

The *Wednesday*

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

On a Higher Plane

We have been suffering from a lockdown for a long time and the coronavirus seems to infect every conversation. I thought we should leave the virus for now and talk about something else. The topic of the relationship between poetry and philosophy suggested itself not least because we had two Wednesday sessions on this question via Zoom in recent months.

The questions that came out of our meetings are related to the nature of the poetic experience and the role of the poet. We have two opposing views: there is first the reductionist view which tries to see the poetic imagination in practical, behaviouristic terms. The poem is reduced to our everyday experience and the poet becomes a technically gifted individual. But this view has long been discredited. Poetry is more than a craft and Plato was right to notice this in his own time. It may involve the everyday experience, but it goes beyond that experience, giving it more universality and truth.

The opposing view is that poetry belongs to a totally different realm populated only by eternal truths and universal values. Poetry by this account is beyond the poet's particular experience, even though this experience occasions it, and it is beyond space and time and all particular conditions. Poetry has a bit of the mystical experience, it can contain a perennial wisdom speaking to us across the centuries. Bachelard once argued that the psychology of the poet is not relevant to the effect of poetry on us. If the poem is limited to the psychology of the poet, why would we have the emotion we have when reading or hearing it?

I take the middle way between the two views outlined above. I think there is something particular, defined by space and time and the

poet's given experience, but it also represents a truth beyond all these specifications. Walter Stace, in his book *Time and Eternity: An Essay on the Philosophy of Religion*, argued that there are two realms with two dimensions. There is the empirical realm with the time we experience as past, present and future, and there is an eternal time which we cannot talk about in the same terms. They interact in the mystical experience.

The same interaction happens in the poetic experience. Eliot said: 'The point of intersection of the timeless/with time is the occupation of the saint'. And Blake said: 'To see a world in a grain of sand/ And a heaven in a wild flower/ Hold infinity in the palm of your hand/ An eternity in an hour'. Heidegger called this 'the happening of truth'. We are all aware of poems that carry meanings that are well beyond their time and place, and the very words that were used. Heidegger in his essay *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* thought that the poet connects us with the essence of Being and the role of the poet is to be a mediator between the truth of Being and society. Poetry can often be considered to be beyond everyday limitations, and calls for openness to a much larger vision.

To finish on a different point, *The Wednesday* is three years old this month. My thanks and gratitude to my editorial board, writers, poets, artists, and all those who contributed to its success. Special thanks to the loyal readers who supported the magazine in its journey and who have been visiting our website to read past issues as well as the latest. I am pleased that *The Wednesday* that started three years ago as a newsletter to a group of friends meeting every Wednesday is now read across the world. Thank you all.

The Editor

A Brief Critique Of F.H. Bradley's View Of Ethics

EDWARD GREENWOOD

What is wrong with F.H. Bradley's ethics? The brief answer is 'everything'. The collection of essays on ethics in *Ethical Studies*, Clarendon Press, 1976, works dialectically. Setting aside the first essay on the vexed subject of determinism and free will, let us start with the second essay which poses the cardinal question 'Why Should I be Moral?' The thesis of essay two poses hedonism, the notion that the right thing to do is to pursue pleasure. The third essay 'Duty For Duty's Sake' maintains the antithesis. A sort of synthesis is then offered in essay five 'My Station and its Duties'. But even this solution is rejected as 'neither ultimate nor all-inclusive' for the 'ultimate and all-inclusive' is what Bradley is pursuing. This is that obscure something he calls 'the Absolute' a distant descendant of Parmenides' 'the One'.

In 'My Station and its Duties' Bradley's holism comes to the fore. He calls the idea of the 'mere individual' an empty idea. It is, so to speak, ontologically null. Thatcher's 'There is no such thing as society, there are only individuals' is often taken to be an expression of the view Bradley is rejecting. But not even J.S. Mill, the thinker he takes particular delight in attacking, has discounted the fact that every individual is also a social being.

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What Bradley wants to emphasise, then, is the idea of 'social being'. It is in his idea of social being that he goes wrong. He wants to say that what is ontologically primary is the community to which the individual belongs. This community can be the state, the nation or the race. The community is ontologically real, the individual ontologically deficient. This view reaches its rhetorical climax on page 184 of 'My Station and its Duties' in

the fulsome picture of a nation in arms when rights are laughed at and 'the individual trampled underfoot'. It is the old Roman '*Inter arma leges silent*' or 'during the time of war the laws are silent'. The sentiment evoked is not unlike that evoked by Cecil Spring-Rice in his famous 'Land of Hope and Glory', but at least Spring-Rice also asks 'How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?' - a question that it never even occurs to Bradley to raise.

In his list of contents Bradley tells us that he is going to deal with 'the origin of morality'. In fact he never does. If he had done, he would have had more doubts about it. Moreover, he assumes that we all agree on what morality is, which is far from the case. There are several different moralities, just as there are several different religions. In fact a morality often has its roots in religious belief. This means that when religious beliefs clash the moralities that go with them clash too. It also means that when religious belief is lost, the loss often precipitates a moral crisis. It is odd that while Bradley showed considerable historical sense in his essay 'The Presuppositions of Critical History' (an essay praised by R. G. Collingwood) in which he discusses the crisis in Christianity precipitated by David Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, he shows little appreciation of the historical sense when discussing morality.

Bradley sees good and evil as correlative notions. For him, good is identified with the whole, and evil with the part. The individual is merely an organ in the body of the community whether that community is the state, the nation or the race. But surely only an organic physical body can be begotten, born and die, and develop a conscience that strives to distinguish what is good. Such a body is at least partially individuated by the



F.H. Bradley

space it occupies which cannot be occupied by another body. That would be to violate Leibniz's *principium individuationis*. There is nothing to correspond to this individuation and perspective in a state. States are made up of often conflicting individuals. Individuals can bear witness to the truth in a way in which states cannot. Indeed, states are notorious for their unscrupulousness, duplicity and lying, faults often left to courageous individuals to expose. The terrible twentieth century, the age of collective tyrannies, surely showed this in abundance. Moreover, the space a state occupies can be occupied by another state. This is not the case with the human individual.

In his final remarks Bradley turns to the question of religion. He speaks on page 324 of 'the necessity of a religious point of view'. He says religion is essentially not a matter of theory, but of practice, or, as he puts it, 'doing'. He ridicules Matthew Arnold's attempt to preserve the moral sentiments of Christianity without its dogmas. Somewhat provincially on such a world-wide issue he seems to endorse

on page 375 the Protestant view of salvation through faith rather than works. Belief for Bradley must come 'from the heart'. We may recall Jane Austen's irony at Marianne's reliance on her heart as opposed to principles in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Bradley himself (somewhat like Hegel) sees religion as understood by laity and theologians alike as a sort of poetic fiction unsustainable when challenged by philosophical reason. In fact, he is an atheist who does not wear atheism on his sleeve, perhaps because it was professed by vulgar men such as Bradlaugh who actually talked far more good sense on the topic. When I think of Bradley's religion I am irresistibly reminded of a more genial old fraud, Stepan Verkhovensky in Dostoevsky's novel *The Devils*. The elder Verkhovensky declares in chapter nine of part one: 'I believe in God, *mais distingueons*, I believe in him as a being who is conscious of himself in me only.' That is a way of dressing up atheism so that religion can still give comfort to someone who favours a vague religiosity.

Losing The Blue Boy

When I was four I made a pact
with my invisible blue friend
to always stay close. Whatever happened.

Later in life we both travelled to Sicily and Greece,
and talked of the things you cannot see.

We swam in the sea, walked up mountains
and held tight at night.
I smelled his aroma of cinnamon and cloves,
learned his secrets by picking up notes,
which gusts of wind blew out of nowhere
and lifted them up and letting them float
through the air and onto my lap.

In the kitchen I saw him mirrored in spoons,
take bites out of the bread, sip tea from the blue
china cup while leaving those brown rings of eternity.

I saw him in mirrors in the hall, in the distance,
rushing towards me or leaving through the wall.

When I was with my lover, he insisted to sleep
between us and cried when I cried.
We got drunk together, laughed together and hugged.
Once when the sun rose like a fireball
and the clouds came sailing down,
he stepped on one of them, lifted up
and was swept away.

At times I remember and talk to him still,
but then my voice gets blurred and has nowhere to go.





Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Reports of the Wednesday Meetings Held During June

Written by Rahim Hassan and Paul Cockburn.

The Philosophical Background of Poetry

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 3rd June

We started our Wednesday meetings during June with an interesting talk by Edward Greenwood on a number of poets and their philosophical take on being, nature, love and poetry. This follows from April's talk by Edward on the relationship between poetry and philosophy. The poems chosen represented a progression from mystical views to positivism and they span eight hundred years. They also represent a perspectival shift and a change in the world-view from Medieval times to the present day.

Edward selected about six categories of poets/philosophers: those who have a poetically philosophical vision and who express it in verse form or with great literary power (Parmenides and Heraclitus), poets who expound a philosopher's idea (Lucretius expounding Epicureanism), poets who write about philosophers (Wallace Stevens on Santayana), poets whom a philosopher expounds as expressing and validating his views (Hölderlin was expounded by Heidegger), poets who use philosophic themes or motifs (A.E.Housman) and poets who can be classified as optimists or pessimists or as trying to hold the balance between the two, or who reject and try to transcend the dichotomy (Giacomo Leopardi and Thomas Hardy).

The meeting started with a reading of a poem by the 13th century Islamic mystic Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi. The poem was addressed by Rumi in Konya in Turkey to his friend the mystic Shams-e Tabrizi who resided in Persia. The love between the two mystics seems to have obliterated the distance between them so that the principles of individuation, space, and time were dropped.

'Happy the moment when we are seated in the palace, thou and I,
With two forms and two figures but with one soul,
thou and I...
The colours of the grove and the voice of the birds
will bestow immortality
At the time when we come into the garden

Thou and I, individuals no more, shall be mingled in ecstasy....

This is the greatest wonder that thou and I, sitting here in the same nook,

Are at the same moment both in Iraq and Khorasan (Persia), thou and I.'

Moving on a few centuries, we find Marvell's 'The Definition of Love' viewed love through the lens of the new science and the geometrical and mechanical conception of world and life. Shelley's poem 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' was a sort of a correction to this view. It has much more of a 'Romantic age' feeling about it. But with Thomas Hardy's poem 'God's Funeral' the effect of the motif of the death of God and the Positivist view of space and time affirm themselves. But again, there is some spiritual correction to this view in W.B. Yeats's 'Among Schoolchildren'.

The full text of the talk will be published in another issue of *The Wednesday* magazine.

There followed a long debate on each individual poem and different views and readings of the poems were suggested. They ranged from materialism and behaviourism to a much more inclusive vision of the mystical and the mundane.



Jalaluddin Rumi

The Realist – Anti-Realist Debate

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 10th June

We were very pleased to welcome Chris Norris, a regular contributor to and supporter of *The Wednesday Magazine*, who gave an excellent talk on the philosophy of science.

The overriding theme of the talk was the conflict between realist and anti-realist views of science. Scientific knowledge presupposes a real world which contains objects and structures which can be studied, and true and false propositions can be made about them. Anti-realists are skeptical about this claim for a number of reasons. One is that scientific knowledge is expressed in language and there is a problem in terms of what does language actually refer to? Additionally, as Thomas Kuhn showed the history of science is full of examples of scientific theories being overthrown, what we ‘know’ now may well be proved wrong in the future. Furthermore, sociologists such as David Bloor see science as a social activity, scientists work in groups and the science they produce could be just another social discourse.

Kant left the door open to skepticism by proposing the ‘thing in itself’, beyond our senses and our knowledge. In terms of modern philosophy, Hilary Putnam is an interesting case of a philosopher who moved away from an anti-realist view to metaphysical realism (objects and their relations



David Bloor

exist outside the human mind) and then to a view that human mental concepts do mirror reality in some way. Michael Dummett in his theory of semantic realism thought that transcendent truth was not tenable and should be replaced by verification.

Science and the technologies it has given rise to now comprise a large body of knowledge which has grown over a period of time, and so it is hard to maintain an anti-realist stance for all areas of science. Even quantum physics, which leads to some strange paradoxes, works in a pragmatic sense.

It may be helpful to distinguish the context of discovery in scientific endeavours from the context of justification according to Hans Reichenbach. In discovering a new theory there may be many social and psychological influences on a scientist, but in terms of judging the theory there are a number of other considerations in terms of scientific and empirical validity, such as falsifiability, explanatory power etc.

More recently critical theory has perhaps taken a more ‘realist’ turn. For instance the French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux in his book *After Finitude* holds that when there were no humans on earth there must have still been an ‘intelligible’ world. He also holds that mathematics deals with the primary qualities of natural things while perception deals with secondary qualities.

In the course of our discussion Chris Norris put forward the view that philosophers such as Kant and Wittgenstein often create more problems than they solve! We also tried to define realism and anti-realism, and considered Roy Bhaskar’s attempt to combine the epistemological subjective and social side of knowledge with objective knowledge.

Thanks to Chris Norris for such a thought-provoking and wide-ranging talk, of which this is only a cursory summary.

Perception of the Cosmos

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 17th June

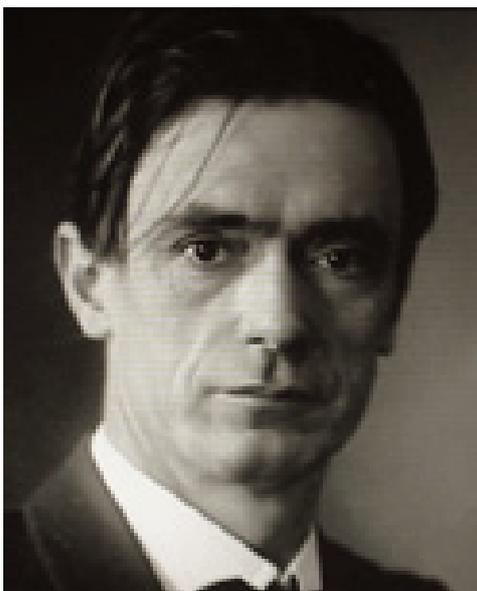
We are used to the scientific mechanical conception of the world but what about challenges to this world-view? William Bishop gave us an interesting challenge to the present state of science and the position of the human in our scientific age. He took us through a number of concepts that together introduce a different picture of life and the cosmos. He drew heavily on the thought of Goethe and Rudolf Steiner.

William started his talk with a quote from Pierre Hadot's book entitled *Philosophy as a Way of Life* where Hadot refers to an aesthetic mode of perception, a cosmic dimension of existence. The aesthetic mode is concerned with the whole of the human being and it is based on a Romantic reaction to abstract rationalism. Science is an extreme form of rationality and is also reductive. The scientist is a detached observer of his subject. William contrasted this with Goethe's phenomenological approach where the scientist is a participant in the subject he studies. The phenomenologist follows appearances as they progress. Things speak for themselves if one is attuned.

William contrasted Goethe's theory of colour with that of Newton's. The first looked for the whole and the intermixing of polarities of dark and light to produce what he called the 'wheel of colour', while Newton moved in the direction of analysing light into its components. Goethe's approach is quite complex, and the mainstream science that followed moved in the direction of Newtonian analysis rather than Goethe's.

Things get even more complicated with Steiner who edited Goethe's work and wrote a commentary on Goethe's theory of knowledge. He took Goethe's methodology further and gave the idea of polarity a cosmic dimension. He talked about the ethers and characterised these as four initiatory processes related to the four classic elements of earth, water, air and fire. The four ethers were characterized as warmth, sound (organisation according to number), light, and life (the individual organizing principle or archetype). The primary cosmic polarity was said to be levity/gravity (spirit and matter) and from this arose secondary polarities. For instance the light and the sound ether in its fallen state (compelled by gravity) form the 'sub-natural' forces of electricity and magnetism. The fallen ether is anti-life and expresses itself in electricity and magnetism. Through technology they dominate our world.

There were references to images of the cosmos. Kepler talked about the music of the spheres arising from the relationships between the celestial bodies, which supported Pythagoras' view of everything in the universe as a musical-mathematical arrangement. Newton took a mechanistic view of the universe. William suggested that the sun represents levity, living nature, the divine world and the spiritual, while gravity is the counter pole of density. Light itself is invisible but when reflected from matter it has become a combination of levity and gravity. Light (as inner light) is also associated with reason. The Stoics looked at light as leading towards the Divine. The sphere of ethereal light is the domain of the spirit. We were told that gravity and matter represent the dark pole



Rudolf Steiner

of the spectrum and that the levity-level of the ethers relate to human consciousness.

A question was raised about the validity of all this. The answer was that you can't measure such things as these in the standard scientific way. If the hypothesis of the ethers is discredited by science, this is not the same as the function it plays in life according to Steiner's assertion. But scientists have also stopped talking about matter in the old mechanistic way - although arguably the gravity-based human viewpoint still dominates.

What is at stake here is the contrast between the mechanistic view inherited from Newton and the holistic approach suggested by Goethe. Goethe

applied his phenomenological approach to the study of colour in optics and plants in biology. However, Newton's approach came to be dominant and this has led to a partial view of the human situation. Goethe's methodology seemed more suited to reality as a living process and mechanistic science ideally suited to reality as a mechanism.

In our discussion views were divided as to the validity of Goethe and Steiner's ideas. We discussed whether there was some sort of 'middle way' between reductivism and holism - how do we see the 'big picture', if there is one. The view was also expressed that scientists need to be aware of the ethical dimensions of the work they do.

Poetry



The Modern Materialist

I'm a fine example of a modern mainstream materialist,
I've factual information that's statistically infallible,
I'm very well acquainted too with matters mathematical
And multiple hypotheses that no-one may gainsay
And I really have no reason to suppose that I am wrong
For even to think so would be playing dice with fate
For doubt is what my reason rules against -
For I believe that I represent the very model
of the modern materialist stance.

William Bishop

Why Work? Marx and Human Nature

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 24th June

What is the role of work in human life? Is it only a means to earn a living, or does it have a deeper function? What are the implications of this question for our views about human nature? These questions were explored through a discussion of Hegel's philosophy and Marx's concept of alienation. There is a lot written on the sociological, psychological, and managerial study of work but there is hardly a philosophical justification of why people work. This was all part of the interesting talk given by Sean Sayers to the Wednesday group. Sean is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Kent University at Canterbury. He has written extensively on the philosophies of Marx and Hegel.

Sean started with a poem on 'Toads' by Philip Larkin which raises issues about the point of work and the plight of a working life. This also raised questions about how we view work from a philosophical point of view. There is first the hedonistic view of the utilitarians who treat work as a means to an end. Bentham was mentioned as a prime representative of this view. According to Bentham, humans are motivated by pleasure and pain and work is toil that we would do well to avoid if we can. What is wrong with utilitarianism is that it takes humans to be consumers in nature.



Sean Sayers

In contrast to this view, Marx presented a more satisfying philosophical alternative, by explaining work through the concept of alienation. The concept has its roots in Hegel's philosophy. Alienation is related to a feeling of estrangement from the products of our work. This is the nature of Capitalism where workers experience a loss of power and they find their work impoverishing rather than enriching their lives.

Implicit in the concept of alienation is the idea that work shouldn't be like that, rather it should be fulfilling and an expression of our creative power. Hegel thought that work is distinctively human. Other creatures work to satisfy their needs from nature but their satisfaction is immediate. But humans relation to nature, after the phase of hunter gatherers, is mediated. Animals work instinctively but humans work imaginatively and have a purpose. Work for Hegel separates man from nature but it is also the means to bridge this separation, to make ourselves feel at home in nature. This is different from Rousseau who thought that civilisation and work are the causes of alienation. Hegel thought that work is an end in itself.

Marx inherited Hegel's ideas and radicalised them. For Hegel, through work humans can project their will onto nature. Marx called it objectification: we objectify ourselves in the object; we give the object a human form. Marx thought that work is not necessarily toil nor that it is inevitably so. He thought alienation could be redeemed by changing the capitalist system. Alienation is a concept which still resonates powerfully in our modern world.

It was pointed out during the discussion that work can be valuable in itself because it can give us self-respect and a sense of purpose. There is also the separation between life and work. A distinction can be made between work that is useful and interesting and hard useless toil. Another distinction is between artistic work and routine work. The religious dimension of work was also mentioned.



Problems and Solutions

‘Problems cannot be solved by the level of awareness that created them!’

DR. ALAN XUEREB

This quote has been attributed to Albert Einstein however I could find no proof or reference to it anywhere. Nonetheless, he did say that: ‘a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move towards higher levels.’ This was in a telegram reported in a news section published in the *New York Times* (25 May 1946): (ATOMIC EDUCATION URGED BY EINSTEIN; Scientist in Plea for \$200,000 to Promote New Type of Essential Thinking).

Whoever authored this quote is anyway to be lauded. Indeed, we do see this principle’s effectiveness in science, in politics, in law and last but not least in philosophy. I will attempt to give some examples from all these fields in order to illustrate my point.

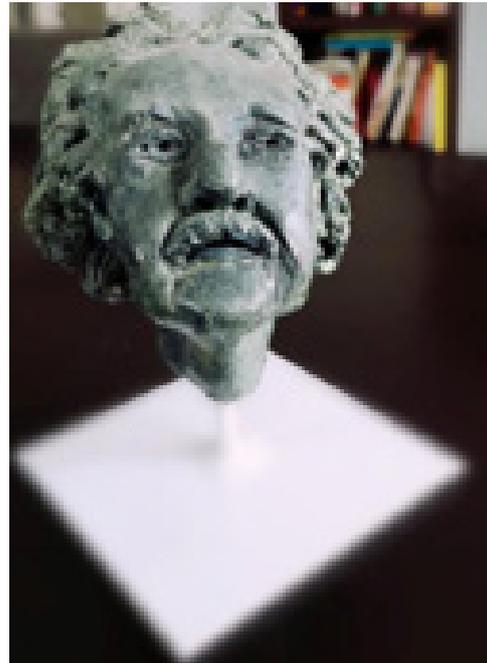
In science, particularly in physics there is, amongst other problems, the problem of the unification of the four known fundamental forces of nature, that is electromagnetism, weak nuclear force, strong nuclear force, and gravity. The first three forces are unified: however gravity remains problematic. Simplistically, physicists have found it pretty difficult to merge the subatomic world with the macroscopic one. At large and especially astronomical scales, gravity dominates and is best described by Einstein's theory of general relativity. But at subatomic scales, quantum mechanics best describes the natural world. And so far, no one has come up with a good way to merge those two worlds. This is problematic if we think in the traditional four dimensions (3 of space + 1 of time). String Theory takes this problem to a different level by adding more dimensions. Whether string theory is correct or not is another argument. It

does however fit the concept of solving (at least theoretically) the problem on a different level and unifies beautifully quantum mechanics with general relativity.

In politics this shift in level is done so many times when there is an issue in Parliament where there is disagreement across party lines for example. A normal vote would not resolve the issue but would create a national crisis, so many politicians opt for referenda. They shift the problem onto a different level. This is conversely also true for when a change in the constitution is needed, many parliaments in the world require a two-thirds majority for this to be allowed. At that level parliament becomes supreme over the constitution and thus the issue is solved on a different level.

In law this shift happens through the way the judicial system is structured. A legal issue between A and B is normally first attempted to be resolved via mediation (already a different higher level), then it goes to a court of first instance (different level), then to an appeal and sometimes, in certain jurisdictions, to a higher court, say a constitutional court. This mechanism could be seen as a ‘level shift’, which in jurisdictional hierarchical terms is quite evident.

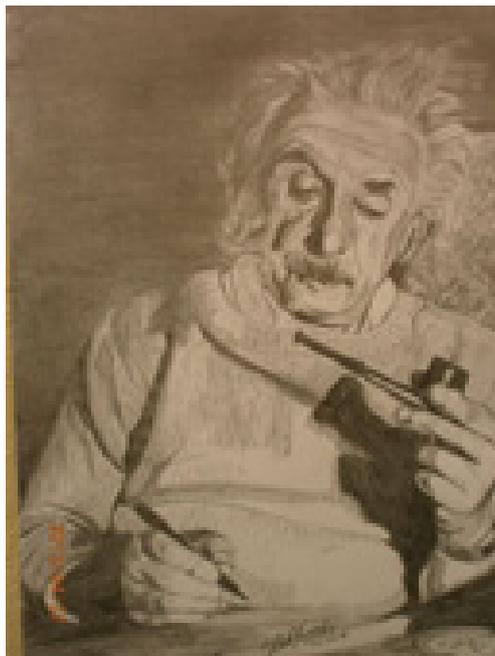
In philosophy I would be bold and say that any argument or issue that appears unresolvable benefits from what the physicist and philosopher Thomas Kuhn would have labelled a paradigm shift. One example of this in philosophy is that philosophy itself is thus viewed as non-essentialist, or not having a unique, unchanged, or eternal essence, and non-foundationalist, or not providing or being in need of foundations.



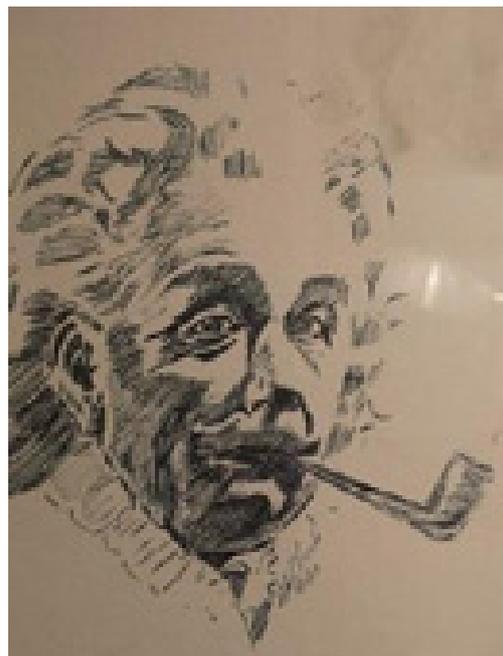
My sculpture of 'uncle Bertie' (2018)

Above is a sculpture of Albert Einstein I made around three years ago, lovingly referred to by my kids as 'Uncle Bertie'.

Here is a pencil drawn portrait of Einstein proudly hanging in my office in Luxembourg made by my father some three years ago. The other one is an ink sketch of Einstein also drawn by my father, some 18 years ago, now hanging in my study in Tawern (Germany).



Albert Einstein, drawn by my father Anthony (2017)



Another drawing by my father, portraying Einstein (2002)

Clocks: a Villanelle



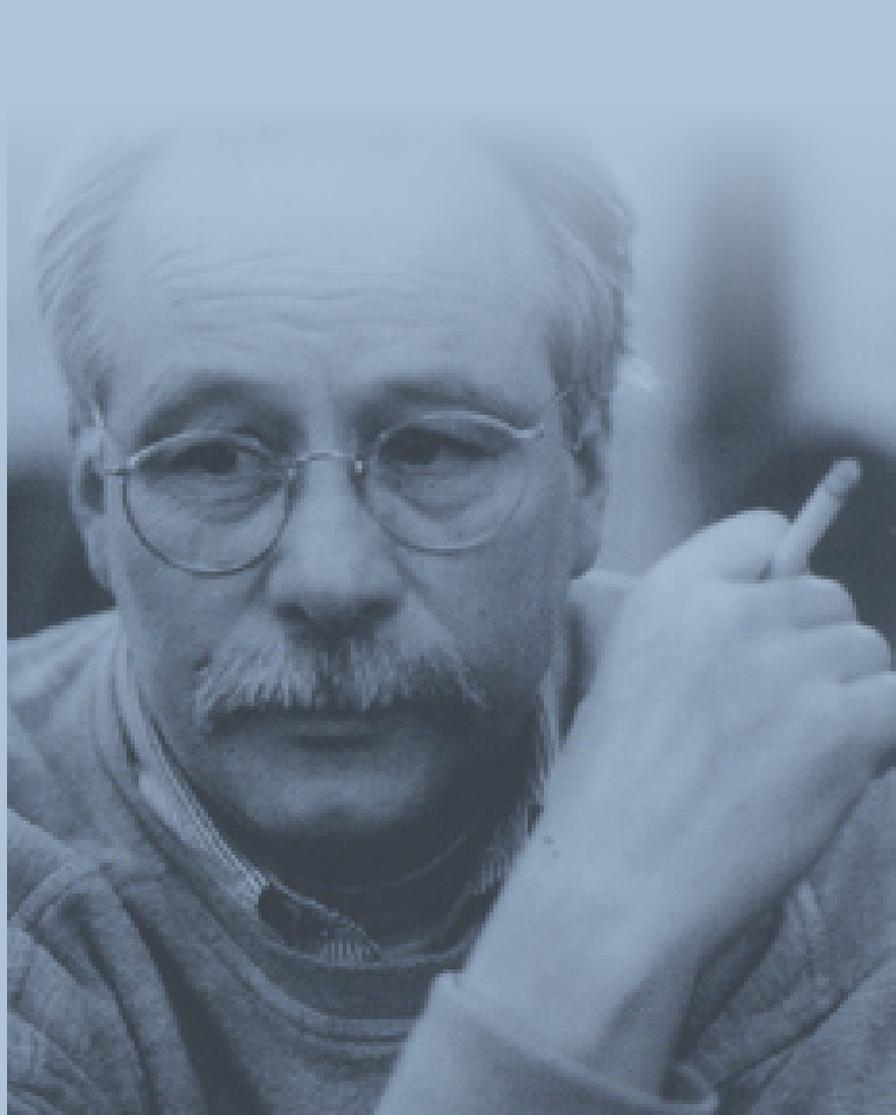
CHRIS NORRIS

There we were in the watchmaker's shop where a host of long-case clocks, kitchen and living room clocks, alarm clocks, pocket and wrist watches were all ticking at once, just as if one clock on its own could not destroy enough time.

W.G. Sebald, *Vertigo*, trans. Michael Hulse

A few to add and time shall cease at last.
Its end creeps close with each new watch or clock.
The more I set, the more time rushes past.

Sometimes I fret lest they should tick too fast.
Why not retire, why not run down my stock?
A few to add and time shall cease at last.



A quick spot-check suffices to contrast
Their quick-change rate with my old-timer shock:
The more I set, the more time rushes past.

Freeze-framed like Wordsworth's 'stationary blast
Of waterfalls', that syncope tick-tock:
A few to add and time shall cease at last.

Let staid horologists look on aghast
As time clocks out and thought's foundations rock.
The more I set, the more time rushes past.

Watch me as I deploy my eager cast
Of time-devourers, *chronophages en bloc*:
A few to add and time shall cease at last;
The more I set, the more time rushes past.

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