Issue No. 158 01/09/2021

ISSN 2516-2292 (Online)
ISSN 2516-2284 (Print)

The *Wednesday*

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

The Rhythm of Life

I have been fascinated by the number of conferences, workshops and special issues of philosophical and social science journals dealing with the issue of Covid-19 and the pandemic. They do show an interest in bridging the gap between life generally and academia. They also show the need for the mind to be prompted by external demand to think new thoughts. But sometimes you get the feeling that they are over intellectualising the issues they are dealing with and may be pushing them in an apocalyptic direction. There might be a need to calm down and think these matters through with a cool head.

The world is always open to the possibility of disasters coming through war, natural causes or disease. The developed world has been immune to all this for a long while and other parts of the world have been in mourning. But as Becket once said whenever tears stop in one part of the world they start again somewhere else. We must also not forget human resilience in the face of calamities. The life force does not stop but pushes towards creating new forms and renewals. I wrote at the beginning of the pandemic that there is a philosophy that sees life and death as interacting all the time and feeding on each other. Pierre Hadot in his ground-breaking book *The Veil of Isis* give a fascinating account of the Greek and early Roman philosophers' view of nature as a cycle of life and death that is hidden under the symbolic veil of Isis, the Egyptian Goddess.

Hadot gives a detailed reading of a Heraclitus fragment which says: 'Nature loves to hide.' Several meanings, and views, come out of his reading. They basically support the view that Sophocles sums up as 'What appears tends to disappear' or 'What is born wants to die.' Hadot supported this view with the work of the French physiologist Claude Bernard who wrote: 'There are two kinds of seemingly opposite vital phenomena, some organic renovation, which are always manifested by either the functioning or the wearing out of organs. It is the latter that is usually characterised as the phenomena of life, such that what we call "life" is in reality death.' Hadot comments that 'This is why we can say both that "life is creation" and that "life is death"'.

However, I wish to suggest an alternative idea, one that is not concerned with generation and destruction but creativity. I suggest that life and history have a rhythm of expansion and contraction, of a force going out to create a new reality, new thought, new civilization and a return to the source to rethink all that and to repeat the process at a higher level. But the source is not a fixed point psychologically, geographically or historically. A thought may exhaust itself in a certain philosopher only to be picked up by another thinker locally and contemporarily or in a different location in geography and history. A civilization may die in one place but it will make the material from which another civilization rises again and at a higher level. This is a rhythm of thought, life and civilization.

We can see that all talk about the pandemic's destructive effect on social life misses the point. Human beings have accustomed themselves to certain forms of sociability, but these forms are contingent. If the worst happened and they had to give them up there will be always new forms created to face the situation, especially with the aid of technology. Technology proved to be helpful in the present crisis. Teaching and meetings were arranged online which have made life easy and created a virtual sociability. Life may expand more than it shrinks!

The Editor

The Presence of Beauty

Thought is well adapted to discussing what has come to pass but less suited to addressing life as it is happening. What is required is intuition. For a theory of everything (including life), reason and the logic of mathematics require the addition of the arts of the heart.

WILLIAM BISHOP

Encased in a plaster cast from hip to chest lying on my back in a hospital bed what proved to be a lifeline were the headphones clipped to the headboard. A particular weekly music broadcast kept me wanting to continue to live to hear another session. Such is the power of music. It not only engages the mind but the soul, which includes mind and heart as the feeling centre, and the will. Full engagement of our faculties is a deep-seated human need: to be 'in the flow', 'caught up' in the merging of self with the spirit or dynamic of a phenomenon. This can be conceived as resonance or immersion in presence: participation where subject and object are fused together in connection without separation.

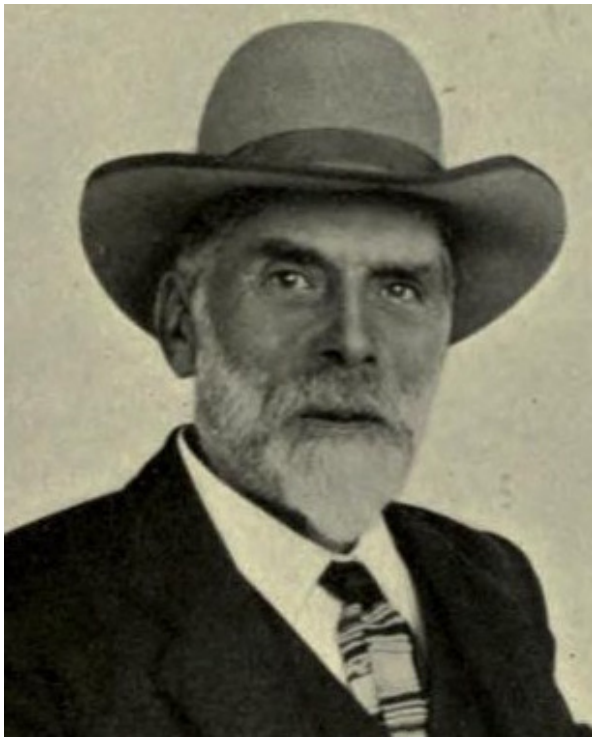
'Hast thou then thought that all this ravishing music,
that stirreth so thy heart, making the dream of things
illimitable unsearchable and of heavenly import,
is but a light disturbance of the atoms of air,
whose jostling ripples, gather'd within the ear are tuned
to resonant scale, and thence by enthron'd mind received
on the spiral stairway of her audience chamber
as heralds of high spiritual significance?'

So wrote Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, in his book-length philosophical poem, '*The Testament of Beauty'* (1929), which he dedicated to the King.

Beauty makes life worth living, yet arguably it is an endangered transcendental experience in today's calculative world. I say this with regard to the human need for wholeness. Fortunately *The Wednesday* comes to my aid here for it includes in its mix the balance of poetry and artwork alongside philosophy, which creates an attractive presentation. For arguably philosophy on its own in its rational and speculative mode is insufficient for full appreciation of the experience and comprehension of life, yet supplemented by the heart in art, what on its own seems one-sided, is rounded out. Previous articles in *The Wednesday* that allude to McGilchrist's split-brain theory bear witness to awareness of a need for wholeness.

According to the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot, ancient philosophy, as wisdom, was a way of life that combined theory with spiritual exercises and lived experience. A particular example is the Stoic practitioner who, by practice, assumes the status of philosopher by adopting the style of life. Here religious and rational elements balance. Under these circumstances the experience of fusion, or resonance with presence, finds acceptance in a philosophical home. Today the notion of being 'filled with spirit' hardly finds a philosophical stable, yet it is part of the experience of life. If such an experience appears mysterious then this may come into a Wittgensteinian category for which there are no words – because to appreciate or accept this it has to be experienced. Similarly with beauty, words can be spoken of and around it in an abstract way but to fully appreciate beauty it has to be felt, experienced.

While there is a common element to what is identifiably human there is great variation among individuals in, for example, constitution, temperament, and ability to understand. Therefore, what makes life worth living for



Robert Bridges

McGilchrist

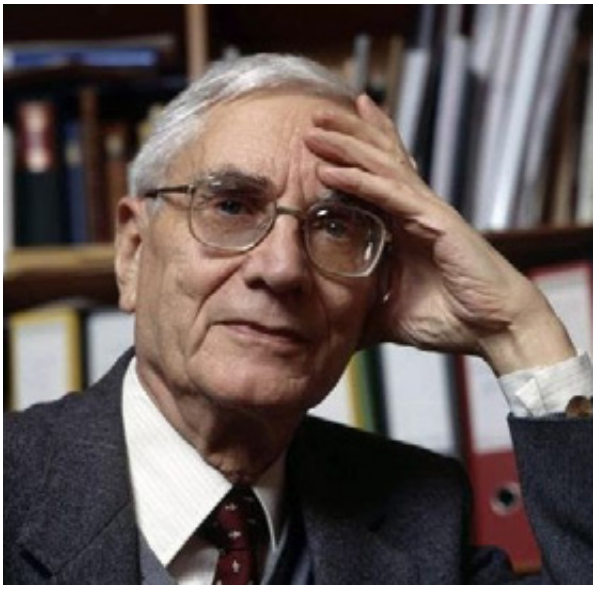
a particular person varies according to these different characteristics, which in turn affect where attention is directed to obtain meaningful, full-filling and fruitful experience. Herein lies the reason behind the engagement of attention. Indeed, while there is a powerful incentive not only for the fully confident or assertive person to feel that their own 'take' on the world is the only right one, any compulsion exerted on another person violates the principle of human freedom. To live in love of the action and to let live the will of the other, was an ideal promoted by Rudolf Steiner.

Inner enrichment makes life worth living and fulfilling, and while this can be personally determined, it also contains a universal aspect because this enrichment is stimulated by, or derived from, a single world, though multi-levelled with different sides. It is our cognitive faculties that limit our ability to experience and comprehend the world. The artist-poet William Blake regarded the senses and mind as a reducing valve that merely filtered in a selectively manageable input while excluding a wide range of potential perceptions. In the context of the evolution of consciousness, we can appreciate that this 'reducing valve' has been, and continues to be, subject to changing parameters. In this respect what has been traditionally called the 'intellect', as the highest faculty that connected with the divine (non-physical) world has, over time, been lost and its place substituted by the intellect as rationality as the highest human faculty. While this can be seen to be the result of evolutionary change in human consciousness does it necessarily imply a change in Being as reality itself? However, our cognitive ability limits our world and determines its reality for us – and poignantly this applies to each individual person. These individual 'takes' on the world exist and yet for society to function there has to be a recognized consensual version of 'reality' to which there is general agreement and conformity. This is where a 'dumbing down' to a common denominator, or general conditioning becomes a danger.

Be that as it may, Beauty has not yet been outlawed as a concept, which is a hopeful sign since it is something that the soul yearns for because it connects what is human to Nature and the Divine or the transcendental. Beauty is fundamentally connected to the source of life

from which it derives its ability to inspire the human spirit. It is an experience that requires a person to apprehend it. It not only contributes unspeakable value to life as an expression of life, but it takes the self out of itself and into the greater world as far as it is possible for the self to experience or commune with 'reality'. Many things contribute to life in this respect though in a more humble way. This is again where *The Wednesday* comes in with its spirit of cooperation within diversity, acknowledging the will of the other in seeking the truth as far as we can know it or contend to know anything. *The Wednesday* takes its place in the long tradition contributing to human culture from a motive of liberality. In a highly compressed and oppressed human world, such lamps for human culture take on great value in shedding light on the shapes and appearances of Truth as we understand it. Originally philosophy, as the holism of wisdom, set foot on this path of enquiry out of a love of wisdom and now many groups of ordinary people continue along this path also with sensitivity to the religious or spiritual dimension to life. What I am trying to say here is not intended as dogmatic statement since numerous contrary arguments can be mounted in opposition, but what is said comes with sincerity and awareness of potential fallibility. So, these are thoughts presented merely for consideration.

Beauty seems to manifest through the whole – in pattern and in overall impression. Yet there is also beauty in parts that form a whole (seeing them as wholes in themselves) and in the pattern of interconnection of parts within the whole. Here I am thinking of an ecosystem, but machines, as artifacts, can reflect this quality. Beauty is to be conceived as a quality since it evades quantification, although this might not impede an enthusiastic statistician from making calculations. But mathematics, which exhibits the mystery of beauty, can be both qualitative and quantitative, which raises the question at the heart of mathematics of whether it is natural and has been discovered or is an application of human invention that happens to fit nature. In this it points to the connection between the



Pierre Hadot

nature of the human mind and Nature; between nurture and culture. There is beauty in order, or order reveals beauty, and there is beauty in complexity as revealed in the natural world and in human arts, crafts, and design. But what the word Beauty may conjure up to the popular mind is the Sublime: the close encounter with a Swiss mountain for example, and here Caspar David Friedrich's 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog' comes to mind.

Is Being a state of knowledge or a knowledgeable state? Are Being and knowing synonymous? Whatever is the case, states of soul are particularly well mapped in the discipline of Buddhist meditation, yet correspondence between a meditative state and a content of reality is hard to determine. This may be beyond the ability of language to express. For example, in a particular meditative state does one enter the presence of angelic consciousness or is one subject to the fundamental frequencies of one's own organism (which may be reflections of cosmic rhythms)? There is a sense in which accessibility to reality is dependent on one's means to receive it. There is also the idea that it takes like to recognize like, so to ascend on the great ladder of consciousness one's cognition needs to develop, or the lenses of one's soul need to be cleansed. As in science there are 'experts', so in matters of the soul there may

Rudolf Steiner

be a need for reliable guides since what is present to the soul (psyche) may be a fine compound of fantasy, illusion, and truth that is difficult to unravel. Yet to really know oneself is to know everything as far as one can. Herein lies the presence of beauty and the beauty of presence. As I have said, there is a compelling desire to transcend our everyday self, our persona, to join the metaphorical dance of life, and conversely the desire exists whereby the calm and collected self repeats the mantra: 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. Reflection and action are two sides of the same coin: a union where being and knowing mysteriously give birth to beauty, in the presence of wonder and the imprecision of poetry.

In a mood of soul that might contain the possibility of relating to a divine presence may lurk the uncertainty of whether the 'presence' is identifiable or whether one is experiencing an illusion. F.C. Happold remarks in *The Journey Inwards* that the Divine Image present in the depth of the human soul is a fact of experience and, on the evidence of the totality of the experience of the human race, is an observable psychological reality that is a manifestation of transcendental reality. He goes on to explain how personal relationship to the Divine is possible because at the back of everything there is a Power, which fills the universe yet has its dwelling in the centre of every human soul: 'Within the deep centre of the soul, Deity-as-It-is-in-Itself is transformed into God-for-us; the ineffable, non-personal Godhead reveals Itself as personal, the It becomes a He, an intimate Thou.' (This might be visualized in projective geometry as identity with or continuity between the plane at infinity and the infinitely distant central point - the soul - to which it relates with the soul as transducer; bearing in mind Plato's statement that the soul is everything).

In the pursuit of a 'theory of everything', the 'quantum gravity' theory, popularly known as 'superstring theory', endorses Pythagoras' theory that music (with its rhythms and resonances) is the fundamental creative force of the universe. We might ask ourselves what could be more beautiful than this, and this may explain why music has such power to move us at a deep level, because through it we are connected to the forces of life that initiate form and express presence where, as in Michelangelo's painting of Creation, a human finger can make contact with a Divine finger. In such a way the human reaches the source of life to receive the inspirational energy to live another day, or conversely to transcend the day to experience presence or immersion where, to quote William Blake, heaven is contained in a grain of sand and eternity in an hour. Indeed, it takes poetic expression just to point to this experience, and the concept of the Logos has relevance here with its resonances with the music of the spheres, with creative sound and rationality. Humankind's yearning for the transcendental is met in the presence of Beauty. The livingness of Beauty, Goodness and Truth presage life to come, enabling eternity and time to meet in the present.

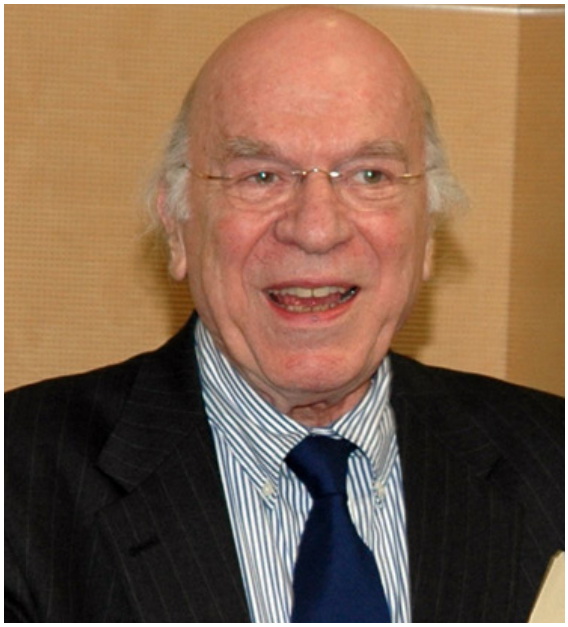
Hopefully these thoughts are not out of place in a postmodern world shadowed by modernism and headed potentially towards a post-human condition. However, while over time there are shifts in our frames of reference, there is also continuity – a link maintained with identity within the living and evolving whole.

Cavell's Pedagogical Investigations

URSULA BLYTHE

As a recent listener of Stanley Cavell's lectures and interviews, I was struck by his pedagogical insights into philosophy and the relevance of language in our way of life, including one's creative expression. Cavell's pedagogic reflections are inherent in his life's work - that is, both his oral and written expressions - such as his interpretation of the *Philosophical Investigations* and the 'scene of instruction' where Wittgenstein discusses a child's initial grasp of words from a language. Wittgenstein expressed that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life' (1953). Language is acquired through a child's indoctrination into a culture or a way of life: this is how Wittgenstein reveals the wider complexities of human interaction, for example: one's facial expression, eye movements, body language, and tone of voice, which conveys one's 'state of mind'. Prior to the child engaging in and absorbing these nuances and sometimes perplexing gestures, they are exposed to the extensive teaching of words or names associated with things or objects, such as apples, oranges, and pears.

Most people accept that schooling is an important part of a child's education and indoctrination into a society, where the role of the teacher influences the child's understanding of the world. However, Cavell's characterisation of 'philosophy as the education of grownups' is mainly concerned with what happens outside of school learning. Philosophy as an academic discipline often gets criticised for asking the 'big questions' that are removed from the real world. The more relevant inquiries tend to be found in contemporary social disciplines that have adopted the praxis of philosophy to make commentary, often identified as critical theory. So, how can the praxis of philosophy help us understand the world? For Cavell, it is not a case of reading to master a text or reading to debunk or defend the argument within the text. Instead, Cavell encourages us to read a philosophical text to challenge our self-understanding. Thus, when reading a philosophical text, one is engaged in a type of dialogue between the reader and the author.



Stanley Cavell

Putnam asserts that ''to read Cavell as he should be read is to enter into a conversation with him, one in which your entire sensibility and his are involved, and not only your mind and his mind' (2005: 119). Similar to Wittgenstein's I*nvestigations*, to read Cavell, we must not only comprehend what he is saying, but also 'how he says it'. In other words, the purpose of a philosophical text is pedagogical in recognising new facets of our own thinking and learning. He acknowledged the proliferate voices in the *Investigations* which provokes the reader to identify (or relate to) the impulses, temptations, and understanding of the different voices within the text. This silent dialogue enables the reader to reflect on their own condition or incite a change in our self-conception. Fundamentally, this is Cavell's appreciation of Wittgensteinian philosophical therapies as an educational conversation between the reader and the author. Our thoughts, words, and praxis are part of the human condition and that is the context in which they are significant. This education for grownups is a praxis of recognising our everyday language through the use of words and names, but also recognising our humanity and way of life.

(This is a summary of Ursula Blythe's talk to The Wednesday meeting 4th August 2021)

Songbird

he flails the air
determined to alight
there at the utmost top
on that flimsy limb

he grips the free
tangled edge of things
paying the flexing horizon
needle attention

and begins to sing
flinging each phrase loose
to express and sooth
his fugitive visions

giving breadth yes
to his own inventions

Erica Warburton

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During August 2021

Written by RAHIM **HASSAN**

Critical Perspectives on T.S. Eliot

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 11th August.

The poet T.S. Eliot dominated literary life for a century through his poetry, plays and literary criticism. He was notable for his defence of tradition and its vital role in the creative process. The poem that brought him to fame, 'The Waste Land', is coming up for its centenary. Eliot wrote a great deal of poetry before and after. Many of his works became landmarks of English literature and established Eliot's worldwide influence. His legendary status was created through the joint effect of his poetry and criticism, and it seemed that his eminent position was secured. But then the tide turned somewhat against him, and his reputation was undermined partly because of his racist and anti-Semitic views.

Our poet, philosopher and literary theorist Chris Norris presented his take on Eliot to *The Wednesday* meeting by reading two of his own poems. One,'The Eliot File', established Norris's case in an argumentative mode while the second, 'Another Journey', expressed the views and feelings of a recent immigrant and asylum-seeker who is very familiar with Eliot's work and with Western literary culture generally. Both poems were polemical and strongly combative. 'The Eliot File' attacked Eliot for certain aspects of his poetic technique, as well as for his racist views. It found that his poetry 'decoupled sound from sense' in order to create 'a symbolist mystique', and thus lulled the reader into passively imbibing Eliot's ideas and prejudices.

So when you tell us jokily that you're
'Unpleasant' or by no means nice to meet,
Then – Mr. Eliot – we had best not score
It up to mere mock-modesty but treat
It as a brief permission to explore
Things you were too repressed, or too discreet,
To say except when given half a chance
By twists of thinking, trope, or circumstance.

Eliot's frequent literary allusions were subject to commentary in a similar vein. The *Four Quartets* came in for some searching criticism on account of Eliot's later turn towards a deeply conservative and exclusivist form of orthodox Anglican religious faith.

The second poem documented the journey of a well-educated immigrant to Britain. After learning so much about poetry and criticism, he is shocked to discover the political reality in this country, with all its insular myths of cultural superiority and its prejudices against foreigners. The speaker knows about critical theory and cultural studies. He has read Post-Colonial and Post-Structuralist theories but has become weary of an enterprise which he now sees as having been co-opted by the status quo instead of challenging it. He had been much influenced by Eliot but now he is not sure and has turned against him. He is troubled by the continuation of a crypto-colonialist discourse and looks for ways of getting Eliot's voice out of his head. He is deeply disturbed by the present-day socio-political turn to the right and disillusioned with his former studies in liberal culture. Chris Norris said that his engagement with Eliot started at school but that later he found Eliot's literary and political views objectionable. These views were clear from the start but they were initially excused for being a product of their time. However, Eliot seems to have held these views independently. Chris said that Eliot wanted to be more English than British and that he identified as 'a monarchist in politics, a classicist in literature, and an Anglo-Catholic in religion'. This extended strikingly to his ways of dressing up and behaving.

T.S. Eliot

Chris mentioned Eliot's doctrine of impersonality in poetry which involved the existence of what he called an 'objective correlative'. The poem, for him, arises from a whole complex range of otherwise unrelated thoughts and circumstances. But there was no agreement on this point in the meeting. Some thought that poetry is not devoid of personal experiences but that these experiences were generalised or universalised by the poet. It was claimed that Eliot's poems came from a profound insight into the light and darkness of human life. It was said that his poetry came from a mystical insight that was not affected by his political views. It was also suggested that perhaps over-rationalisation obscures the mystical voice and does not allow the reader to grasp poetic insight or the meaning.

Parallel Thoughts: Montaigne and Daoism

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 18th August.

It has been assumed in the West for a long time that philosophy is an exclusive property of western culture since the Greeks. The history of philosophy has been told with little reference to other cultures. But the picture has started to change. There are now more studies of other cultures, not as isolated phenomena, but in their parallelism and interaction with Western culture. *The Wednesday* meeting was pleased to welcome Stephen Leach and Gordon Warren to read their paper 'Michel de Montaigne as Accidental Daoist' which made a comparative study of the sixteenth century French philosopher Montaigne and two Chinese Daoist philosophers, Lao Tzu and Zhuangzi. They highlighted the similarities and differences between these philosophers. All three dealt primarily with the question of how to live rather than wrestling with questions of epistemology and metaphysics. All have a free-flowing style of thinking and writing. They also told anecdotes, but Montaigne in particular liked to enliven his writings with quotes.

Montaigne was heavily influenced by the Stoics before reading Sextus Empiricus and turning to scepticism late in his life. Some aspects of Stoicism correspond with the Daoist outlook, however, the Stoics believed in a Ratiocentric world where the Logos and Divine providence pervade all of nature. The Daoist philosophers on the other hand believed in trusting to nature and in living in harmony with it. Nature has healing power. The aim for the Daoist is to follow the 'Path' of virtue, via Wu-Wei (action-through-no action) whereby one attempts to act in harmony with nature. Whereas the Stoics called for self-control, the Daoist promoted letting the self free. According to Stephen and Gordon, this did not mean looking for a peace of mind but for spontaneous and appropriate responses.

All three philosophers focus on the present moment rather than a future event such as death. Zhuangzi says: 'where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth'. Montaigne agrees: 'Death mingles and fuses with our lives throughout. Decline anticipates death's hour and intrudes even into the course of our progress'.

Montaigne

Turning against stoicism, Montaigne writes: 'Philosophy orders us to have death ever before our eyes, to foresee and consider it before the time comes, and afterward gives us the rules and precautions to provide against our being wounded by this foresight and this thought. That is what those doctors do who make us ill so that they may have something on which to employ their drugs and art. If we have not known how to live, it is wrong to teach us how to die, and make the end inconsistent with the whole. If we have known how to live steadfastly and tranquilly, we shall know how to die in the same way'.

Interesting debate followed this presentation. The influence of Montaigne on Rousseau was noted. Nietzsche also admired Montaigne. A comparison between Daoist non-interference in state matters and Hobbes was also made. The Daoist, along with Montaigne however, identified presumption as a significant aggravating factor in the cause of war. Stephen and Gordon concluded their talk with the words of the *I Ching*: 'People may start from different places and follow different paths and yet arrive at the same place'.

Fiftieth Anniversary of *Theory of Justice*

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 25th August.

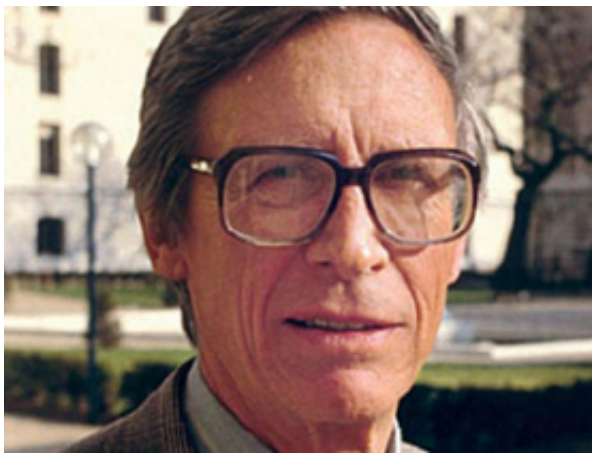
John Rawls book *Theory of Justice* is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Published in 1971, the book proved to be a landmark in ethical thinking. Elizabeth Pask gave a good review of the theory and suggested some development beyond Rawls' ideas. The talk was entitled '*Rawls' Theory of Justice as Fairness'*.

Rawls was writing in response to two main moral theories: Utilitarianism and Intuitionism. Utilitarianism is famous for its principle of happiness of the greater number. It takes the morally right act or policy as that which produces the greatest happiness for members of society.

Elizabeth said that: 'The problematic nature of utilitarian thinking is made apparent when a claim to justice in terms of a right to property, is used to defend a situation in which vast sums of wealth are accumulated by the few, while adequate fundamental resources remain unavailable to the many'.

Rawls dealt with justice and fairness. He looked to the social contract theories of Locke and Rousseau, and the moral thinking of disinterestedness, or duty, of Kant. Locke emphasised the right to property. Rousseau insisted on freedom. Kant grounded morality in practical reason and the idea of duty. He also maintained that people should be treated as ends in themselves and not as means. Rawls built on these theories but without dropping utilitarianism altogether.

Rawls formulated a principle he called the 'veil of ignorance'. This is an approach to social justice that puts 'rational decision-makers in the original position, or the state of nature, where they are denied any knowledge of their actual interests. This allows the legislatures to take a disinterested decision that aims for justice and not self-interest. But is this principle a reformulation of Kantian ethics and may be Rousseau's?



John Rawls

With reference to Honderich Elizabeth outlined the outcomes of Rawls's theory as follows:

'Each individual is to have a right to the greatest equal liberty compatible with a like liberty for all; social and economic inequalities are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity and such inequalities are justified only if they benefit the worst off (the difference principle)'. (Honderich: *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 745).
In spite of the many criticisms directed at Rawls, he has been credited with breaking the utilitarianism – intuitionism deadlock. Elizabeth said that later theorists have defined themselves in opposition to Rawls, while others have explained their theory by contrasting it with that of Rawls. But she suggested a development beyond Rawls, based on the idea of communitarianism and the thought of John Macmurray. Her concern is that fifty years after Rawls, we need 'a theory of justice that is appropriate to the political climate in which we find ourselves today. One where a plurality of values and differences in religious belief exists, and where notions of justice are disputed.'

During the discussion, there were objections to the abstract and theoretical nature of the theory. It didn't talk about the real causes of inequality but with the consequences. It has also been criticised for being procedural. The capability approach to ethics was suggested as an alternative to Rawls'.

(Elizabeth Pask is a retired nurse, and retired senior lecturer in Nursing and Health Care Ethics. She has a BA Hons Philosophy, from Birkbeck, London University, an MA in Values in Education, and a PhD in Nursing Ethics, from Kings College London. She was a founder member of the Clinical Ethics Committee at St Mary's in Paddington.**)**

Petit Mort

CHRIS **NORRIS**

A quickening pulse, an ecstasy
Of sense ensouled as eyes dilate
And vision blurs, a syncope
Of space-time as they consummate
The music's call, its crescent rate
Of change from yearning key to key.
The *Liebestod* – predestined fate
Of love's elect, yet its decree
Deep-rooted as the human tree,
The trunk whose growth-rings indicate,
Like those dark chords, the lovers' state
Of nescience, the lethargy
That creeps on them, the halting breath
And *Liebesschlaf*: a little death.

The Beast of AI

Its living statue stands high above the waves.
In the beautiful light of curved matter
it equips the bare skin of the planets
with its own substance.

Salt and honey of its mind
make the earth tremble, nothing
feels like an empty volcano
or an unpolished glass,
what crowns the distorted silence…

Its fingers knock at space,
smoke out clouds,
command the sea to hold its breath.
Soft seaweed bows in stormy threat,
before newly-bred drones
leave in increasing swarms,

their scales sparkle in the dying lightning
like falling stars,
open new wounds in the crystalline void.
Bare trees, scars, incomprehensible signs
guard the mutilated air.
Remember:
the last in Pandora's box was hope.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Collateral Damage

Dr ALAN XUEREB

'**KARIN**'
acrylic on canvas 20x30 cms
(2019)

This expressionist work was inspired by the 15 year old Karin Maria Grech. In 1977, she was killed by a letter-bomb addressed to her father. In the presence of her brother Kevin (then 10 years old), she opened the package, which she thought to be a present since it was covered in wrapping paper.

Karin was collateral damage. The real target was her father. However, this macabre incident should make us reflect upon the damage we impose on the more vulnerable in our society. Nearly always, the ones who pay the highest price as a consequence of our behaviour are those who cannot defend themselves. Those who are innocent and have nothing to do with whatever issue the rest of humanity is fighting about. We saw this during the pandemic. Our

senior citizens paid the price of our neglect. Just to refer to something very actual, in Afghanistan the collateral damage is composed of the vulnerable, especially children and older people. Any war one picks one sees this pattern emerging. Any violence, whether physical or psychological, is wrong, even if inflicted on someone who can defend himself or herself. However, it becomes infinitely more atrocious when committed on innocent people.

Every time I look at this piece, I remind myself to be extra careful about what I say and what I do in the presence of other people, especially in front of kids. Mine and others'. The expression 'collateral damage' is a military euphemism that alienates us linguistically and psychology from the guilt feeling and sadness we should experience when someone innocent pays the price for our wrongful act or perhaps for our inaction.

In an article in the *Journal of Military Ethics*, Anne Schwenkenbecher argues that in order for incidental harm to be permissible, an agent must make an effort to circumvent such harm even at higher cost to him- or herself. She argues that accidentally but negligently caused collateral damage may be just as difficult to excuse as incidental harm. Only if high precautionary standards of care are satisfied, can unintended harm to innocents – incidental or accidental – be allowable. Actually, such a strong commitment to circumventing harm to non-combatants may well lead us to question more generally and rethink more radically how violent conflicts ought to be fought, how military violence ought to be used and whether there are better ways of achieving those aims that we think are legitimate than those we are currently using.

What a beautiful world it would be if only we thought twice before saying that word or doing that thing. It does not need to be a war. We see conflict on social media, at home, in politics or at work, between family members, between friends. Collateral damage is becoming increasingly morally acceptable. Nevertheless, there is hope. That hope starts in our future generations. Let us make an effort to expose them to love, to art, to philosophy, to science, instead of exposing them to hatred, violence and greed. Thanks Karin, may your beautiful soul inspire others.

The Wednesday

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan
Contact Us:
rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Website:
www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:
The Wednesday Press, Oxford

Correspondences & buying The *Wednesday* books:

c/o The Secretary,
12, Yarnells Hill,
Oxford, OX2 9BD

We have published ten cumulative volumes of the weekly issues. To obtain your copy of any one of the cumulative volumes, please send a signed cheque with your name and address on the back £15 for each volume inside the UK

or £18 for readers outside the UK:

Please make your cheque out to '**The *Wednesday* Magazine**'

or **pay online**
Account Number:
24042417

Sort Code:
09-01-29

Sole Valuers In A World Of Facts

‘This weary world’s weighed down with woe’
Is what the pessimists all say,
And some who cannot bear it so
Choose suicide to end their stay.

Here worthlessness is twinned with worth
And hope is married to despair,
If some find only hell on earth
Yet others find their heaven there.

Such is, I see, our human state,
Sole valuers in a world of facts,
For we have language to create
The faculty to judge our acts.

When humankind is at an end
There’ll be no mind to count the score,
The good and bad will not contend
And praise and blame will be no more.

Edward Greenwood

The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.
To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk