousness and partial realisations in a journey towards what he called Spirit. In a future article, I will trace these different post-Kantian descriptions of the Absolute.

In Memory Of

Barbara Ann Greenwood

1933-2019

I think of all the life that's there outside
As through the curtains comes the whitening dawn,
And down the window pane the raindrops glide
As showers green the lawn.

Two nights ago you slept here by my side,
Breathing with labour, but, waking, a bright mind.
Only a day has passed now since you died,
And bonds still strongly bind.

Alone in bed, I call up all the past,
All the vicissitudes of life we shared,
But every life in death must end at last,
So yours could not be spared.

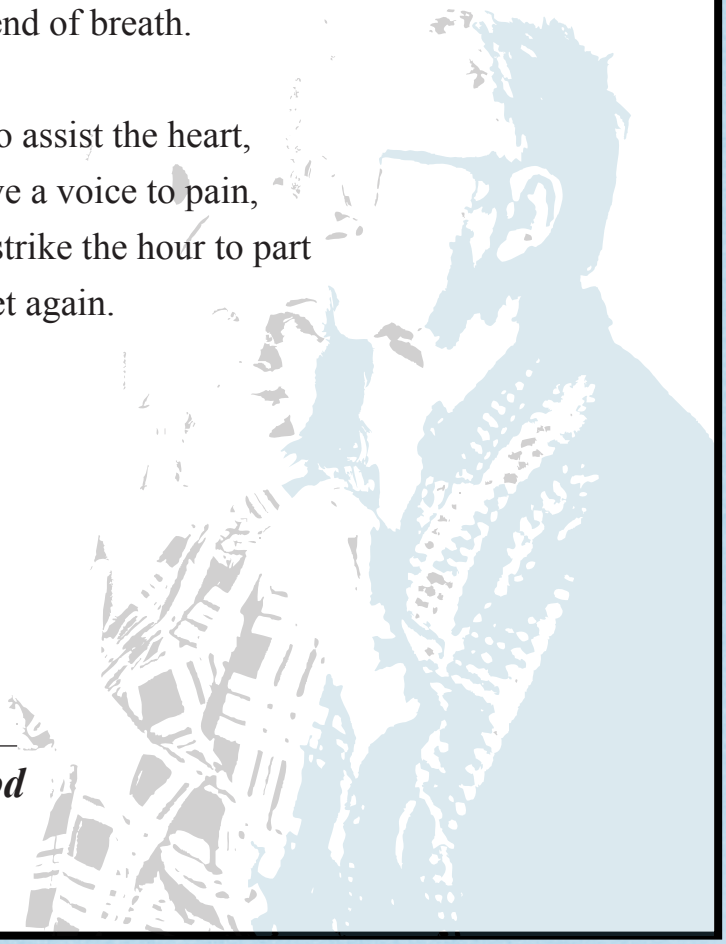
They came to carry your remains away,
With all the reverence we owe the dead,
For husband and for son a bitter day
And more such days ahead.

As life must end, so must a piece of verse,
Although I would prolong it if I could
In the called for endeavour to rehearse
All that you did of good.

But thankfully so many of your friends
Join here to mourn the treasure they have lost,
We know we all must bear what nature sends,
Thought heavy is the cost.

Poets are vain, let me put pen aside,
Sit and think silently on life, on death,
But speech is stubborn and won't be denied,
Breath mourns the end of breath.

And reason too comes to assist the heart,
And thinks it right to give a voice to pain,
When those who love hear strike the hour to part
And never meet again.



Edward Greenwood

Hegel on Truth, Morality and Being

Hegel's philosophy is very challenging to its reader and requires a precise understanding of his terms and method. The article below explains some of his essential concepts and views. More articles on Hegel will be published in the next few weeks.

JEANNE WARREN

I grew up in a scientific culture and age and am, by nature or nurture or both, desirous of verifying my beliefs through experience ('experimentally') whenever possible. When this is not possible, I hold beliefs provisionally or declare an agnostic position. When I learned about Kant, I was content to adopt his position, that we can never KNOW that we know, because our minds may not be in tune with the nature of 'the thing in itself' and thus may never convey it to us. This is OK; the point is to do the best we can in acquiring knowledge and not to pretend to a perfection which we cannot attain.

Hegel is a thinker whom I have found it hard to get to grips with. He has many very interesting ideas about human culture, but I couldn't find a way into his thought, a way of determining how reliable a witness to the human condition he might be. One problem is that he desires certainty and declares that he has a method of achieving it. What this method is and how credible it may be is the subject I wish to address here.

Because Hegel's work is so large and so difficult, I have had to rely on Stephen Houlgate's *An Introduction to Hegel* (2nd edition) for a basic foundation. Hegel is sceptical of the scepticism he inherited from the philosophical tradition which preceded him, particularly Descartes and Kant. Why, he says, should we assume the sceptics' starting point, that reality is over against our minds? Instead, why not allow the possibility that our minds, being part of reality, are able to convey reality to us accurately? Even that way of putting it may posit too great a distance between thinking and 'being', in Hegel's system, where one is found to be the other.

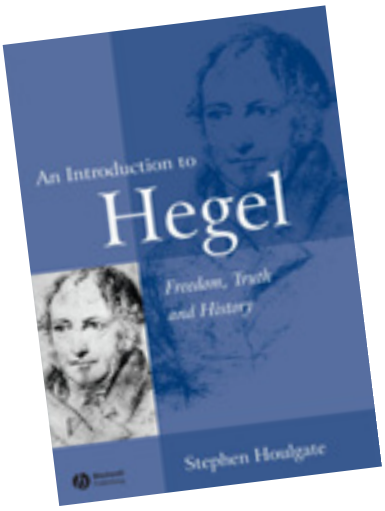
My problem with Hegel is his next move. In the guise of questioning the position of his predecessors, he rejects it! He takes the position that in order not to make unwarranted assumptions, we must accept that thinking can lead us unerringly to being. It is 'natural consciousness' that will continue to want to draw a distinction between itself and the objects it knows. In the 'Preface' to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel says:

> *'When natural consciousness entrusts itself straightway to Science [Hegelian philosophy], it makes an attempt, induced by it knows not what, to walk on its head too, just this once; the compulsion to assume this unwonted posture and to go about in it is a violence it is expected to do to itself, all unprepared and seemingly without necessity. Let Science be in its own self what it may, relatively to immediate self-consciousness it presents itself in an inverted posture.'* (p.15, Miller translation used by Houlgate)

For comparison and to illustrate the great variation in translation of Hegel's work, here is the same thing in the much older Baillie translation which I have:

Hegel

Houlgate



'For the naïve consciousness, to give itself up completely and straight away to science is to make an attempt, induced by some unknown influence, all at once to walk on its head. The compulsion to take up this attitude and move about in this position, is a constraining force it is urged to fall in with, without ever being prepared for it and with no apparent necessity for doing so. Let science be per se what it likes, in its relation to naïve immediate self-conscious life it presents the appearance of being a reversal of the latter.' (p. x)

Hegel appears to think that by examining his own thinking process carefully and by abandoning all presuppositions he is justifying his rejection of the possibility (embraced as obvious by natural consciousness) that being may not be discernible by or identical with philosophical thinking.

Hegel describes how his own mind works beginning from a propositionless starting point. It uncovers the 'dialectic', the way that being is and then is not, and results in becoming. This, he says, leads to knowledge which is certain. There are many stages to this process. It ends with 'philosophical science' or 'absolute knowing'. Later in the 'Preface' he says:

'What Spirit prepares for itself in [the Phenomenology of Spirit], is the element of [true] knowing. In this element the moments of Spirit now spread themselves out in that form of simplicity which knows its object as its own self. They no longer fall apart into the antithesis of being and knowing, but remain in the simple oneness of knowing; they are the True in the form of the True, and their difference is only the difference of content. Their movement, which organises itself in this element into a whole, is Logic or speculative philosophy.' (pp.21-11, Miller translation)

Or in the Baillie translation:

'What mind prepares for itself in the course of its phenomenology is the element of true knowledge. In this element the moments of mind are now set out in the form of thought pure and simple, which knows its object to be itself. They no longer involve the opposition between being and knowing; they remain within the undivided simplicity of the knowing function; they are the truth in the form of truth, and their diversity is merely diversity of the content of truth. The process by which they are developed into an organically connected whole is Logic or Speculative Philosophy.' (p. xii)

Hegel introduces the 'We' and various other checks into a system which could otherwise easily collapse into solipsism. I cannot claim to have digested Hegel's whole *Phenomenology*. I hope that I have not been unfair as far as I have gone.

What is even more alarming than Hegel's approach to truth is his similar approach to morality. It starts from the position that what we are convinced is a moral act *is* a moral act. Though it moves on, I cannot feel comfortable with the starting point. I feel that Hegel has a conception of 'consciousness' or 'self-consciousness' or 'thinking' which is somehow divorced from any actual conscious being or thinker. Yet in reality it necessarily must be embodied to exist at all. This is a problem.

It so happens that in the *Guardian* newspaper for 18th October, 2019 the columnist Gary Younge ends his piece about the current US presidency with a reference to Hegel:

> '"The great man of the age,' wrote Friedrich Hegel – using 'great' to mean powerful – 'is the one who can put into words the will of his age, tell his age what its will is, and accomplish it. What he does is the heart and essence of his age; he actualises his age.'"


System
der
Wissenschaft
von
Ge. Wilh. Fr. Hegel
Erster Theil,
die
Phänomenologie des Geistes.
Bamberg und Würzburg,
bey Joseph Anton Goebhardt,
1807.

First edition of the Phenomenology

Hegel on Being

The words 'Being', 'Nothing' and 'Becoming' recur regularly in continental philosophy (e.g. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*), and I have always had trouble understanding why they are so significant. I now understand that they go back at least to Hegel, and perhaps their relationship with each other in the continental tradition comes specifically from him. So, what did the words mean in his system? This is my imperfect understanding of it.

Just as Descartes began by saying that the one thing I cannot doubt is that I am thinking, Hegel begins by saying that the most basic, earliest thought I could possibly think is of undifferentiated being. In concrete terms, I am 'here', 'now', looking at 'this', but as soon as I think about it, 'now' is already gone, and soon I may turn around and 'this' will also be gone, and if I move then 'here' is gone too. So, we have to retreat a step, to the idea of something being here, now, but which will soon not be. 'Being' becomes 'not being' or 'nothing'. But 'nothing' doesn't last either but 'becomes' something else. Thought, says Hegel, progresses in this way, of a constant shift between being which negates itself and the negation. But being and its negation are 'taken up' into what they together become. This (and not 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis') is Hegel's 'dialectic' and is his description of thinking, or at least of thinking in a philosophical way. Another example is that 'finite' is 'not infinite', and 'infinite' is 'unbounded, not finite'. Negation is necessarily involved in the description of anything. The one cannot exist without the other. Their combination is needed, and the process of combining them constantly continues and constitutes our thinking. If the above is correct, then 'being' is almost a place-holder for 'what is thought about', because for Hegel, thinking and being are so intimately linked that it is possible for thought to think 'being' truthfully. We know what is 'being' because we can know it in thought, IF we have learned to think dialectically.

Feelings

Bobbing feelings
unrestrained
but time-stunted
driftwood of the mind,
smoothed by repetition
wave upon wave,
weathered, stormed,
splintered, smothered
beached.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Poetry and Thought: a verse-dialogue (after Adorno)

CHRIS **NORRIS**

It is part of the technique of writing to be able to discard ideas, even fertile ones, if the construction demands it.

If a dialectician . . . marked the turning-point of his advancing ideas by starting with a 'But' at each caesura, the literary scheme would give the lie to the unschematic intention of his thought.

The prudence that restrains us from venturing too far ahead in a sentence is usually only an agent of social control, and hence of stupefaction.

Where thought has opened up one cell of reality, it should, without violence by the subject, penetrate the next. It proves its relationship to the object as soon as other objects crystallize around it.

T.W. Adorno, 'Memento', in *Minima Moralia*.

Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause,
Shun hypotaxis, keep the word-count low?
It's truth strikes back and gives the thinker pause.

Let sentences unfold to mend the flaws
In your first thought of how the thing should go:
Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause?

You yield to social pressure, not the laws
Of valid thought, when you break off mid-flow:
It's truth strikes back and gives the thinker pause.

All honour to complexity that draws
A bead on truth like a thought-tightened bow:
Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause?

The further thinking ventures out, the more's
Your chance of phrasing it exactly so:
It's truth strikes back and gives the thinker pause.

How not exaggerate as thought explores
New aspects custom deems scarce apropos?
Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause?

They fight in anti-stupefaction's cause,
Those restless thoughts with second thoughts in tow.
It's truth strikes back and gives the thinker pause.

Else you'll revert to those time-honoured saws
That, with more time for thought, you'd soon outgrow.
Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause?

****

Let go the easy reader's quick applause
For texts that save them thinking hard or slow.
It's truth strikes back and gives the thinker pause;
Why let mere prudence have you strike that clause?

Adorno

It runs on different lines, thought versified.
Run-ons too frequent blunt the edge of thought.
Let prosody take thinking well in stride.

One thought each end-stopped line: too cut-and-dried!
Yet it's line-endings keep the thinking taut.
It runs on different lines, thought versified.

Too much *enjambment* gives an easy ride.
You cross the bar but can't put in to port.
Let prosody take thinking well in stride.

Line-breaks, like margins, may be justified.
Main lesson: keep things snappy, keep them short.
It runs on different lines, thought versified.

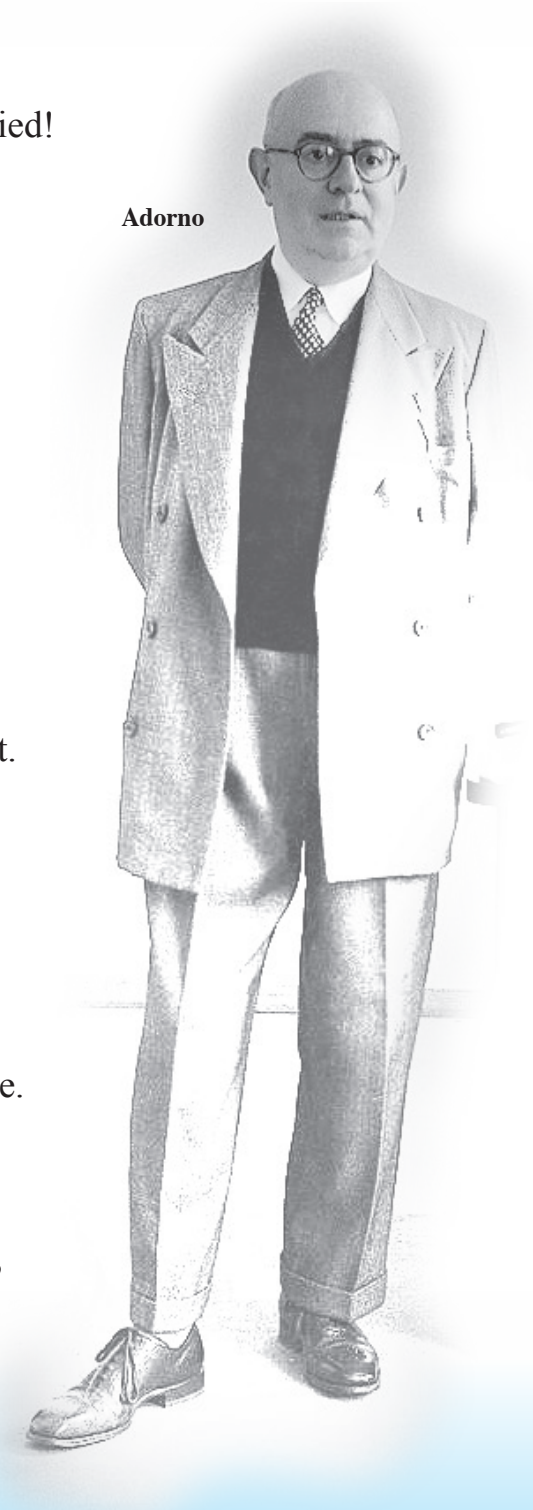
See how it sparks across the line-divide!
Thought-voltage builds in sentences close-wrought.
Let prosody take thinking well in stride.

Thought's charge declines with clauses multiplied.
One more, and the voltmeter drops to naught.
It runs on different lines, thought versified.

You say: thought's bounds are thought's to override.
I say: watch out, your quest may self-abort!
Let prosody take thinking well in stride.

What if each clause yields one more place to hide?
Then dialectic's prize is dearly bought.
It runs on different lines, thought versified.

Still dialectics may be kept onside
By lines that link as tightly as they ought,
While prosody takes thinking well in stride
And runs on different lines, thought versified.



Adorno

Art and Language

Notes on the Wednesday Meetings Held on 20th of November 2019

RAHIM HASSAN

There was a conference last year on the interaction between art and language at Ryerson University in Toronto. We felt that the questions raised in the conference worth commenting on. We made it the topic of our Wednesday meeting. Some of the questions considered:

- Can philosophical questions of art be reduced to questions about language?
- Does art or philosophy have a privileged relationship to the nature of things?
- Can all experiences be expressed in words? Or is there an ineffability to some experience?
- What is the language of cinema and how might it be understood?

Art and language are ways of engaging with the world. Russell, at first, thought that words were about things. They have their content from outside. Wittgenstein in his early work thought that propositions picture (mirror) the world and in his later work denied that a language could be a private one. It is social. The work of art involves all these concepts but goes beyond. It brings its content with it. Sometimes this concept is otherworldly or abstract.

Wittgenstein thought that language has a limit. This limit is the Kantian restriction on knowledge to the realm of possible experience. But, unlike the positivists of Vienna, he thought that there is a realm beyond. Where the language does not dare to venture to express in a propositional form, what is beyond can only be shown. I take it that the latter is the task of art. In the mystical tradition this became the realm (medium) of poetry.

St. Thomas Aquinas thought that language is earthly (worldly) and can only be used in an analogical way in metaphysical thinking. But we may add that 'analogy' is the stuff of art and poetry.

The Wednesday

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