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The Wednesday



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Editorial

The Hero Revisited

The Romantic age of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was occupied with the ideas of heroes and geniuses. Philosophy had its share of both. However, both ideas have been eclipsed since the midtwentieth century and what looked like more supernatural abilities were reduced to mere technical capabilities that can be measured with new psychological techniques such as IQ.

In his novel *Hyperion*, Holderlin took up the topic of heroism. He directed his attention to the Greek nation and its struggle for independence. But after long travels and actions, he saw that the task of the philosopher and poet is in looking for a harmony between man and nature. The voice of the poet and philosopher rises above that of the political agitator.

Hegel thought that history is the unfolding of reason and freedom through individuals and nations. The hero may promote this by incarnating the spirit of his time. Napoleon was for him the hero who was heralding a new age and building new and more rational institutions of state across Europe.

From a literary point of view, Carlyle's book *On Heroes and Hero-worshipping and the Heroic in History* is a pioneer book. Carlyle's discussion of Napoleon comes at the very end of the book. He thought Napoleon was self-deluded: he had a penchant for facts at the beginning but lost it at the end. In his lectures Carlyle called him the Last Great Man, for embodying the last form of heroism. He may have ended the heroic age. What came after was labelled by Nietzsche 'the Last Man' – the man of modernity.

Nietzsche criticised Carlyle for making Napoleon moral and religious. Also, he thought Carlyle did not understand the nature of heroism. There is a moral and religious difference between Carlyle and Nietzsche. What one valued the other rejected. But Nietzsche thought that the 'hero' is not his 'Overman'. Sidney Hook in his book *The Hero in History* made a distinction between the 'eventful man' and the 'event-making man'. This may be a refinement of Carlyle's heroes. But all this still doesn't capture the idea of the Overman. The Overman is the very idea of man as a species for the higher achievement of humanity and the meaning of our existence.

Nietzsche's analysis in *Twilight of the Idols* is very interesting and impressive. Nietzsche rejected all theories that were presented in his time to explain heroism, especially Comte and Carlyle. Nietzsche thought that the hero is the Genius. He is an 'explosion' after a long wait, a latent energy that needs to show up. He is the old against the immature young. He is 'dynamite' and has a destiny.

Schopenhauer thought that the hero is someone who identifies with humanity. This has been updated by Marxism to a class as the subject of history. The French Annales school of history in France also rejected the individual hero and opted for a class.

These conceptions of the hero as an individual of genius or a class came under fire from Sidney Hook who rejected the Marxist ideological hero as a member of a class, and the fascist and Nazi heroes. They were countered by the democratic way of life and the little heroism of the every-day.

The technical feature of the modern age may have banished romantic ideas but the big changes in our global world and shifting politics may regenerate them again. Is this good or bad? This is a question that philosophy has to face. Heroism, in the traditional and historical sense, is linked to nationalism and irrationalism. Despite globalization, there is an increasing trend towards both and this may have serious consequences.

Philosophy

The Big Picture: Hegel's Dialectical Method

Hegel's motto is 'What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational.' This does not mean all that exists is rational; rather Hegel means reason enables us to make sense of the world. Reason is the logic of reality.

ADRIAN SHEPLEY

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In order to better understand Hegel, his work *The Science of Logic* and the dialectical method I would like to take you on a whistle stop tour of philosophy. Arguably, philosophy began with Thales around 585 BC. By using reason and mathematics Thales correctly predicted an eclipse. This was important for humankind because it showed the ability to understand the world using reason independently of divine revelation and mediating priests.

Heraclitus was a mystic from about 500BC. He noted that in our experience everything seems to change. Heraclitus is famous for saying that when we step into the river we never step into



Heraclitus



Descartes

the same waters twice. Since water flows and a river's course changes, in what sense is it the same river? The world is in perpetual change.

Parmenides around 450BC thought that Heraclitus was talking nonsense. Reason shows that the world is fundamentally a unity in stasis. This is because Parmenides began to formalise reason with the laws of binary logic. Parmenides used the principle of identity so that what is, is and it cannot be that it is not. This is known as the law of non-contradiction. We cannot have P and not P. We also have the law of the excluded middle such that either P or not P. Lastly, there are two truth values; things are either true or false. Since for Parmenides if something is and it cannot be what it is not, his logic implies nothing can ever change.

But let me bring in Socrates. The Socratic turn occurs when Socrates applied philosophy to the human condition. Socrates is famous for asking: What is the good life? How should we live? What is truth, justice or beauty? Arguably the '*What Is*?' question is the birth of metaphysics, although this is usually credited to Aristotle. Platoborn428BC coined the term 'philosophy'. Plato, a pupil of Socrates, is remarkable for synthesizing the history of philosophy into a coherent whole. Plato notices the Egyptians use a (3,4,5) right angled triangle to set out a field system. But the Greek philosopher Pythagoras comes along and says the rightangled triangle is of the form $(a^2 + b^2 = c^2)$. So now the (3, 4, 5) triangle is an instance of the universal form $(a^2 + b^2 = c^2)$, but the universal form does not in fact exist, rather it is seen by the intellect. In fact, numbers themselves do not physically exist; rather they can describe a world that is only seen by the mind. So, we have the world of experience, which flows before our very eyes, and a realm of forms or concepts, eternal truths seen only by the intellect.

From Plato and Aristotle onwards there developed two major schools of thought. One school is the empiricists, who locates truth in the world of experience, and whose followers believe the mind is a mirror which correctly represents the world, and so makes knowledge possible. However, that the world is known in this way is usually through the verification principle. But the verification principle is a metaphysical assumption and beyond verification. This is a problem for empiricists.

By contrast the rationalists argued for truths known by reason, independent of sensory experience. These are the truths of mathematics, logic and metaphysics. They are true because they are internally consistent. However, this depends on the metaphysical position that reason reveals truth. This is a problem for rationalists. As Quine pointed it out, if we make a prediction that planet A appears at position X at time t, if the prediction is correct, all is well. However, if it is false then all theories and background assumptions, such as the propositions of maths and the laws of logic are in question. So, there is a pragmatic position that says in fact all knowledge is empirical, it's either verified or falsified.

We come now to Kant (1724-1804). Kant mirrors Plato, in that Kant's categories are like Plato's forms. He suggested that knowledge independent of experience is *a priori* knowledge. This knowledge includes the truths of maths and logic. But Knowledge which is dependent on experience is *a posteriori*.

For Kant, it is possible to logically derive a priori categories, or concepts, such as space, time and causation which then organise our perceptions. Without the a priori categories perception would be a booming buzzing confusion. So the a priori categories or forms are necessary truths which structure experience. Kant is called a transcendental idealist because the transcendental, a priori categories are the preconditions for experience. But Kant is also an empirical realist in that the world is a causal foundation of experience.

The problem with Kant is that he divides the world into two aspects: phenomenal or the world as we experience it; and a noumenal world, the world beyond experience, but which is also inferred as the foundation of experience. The noumenal aspect is what he calls the 'in-itself'.

The problem is that we can access our perceptions, but we cannot step out of our perceptions and compare our perceptions with the noumenal world, the world in-itself. So if we see a tree that has a brown trunk and green leaves, to check this we would have to compare the way the tree appears to the way it is. But since the only way to find out is to look at it, in fact all we are doing is comparing the way it looks with the way it looks. Obviously it is going to look the same both times. As Wittgenstein pointed out, it is as if we buy a newspaper and find a spelling mistake on page three. Annoved, we buy another copy of the paper only to find it still has the same mistake. So, the problem Kant leaves us with is we cannot check whether the phenomenal world, our perceptions, accurately track reality.

And so to Hegel and the Science of Logic with its dialectical method. Hegel thinks Kant is unsatisfactory. For Hegel, the world is revealed by the subject engaging with the world. We know the world through call and response, through question and answers, through dialectical method. For Kant the subject structures experience. For Hegel the rational structures of the mind correspond to rational structures of the world. Hence, 'what is rational is actual,' means what is rational will exist; and 'what is actual is rational' means when we understand the world through the dialectical method, what is reasonable should in fact be the case. Hegel is an Absolute Idealist in the sense that when we arrive at the end of reasoning, we will also arrive at the end of knowledge.

Philosophy As Conceptual Engineering

So, to be clear about Hegel's project and dialectical method, I will mention a few ideas. Hegel is not a social scientist. He is not looking at social facts and their necessary or contingent



Phenomenology of Spirit

relations. Neither is Hegel a historian, looking at events and constructing a historical narrative through time. Hegel is a philosopher. For Hegel, philosophy is conceptual construction or conceptual engineering; this is philosophy as rational inquiry into concepts and their necessary implications. For Hegel, we begin with a foundational concept and explore the logical implications, and follow where the concepts and logic take us. If there is a method that we can attribute to Hegel, it is that there is an immanent teleology which unfolds to reveal how the world is. It is as if the foundational concept is an acorn, the acorn contains all the essential instructions it needs to be an oak, but is also dependent on contingent factors such as soil nutrition and weather, sunshine and rain, i.e. the world. So, Hegel renders explicit what is implicit in the concept. For Hegel the concept will reveal the world, and we arrive at the truth when the world fits the concept.

Now I want to give you a taste of the Hegelian method. Hegel's dialectical method is often said to be based on Fichte's idea of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, or an argument for, an argument against and a resolution. However, the Hegelian dialectical method is really grounded in immanent teleology, which is slightly different. What is important in Hegel's method is that the concept determines the thought, in this sense Hegel is closer to Spinoza. The method is simply the logical development of the concept. Like Spinoza the immanent teleology will reveal the nature of this world. However, the dialectical method is important because it moves philosophy away from a static conception of logic and the forms, categories, or concepts, towards a process philosophy of movement, development and growth.

The Dialectical Method

I will now demonstrate Hegel's dialectical method through metaphysics and explore the move from 'being to the infinite and back again.' The dialectical method will derive the concepts and necessary relations of thought, so revealing the necessary structures of reality, the world.

To begin, Hegel argues for a pre-suppositionless philosophy. This is possible because we are existentially free beings able to stand back and reflect, independent of determination and context. For Hegel existential freedom is necessary for inquiry. From a position of freedom we work with what is presented. In this sense Hegel is an Enlightenment thinker.

Gadamer objects to Hegel by arguing that the medium of thought is language, so language is presupposed in thought. The Hegelian response is that language does not determine the concepts of thought or its logical derivations. Language is simply an enabling condition, it merely enables us to think.

So back to Hegel and the *Science of Logic*, where do we begin? We begin with what presents itself, what is before us. This is because: (1) the *Phenomenology* makes 'being' the starting point.; (2) from a reflective position of existential freedom, Hegel avoids determinate assumptions; (3) Hegel

Philosophy

does not want to beg the question, to accept assumptions; and (4) the very nature of being posits itself as the starting point.

So, for Descartes, we begin with the Cogito, 'I think, therefore I am.' For Hegel, the Cogito says too much. All we can say is there is thinking and so there is being. Pure immediate being. A pure thought is a pure being. Being must be indeterminate because if it is determined, it is mediated. But what is this pure being? If pure being is indeterminate, nothing can be said of it. There is nothing to distinguish it and logically it vanishes into nothing. However, pure being is not pure nothing, so there is a logical flicker between being and nothing. Since pure nothing has immediacy or being of its own, it is something and hence logically vanishes into being. To put this another way: Think of nothing. To think of nothing is something. So, there is a flicker in thought between nothing and something. This flicker generates the movement into becoming, where the restless vanishing of being and nothing merge into one another. As the flicker stabilises into becoming, the becoming unifies itself into 'Dasein', being there. Being becomes affirmation and its negation is nonbeing. The relationship between being and non-being is what makes being determinate, being something, as the affirmation of reality. In other words, being must be finite, through affirmation of what is, against its negation, what is not. This sets up the creative tension between being and nothing and so now we have our first metaphysics; being is becoming. It is important to note this is a logical process and not a matter of physics.

include any conception of the finite within it, so transcends limitation. The finite becomes an expression of the infinite, instead of its opposite, and the infinite is being that does not end. This unity is true infinity.

In the last section of the Science of Logic, Hegel asks what is being for one and how does it generate a plurality, the existence of the many? So far we have being vanishing to nothing, generating becoming which stabilises into being there or dasein, a stable oneness, the unity of being and nothing. This sets up the dialectic of dasein. On one side there is being and affirmation of what is, and on the other side, there is nonbeing, the quality of negation which generates the determinate being. So in Dasein there is a unity, the affirmation of reality, and the negation, generating determinacy. Thus, Hegel has derived the idea of the necessity of the determinate being, Dasein, being there.

Back to infinity, true infinity is a unity of the finite into the infinite, it is a quality of being; it is the moment, *the finite* within the logical process of becoming *the infinite*. Being for itself is being in its unity, and is therefore infinite. But we know this is a unity between what is and what is not. The famous *dialectical* process is generated by affirmation - what is and negation - what is not. Therefore, the being for itself contains within it its negation, determinacy, or moment. The moment within the infinite is called the being for one.

Terminology

Here are some useful technical terms:

1. Being in itself is the potential to be. Remember actuality requires negation for determination.

2. Being within itself means the being of something.

3. And being for itself is the infinite being within which is the being for one, the moment within the infinite.

The one and the many

Hegel then develops an interesting account of the tension between the finite and the infinite. If we define the infinite as not finite, we have given it boundaries and so it becomes limited. This conception of the infinite Hegel calls the bad infinite. The good or true infinite must



4. Being for one is the determined being within the infinite.

The being for one, on its own within the infinite but including the infinite is called 'the one', this is because there is no other limiting being. So 'the one' is the infinite within which is the determinate being for one. It is 'the one' because there is nothing else. The one is simply self-relation, because there is nothing else. It is exclusive being and void.

The argument for the many runs: 'the one' as affirmation of being sets itself beyond the void. Thus paradoxically, it becomes other than 'the one'. Just as affirmation is limited by negation, negation is limited by affirmation. So, when the void negates itself, nothing must become something. The void as nothing becomes other than the one, yet to be the void it must contain within it its own negation, but negation of negation is affirmation, becoming something, another. The logic then repeats itself and so many are created from 'the one'.

The Relevance Of Hegel

In conclusion, Hegel's contribution to philosophy is huge: First, Hegel is a proto process philosopher, grounded not by facts or events and their narratives, but concepts and their logical relations.

Second, philosophy becomes conceptual analysis and engineering. Concepts contain within themselves logical necessity and this drives the process and structure of thought and reality.

Third, Hegel develops an immanent teleology; Hegel's philosophy makes explicit what is implicit within the concept. This is Hegel's dialectical method.

I have presented Hegel's metaphysics in the *Science of Logic*. Working with what presents, Hegel, like Descartes' Cogito, begins with thinking as being and asks what is being? The dialectical method is the exploration of the concept and its logical relations. Through affirmation and negation, we have travelled from being and nothing to becoming, through Dasein to being for self, the one, the void and plurality. For those interested in Hegel, Hegel's work includes the *Philosophy of Right* where he examines the concept of freedom; and *Phenomenology of Spirit* or Geist, where he examines the concept of mind and explores how we become self-aware.

Poetry

In Stockholm

It was a quiet city-scape that I first saw. Perfect pavements allowing steady stepping. No stumbles to worry me or broken stones to graze me. Perhaps that is why crowds, young and old, jog. A great heave of fitness in this smiling populace.

Hey delivered with every brief eye contact. Then everyone slipped home to civilised flats. Thousands of them - lamps shining out of windows; spots of warmth glowing in stone.

No kerbside begging to be seen, just men with sacks, picking and receiving empty bottles and cans *Pand*-pledge secures a warm meal and a bed. Humanitarian collections in clean streets.



Olof Palme

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Hundreds of years of buildings. Historical moments fashioned into walls, even a gold covered-king, looking like a dug-up pharaoh, but perfectly walled in.

Of course history has screamed through these streets, killing kings and scorching heretics. Like everywhere else, poor people were done to death.

But social democrats won quietly through. Justice and fairness became the norm – why not? Who needs a revolution to recycle oppression?

At one moment I stopped and looked down at the pavement plaque a memorial to the murdered Olof Palme. Evil lurks, even when there is hope on the horizon.

David Burridge



Follow Up

Political Anthropology: Structuralism, Tribalism and Discourses

Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 27th of November 2019

PAUL COCKBURN

A lex Gath gave a talk about the fields of political philosophy and political anthropology. He thinks these are important, vigorous domains within their respective, wider disciplines. With Britain moving towards a General Election in December it seems a good time to look at these areas.

His talk covered three main areas: Structuralism, Tribalism and Discourses. These are all favourite themes within philosophical and political anthropology. Alex thought they need not be too technical and can be seen to be relevant to contemporary discussions.

It can be argued that structuralism started with Saussure and his philosophy of language in terms of the 'structures' of meaning, grammar and signification. Structuralism was then extended to myth (Levi-Strauss), fashion and literature (e.g. Barthes), as well as to sociology. In terms of auditory perception, the phonemes 'ma' and 'pa' were distinguished early on in human history as referring to the mother and father respectively. In terms of politics and colour, it is interesting how political parties adopt particular colours. In Britain currently, the Conservatives are blue, Labour are red and the Liberal Democrats are orange/ yellow. Originally the Conservatives were orange! In Kerala, where Alex lived for many years, the Communists adopted red, and the Hindus yellow.

The colours we see cover a wide spectrum, but structuralism as proposed in Levi-Strauss's study of myths is binary, although this structure covers many distinct binary features. His book *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) was the first of four books Levi-Strauss wrote on mythologies, analysing myths in terms of various binary oppositions. But what are the key binaries? In politics there is a left/

right split, and this is divisive. Perhaps we should move away from this 'them and us' psychological picture to the opposite direction of pluralism. Alex worked in Kerala in South India and it is interesting that in Kerala there were many parties, but at election times they collected together under the umbrella of what could be called either 'left' parties or 'right' parties. Thus, the Communists on the left were represented by two parties, one influenced by Russian Marxism, the other Chinese Marxism.

In simple terms the voting system that was bequeathed by the British Empire to its former colonies was 'First past the post'. This has subsequently been adapted in many countries e.g. New Zealand which has adopted a proportional representation voting system.

How do you design a fair and good Parliamentary



Alex Gath

system? Is a Presidential system better? With these questions unanswered we moved on to tribalism, which reinforces the binary system we have considered above. In India the caste system can be considered to be tribal. What social groups do we belong to? In Britain's recent history, it seems that attending Eton school and belonging to the Bullingdon Club at Oxford University is perhaps a tribal background that has given us two recent Conservative Prime Ministers, David Cameron and Boris Johnson. There is the possibility of the break-up of the United Kingdom, as Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland all oppose Brexit.

As the recent world-wide protests on climate change have shown, tribalism does not seem to be appropriate to the global environmental challenge that we – the whole of humanity – face.

We moved on to discuss discourse. How do we debate political questions, and where do we get

our information from in order to make political judgements in terms of who to vote for? With the growth of the internet and social media, information is disseminated on-line, and could come from a source such as a foreign power which cannot be trusted. What is the point of a manifesto which shows the plans that a political party has for the country, and seeks our approval? Can we trust them to carry out the steps they propose? Discourse seems to be trivialised now, perhaps he or she who shouts loudest wins.

We also now seem to have a much lower attention span, and are unable to unravel problems which seem more complex than those in the past. After structuralism in philosophy there came poststructuralism, and a concern with who wields power on behalf of whom (e.g. Foucault). The current structures of power benefit those in power, and the poor and the marginalized are not represented or treated fairly.

Flags, National Semiotics and Political Parties DAVID CLOUGH

In Alex Gath's talk we heard how Claude Levi Strauss in particular described the world in rigid binary opposite terms at the height of the structuralist phase. After that a period of critique, difference and trying to include minorities more positively had taken hold. But in Levi Strauss instead of worrying about mental imaginative issues of 'right and left brain', here it was our limbs. It was practice rather than imagination. On our right hand is one category and on our left hand is its opposite. In reality, the combination of religious and tribal matters in India makes its politics pretty complex. There are many small groups or factions with particular loyalties and symbolic attachments.

To overcome this Alex wanted not a middle way or compromise, but the idea of accepting micro pluralism in politics based on his own studies of relatively little known Marxist dominated states in South India. Although the Congress party had



Claude Levi-Strauss

Follow Up



Chinese Flag



some socialist aspects, the BJP had in recent times displaced it in the rest of India. What the two Indian communist parties (one looking to China and the other Russia) offered was a secular alternative to religious Hindu Nationalism. But the point was not as simple as it might seem. What seemed relevant was the need where many political factions existed to form pre-election pacts to enable government still to function. Something like this is currently only present in embryo in British politics (particularly in the remain parties) but our first past the post system would have to go, he said. He thought Canada still had our system, but New Zealand had gone for proportional representation.

In European thought, it was the French who institutionalised the left/right distinction. Left Hegelians were mentioned but the group stressed that in Hegel the idea of the right was not so binary. Nevertheless, most influential French philosophy is on the left. Even Ricoeur was on the left. Structuralism just made patterns and seemed conservative. Post-modernism that followed irony and critique was often claimed to be ultimately conservative too. Yet cultural change still happens.

One example of a Levi Strauss type structuralist approach he said concerned the way the visible colours of the electromagnetic spectrum become significant in tribal identity and politics. This excluded certain mixture colours like brown though it was pointed out that purple had been the original colour of the suffragettes. The Conservatives were originally orange before they were blue, and yellow seemed a very popular colour in India, while Green with possible Sufi connections was common on Islamic flags. Red often did mean communist or socialist but these meanings emerged over time. One might detect a kind of hermeneutic path to the way symbolic attachments evolve. Deep yellow and pale yellow would mean very different things. The Brexit party has to have a deeper blue than the conservative party. It would then be a kind of an account of political pageantry.

In Alex's view, since Thatcher and Blair, our politics have become too presidential and the media has played too much to personality politics which damages the parliamentary side. But instead of criticising the subjects MPs studied, such as Law and PPE, he thought the tribal aspects of Eton and the Bullingdon club were much more significant. But this was not developed much further. Is collaborative micro politics really going to stop powerful elites getting into politics? True certain Labour PMs like Wilson and Brown did not fit the same elite model, but it was pretty dominant.

Alex also seemed pretty positive about the SNP in Scotland. The idea that it was monolithic or lacked plurality didn't stack up in his view. They are more solidly unified – definitely not disassembling or falling apart. The rest of the UK might feel more pain if the Scots do leave. Changing our flag might then happen. This was not not necessarily everyone's view, but we admitted that things were changing fast and Northern Ireland and Wales were also responding to any moves the Scots have made. We ended by thinking briefly about postcolonial changes since WWII when new flags were created or redesigned. New Zealand had recently struggled to produce a new version of its flag.

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Art and Poetry



Night Birds

And does not the forest know you when you come searching, the deep night forest with those well-known calls protecting your sleep? Does not your heart beat softer when night birds are catching your dreams? Lifelong they follow your night's wing-beating heart that soars with them searching the woods. Oh, that joy when trailing the sleep it guesses the trees all overgrown with the hoot of owls!

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

Poetry

Masterpiece

Rembrandt rendered it in the lavish sleeves, the hands, the expression of truthfulness. The Jewish Bride is a marvellous amalgam of richness, tenderness, trust. And thus, the Old Testament also describes Rebecca and Isaac.



But where are these ivied covenants now? Modern montage is quick, makeshift, loose. Its constraints are minimal, temporary, conditional. They leave choice exposed soliciting every itinerant soul for the faintest of resemblances.

Erica Warburton



The Wednesday

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