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Editorial

On the Road to Wisdom

Wisdom and philosophy have a complex relationship. The meaning of 'philosophy' is the love of wisdom. But the experience of philosophy over two and a half millennia shows that this is not the case. Wisdom is not co-extensive with philosophy. Someone who does not have a special wisdom or behave ethically could be a philosopher. The true friend of philosophy may be closer to the sage. Bridging the gap between the conceptual thinking of the philosopher and the visionary wisdom of the sage may provide philosophy with the spiritual energy that it needs to sustain itself and help its development.

The above is borne out by the history of philosophy. At the roots of philosophy, or prior to philosophy, there was a mythological vision of the world which latterly became more defined in religious terms. The birth of philosophy, with the pre-Socratics in the Western experience, showed signs of the mixture of mytho-religious vision and proto-conceptual thinking. Myth still played a role in Plato's thinking but was gradually eroded by the technical development of philosophy with defining categories and rigorous proofs, as in Aristotelian philosophy. Conceptual thinking got the upper hand. Plato himself played a role in this by opposing philosophy to poetry. Poetry in his time dealt in mythology, such as in Homer and Hesiod. It was more in touch with ordinary consciousness and touched the life of its audience. This is not the case with the technical philosophy that succeeded it.

But wisdom has not vanished from the scene. It has survived in religious thinking, spirituality generally and the teachings of the sages, especially in Eastern thought. Wisdom stayed as a parallel road to philosophy and in a few cases interacting with it, such as the influence of mystical writing on German Idealism.

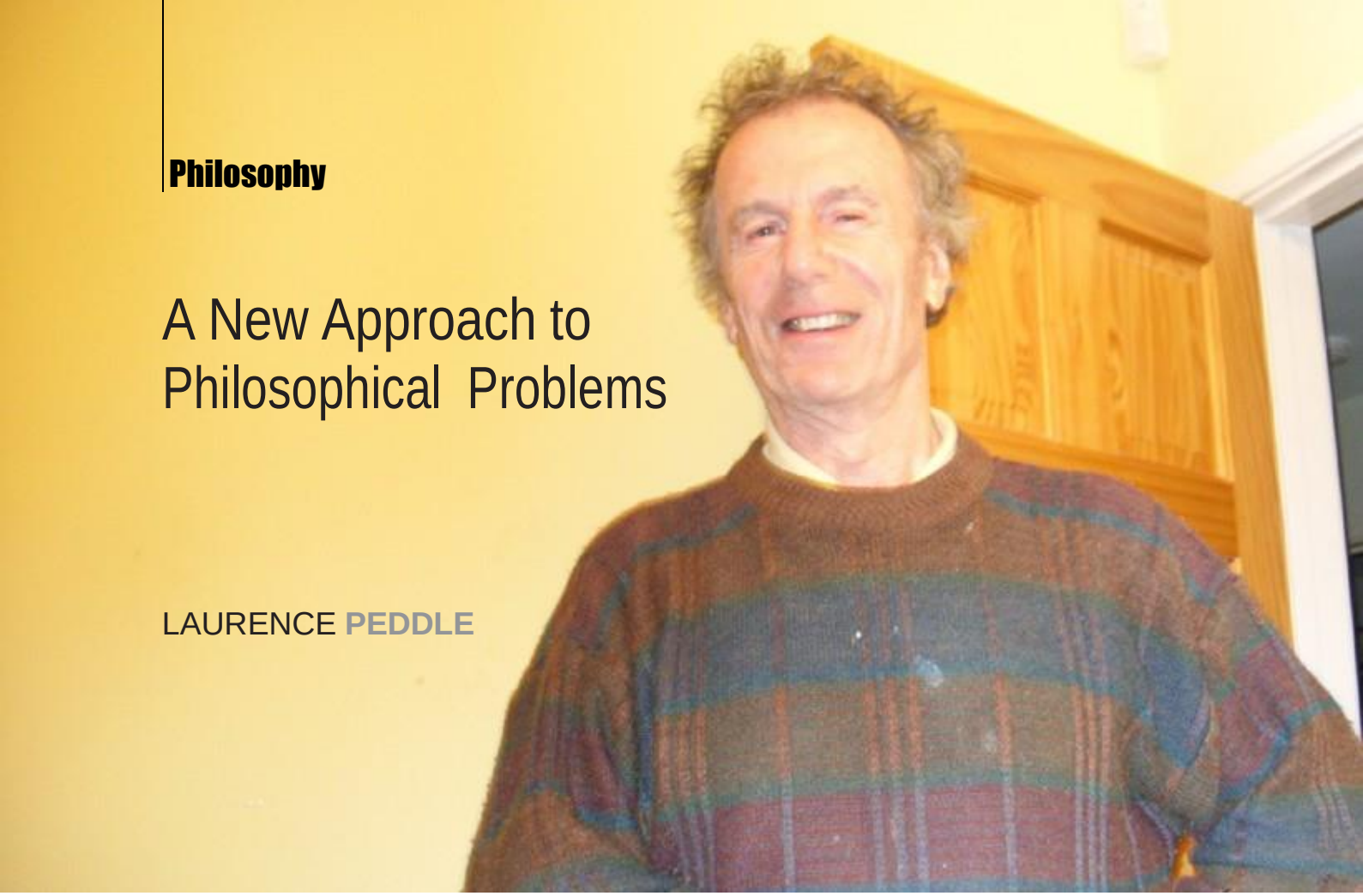
I wish to suggest here that the gap between wisdom and philosophy is not unbridgeable. The philosopher could turn towards the sage. This could come after a crisis in philosophy or after a severe personal crisis of an individual philosopher. Perhaps one undergoes a crisis of faith, in the religious sense, or the faith in what one is doing. What might set a philosopher on the road to wisdom is a vision, a waking call, or accidental encounters with interesting people, artworks or poetry. Personally, I didn't go through a crisis, but my encounter with Nietzsche, in philosophy, and Ibn al-Arabi, in mysticism, were my awakening call. Both writers are challenging, and they may seem to be opposed. However, I found them both searching for an unusual truth beyond the simple faith or unfaith.

I want to point out that the road to wisdom entails sacrifices. The sacrifice means that the wisdom you gain is of the highest value for you. The Austrian poet, Rilke wrote an excellent advice to a young poet, suggesting the following:
'Go into yourself. Examine the reason that bids you to write; check whether it reaches its roots into the deepest region of your heart, admit to yourself whether you would die if it should be denied you to write. This above all: ask yourself in your night's quietest hour: must I write? Dig down into yourself for a deep answer. And if it should be affirmative, if it is given to you to respond to this serious question with a loud and simple "I must", then construct your life according to this necessity; your life right into its most inconsequential and slightest hour must become a sign and witness of this urge.'

This is a life and death commitment to your writing/ philosophising. It will involve sacrifice, but it will lead to wisdom. I look forward to a future time when philosophy and wisdom join hands so that the philosopher instantiates the sage.

The Editor

A New Approach to Philosophical Problems



LAURENCE PEDDLE

My aim in this article is twofold. First, to provide a personal account of the conception, gestation and birth of the two-volume work the writing of which has been my labour of love for many years. Second, to outline my system-based treatment of traditional epistemological problems. Of the two volumes – or books – *The Mystery beyond Knowledge: Scepticism, Intentionality, and the Non-Conscious* was published a few months ago, with *Self, System and the Non-Conscious: The Further Metaphysics of Meaning and Mystery* following in its wake a few weeks from now. My claim is that within their pages will be found not so much a solution as a resolution of the problems, the difference becoming apparent as the pages are turned.

Starting with the personal account, perhaps I may quote from the preface from Beyond Knowledge:

The genesis of this book is not without interest, concerning as it does the world's longest railway station name. During a tutorial many years ago, a student mentioned that the station Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwyllllantysiliogogogoch − was in Wales and that she had visited it. When I seemed to remember reading that the name was descriptive, she quipped that in any case no-one knew what it meant, for by the time one had read it to the end the beginning had been forgotten. "Perhaps one loses one's train of thought." another student, in so many words, piped up, and we laughed; but I was already, as it were, presenting my ticket.

For what had struck me with the full force, not of a train but of an epiphany, was that the uttering of a sentence is an event like any other, so that its understanding is conditional upon memory and expectation. What, then, of the implications for scepticism about induction and knowledge of the past? And if one such condition obtains, should there not be others, perhaps forming a system? From this point of departure via my PhD research at Cardiff University I worked out an anti-sceptical theory of knowledge, various parts of which were subjected to scrutiny by my peers at seminars and conferenc-

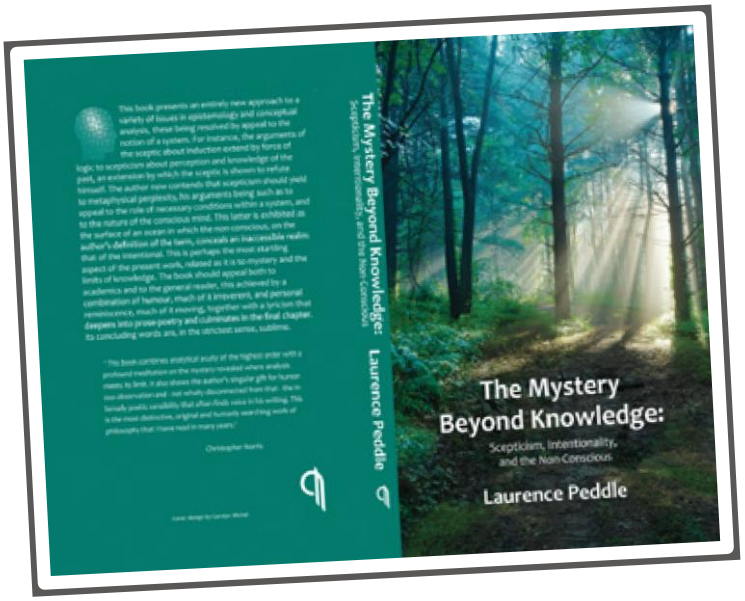
es over a period of several years. I benefited greatly from those discussions but the thesis about necessary conditions operating within a system over varying intervals of space and time has withstood criticism and has never hit the buffers. From departure to destination has taken twenty years, but this, I believe, has enabled the passengers to bond into a coherent group of arguments and themes.

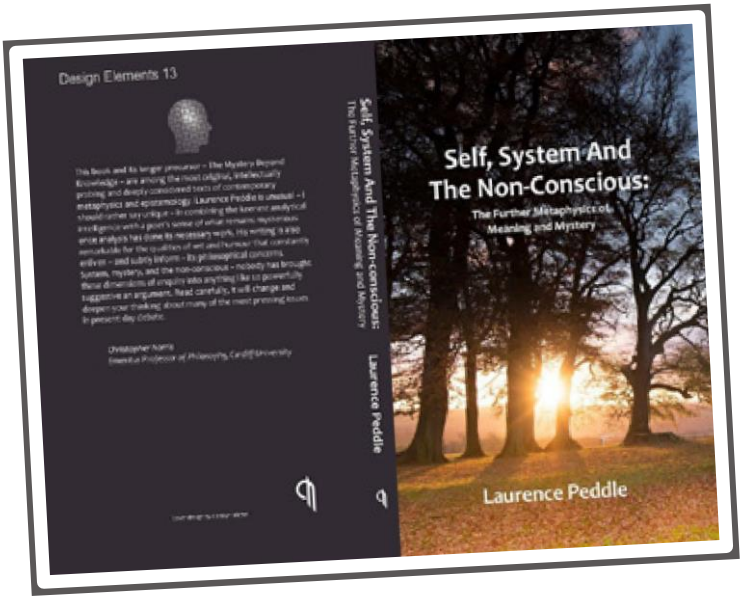
Two decades is a long time to be stuck in an academic railway carriage, and the rushing past of so many years very nearly proved fatal to the project. In 2020 a serious illness came out of nowhere and a collision ensued, whereupon my former doctoral supervisor, Professor Christopher Norris, dragged me from the wreckage and took over the reins, not of the train but of the project by which the writing of the book was nearing completion.

Turning from the personal to the work itself, I propose a system-based solution to traditional epistemological problems and, on the same basis, a non-empiricist theory of knowledge. The system referred to is that by which the concepts of intention, induction, perception, avowals, the past and other minds are interconnected, interdependent and governed by necessary conditions of application. By way of illustration, suppose that I report that I am looking at this keyboard, the palm rest of which I see as curved, my seeing of it being an occurrent perceptual event. Yet what I see at one moment or from one perspective is evidentially accountable to further such experience. If I move my head a little to the side I expect the palm rest to continue to look curved and any newly visible part of it to jigsaw with the old. Such micro-expectations, as I call them, are intrinsic to perception.

Not only does the problem of induction encompass perceptual expectation, but it may also be shown that Hume's anti-inductive arguments, radically interpreted, challenge one's knowledge of the past. If this is correct, the thesis that nothing justifies predictive belief threatens the whole of knowledge, an extension which renders it strictly unbelievable, this being enough to condemn it.

Arguing in this way, I maintain that the induction problem must be reinterpreted as concerning not whether but how we know, so that the difficulties





we face, albeit confusedly, are those of analysis. This, it seems to me, is in some ways the approach we perhaps unwittingly already take, the validity of empirical knowledge, including the prediction intrinsic to it, being presupposed in the statement of the problem and in its attempted solutions. Probability solutions, for example, take for granted that individual balls, dice, urns, bags and ravens are re-identifiable.

Let us now go into a little more detail, the place to start being with the problem of one's knowledge of the past, this to be resolved as follows. The first step is to condense the sceptic's views into a single representative sentence: "I have no reason to believe propositions about past events." Then the

sceptic's case depends upon his ability to provide arguments, and these have to be remembered if any arguing is to take place. Moreover, the sentence itself relies on memory, for the sceptic has to agree that in uttering it he remembers the way in which it begins. He has to know whether he said "I have no reason" or "I have good reason". There is no escape from these epistemic commitments; therefore, the sceptic necessarily refutes himself.

Taking this further, consider the possibility of checking, revising, confirming or disconfirming one's memories, given how fallible they can be. But still, each of these possibilities in relation to particular memories depends on taking others for granted. For instance, I can recall what I had for breakfast only if I remember the memory from one moment to the next. Even to say that I am losing my memory, if I mean what I say, is to remember what I said. Summing up, it is only particular memories that can be in question, not memory in general.

The problem of induction, too, is amenable to a system-based approach, the core statement being as follows. "All prediction is unjustified." Now ask the sceptic whether he knew in advance that the predicate would be "unjustified" as opposed to "justified". Clearly, he would say that he did, which ought to give him pause, and all the more so if he acquiesces in the view that perception is predictive. This rules out any reference on his part to physical objects, perhaps in the context of defying us to show that their past behaviour will continue into the future. That is, if he challenges us in that way then he implies that such objects can be perceived and identified; but since this involves prediction, he necessarily refutes himself.

Finally, and very briefly, the notion of mystery will now be introduced, and in connection with memory. Suppose that the sceptic about memory accepts that by his own argument he refutes himself. Then he may well be dissatisfied with that solution, for it does not consist in a proof that one enjoys direct epistemic access to past events. But even if he concedes that no such access is possible, he may still be in thrall to philosophical perplexity, not so much about what we know as about what it is to know it. This, however, lives next door to mystery. For suppose that I now recollect opening a present on my fifth birthday, for instance, and that in my mind's eye I see the wrapping paper come off, where in terms of the phenomenological this equates with mental imagery. If at this level the sceptic tries to reduce memory to mental event, as if it were a sensation, then it may be shown that he refutes himself and that memory is irreducibly intentional. But the fact remains that remembering a past event involves a present conscious process, its intentionality being wholly inscrutable. Since the sceptic's perplexed interrogation of the concept of the past never forces it to reveal its identity, the spotlight should turn to system-based analysis — but we have seen that post-analysis the sceptic remains perplexed.

If that analysis fails to satisfy him, despite his not being able to fault it, and given that there are no longer any problems the solving of which might succeed where analysis fails, the only possibility still standing is that of reinterpreting philosophical perplexity as unquiet awareness of metaphysical mystery. To that end, I shall now introduce an altogether novel notion: that of the non-conscious.

Imagine that I start counting the natural numbers out loud and that I have just said "5". Each number is no sooner said than it falls away into the past, its utterance momentary. So my co-occurrent conscious experience was also momentary. Now consider a conscious event that seems to last longer, such as my looking at this monitor in front of me. But suppose that at the same time I resume counting. Then my visual experience turns out to be a sequence of conscious events, each of which is momentary. But at any such moment the past does not exist, nor the future.

The insight to be gained is difficult to bring into close focus, for language tends to take a wider view. We say that we are now looking at this monitor, the reference being not to an instant but to the continuing present, so that our conscious awareness manifests itself as having duration. We do not notice that this is true in one way and false in another. To render it more noticeable, suppose that when I call a number out it appears momentarily on the screen, its disappearance followed by my calling out the next number, again mo-

The Welsh station with the longest name

mentarily screened. Now consider what common sense would say: that the understanding involved, for instance in my knowing which number to call next, is purely a matter of my conscious grasp of the natural number sequence and of how to recite it. But this is demonstrably false; for at any point in the performance there is just the single number said or displayed, this being the only possible conscious object. Clearly, it adds nothing to my understanding, not even at that point; for a number displayed, whether momentarily or not, indicates not at all its successor: perhaps the next number after "5" is "7", as with the odd number sequence.

Similarly, I cannot determine that successor, or anything else, from a single moment of consciousness – but this is the form that all consciousness takes, with one moment followed by another, but never more than one moment obtaining. It follows that understanding, and intentionality in general, belong elsewhere: hence the positing of a non-conscious realm. It is here, in the computer room of the intellect, as it were, that my grasp of what I am doing when I call the numbers out is operational. It is in these terms, too, that the fact of recollective memory begins to be less perplexing. My experience of my fifth birthday involved the non-conscious, as does my present recollection, thereby providing the link between them.

Conclusion

According to the theory I have sketched out, perception, memory, prediction and intentionality in general belong within a system in which they interconnect, as in the example of the keyboard. Within that system particular instances of each of them can be called into question only if the validity or veridicality of other instances is taken for granted. Put another way, the system must be self-justifying – or, better, such that the question of justification arises only internally and in particular cases. A distinctive feature of this approach is that the problems have been resolved in such a way that the associated perplexity remains in place. The difference is that it now partakes of the metaphysical, the epistemological having been dealt with, yielding as it does to an abiding sense of mystery.

(Sadly, Dr Laurence Peddle passed away last week after a long struggle with illness.)

John Dewey: Education and fortifying a democratic society

ROB ZINKOV

Dewey is a naturalist and very influenced by Darwin and the sciences. He strives for a physical explanation for different phenomena. He views education and learning as part of that natural physiological and psychological process of growth, which all organisms undertake. Dewey's background as a scientist leads him to create one of the first laboratory schools where theories of education were systematically studied. Interestingly, unlike what we expect of many scientists and naturalists today, he was an idealist for most of his life and only became something resembling a materialist near the end of his life.

Education is an essential component of preserving and evolving a society. For a society to continue to function, the previous generation must teach the upcoming generation the skills, knowledge, and values essential to its function. Whatever your vision of what society ought to be, education will be a requirement for there to be people that can fill the roles that society requires. And in an increasing complex society there is a need for this education to increasingly be formalised if we are to stand a chance of preserving everything we got.

There are multiple theories of education with much of the literature using the terms Traditional and Progressive. While their meaning is clear in the literature it is very easy for people to think they agree on what these terms mean. In this folk understanding, Traditional is whatever the local state school taught, and Progressive is however I wish it were taught. Instead of Traditional and Progressive, I will try to use the more descriptive terms of Social Efficiency and Liberal education from later literature.

In the Social Efficiency theory, schools need to provide a vocational training so that citizens may be transformed into rank-and-file producers. In the liberal education the view is that students must be prepared in all subjects so that they may be masters of their own destiny and reach their full potential. Education exists to serve the current and future needs of the student. The difference is not just in centring the student's needs. Dewey argues that without a liberal education there is a tendency to funnel students from certain backgrounds into certain vocations which is intrinsically classist. This can be seen in the way different schools seem to prepare students to be future leaders and others seem to be prepared to follow the orders of those leaders.

Dewey can be said to be in the liberal school but still in keeping with the overall goal of balancing the needs of the student and the needs of the society - something which every school of education must deal with.

There are also different theories of learning. There is the bucket theory in which the mind is seen as a database where facts are entered. Here the teacher devises a curriculum and dictates to the students. The mind is merely to be filled with the right content. The only good thing Dewey can say about the bucket theory is that at least it acknowledges that people can be systematically educated.

There is the constructivist theory according to which students build their own theories from the experiences they have. Here the teacher's role is to offer guided experiences to aid in learning. This is sometimes called assimilation as new knowledge is connected to old, and accommodation as old knowledge is recontextualised with respect to the new knowledge.

There is also independent learning where the student self-directs their own learning. This is based in the idea that the student's interests and experiences will guide them to what they should learn. The problems with this are that students do not know what concepts they need to learn ahead of time, leading to poor planning and incorrectly sized intermediary goals which hinder learning.

Generally these days, formal education follows the Social Efficiency theory of education and the constructivist theory of learning.

Because of the role Dewey sees for education he takes a fundamentally constructivist approach with elements of the independent approach. Furthermore, he saw education as experiential and that the school should mimic the relations students would have in society. Students learn best if provided with an environment like those in which they would expect to use this knowledge - and not just social knowledge but also social habits, behaviours and habits that will let them thrive in society and competently preserve it. Additionally, by striving to mimic a natural social setting it helps the students develop social intelligence. Going beyond this the school can be a place for social reform as students are taught not just to preserve the societies they will enter but also improve them. So, it is a cultivated environment that strives to mimic the salient aspects of our society without irrelevant details that would only hinder learning.

This is also precisely the environment in which we cultivate democratic values. Society and their cultures form through communication. Consensus and agreement on values is reached through communication. All of the skills to safeguard and maintain democracy are first taught and nurtured at school.

Some of Dewey's most famous thoughts on democracy and education are in response to Walter Lippman's *The Phantom Public*. Lippman's piece contends that the world is too complicated for the public to understand. They have to act with their flawed understanding of the world. A trained technocratic elite is needed to rule over people.

Dewey responds to this by articulating that the state - though it claims to represent all - is in fact run by private individuals with their own interests, who cannot help but act in those interests. Only in a democratic society is the public organised so that the state is forced to act within their interests. In that sense not to speak of a democratic state as much as a democratically organised society.

Dewey then explains the state and its role in society and the mechanisms by which a state can be responsive to the needs of the public. Dewey's view is that the state manages the consequences of public actions that affect the public, and adjudicate

John Dewey

their differences.

Democracy originates not so much in the public coming together as in religious, scientific, and economic developments. Early democratic movements were motivated by freedom from crumbling institutions like the church and monarchy in support of individual autonomy. This reflected the power shifting from the nobility to a rising merchant class.

This liberal individualism, though, is not enough to sustain or maintain a democracy. In freeing people from old institutions it has also annihilated communities and community bonds as well as alienating citizens from their neighbours.

A democratic society like any other society needs to be preserved. To be preserved it also requires knowledge, social customs, and habits. If we are derelict in our duties prepare students to conduct themselves within a democratic society, we risk losing it. In this way education is essential not only to keep a functioning society but also a free and open one.

(A full version of this paper was presented to The Wednesday meeting 12th January 2022)

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During January 2022

Written by RAHIM **HASSAN**

Does Philosophy Help Us to Live More Wisely?

Members of *The Wednesday* meeting have been busy during January discussing the following question: How has philosophy as the love of wisdom helped each of us to live more wisely? The question, which was raised by Chris Seddon, proved fruitful and was discussed over two meetings (5th and 26th January) and there is a third meeting planned for March. Replies to the question came in the form of confession of members about their experience of philosophy and had a personal touch.

Chris Seddon said that he came to philosophy through a personal crisis. He was trained in mathematics, logic and music but was encouraged by a friend to add Philosophy to his degree. After a career in computer systems programming, he developed extreme mental health difficulties. During the subsequent mental breakdown, he realised that his logical mind was not adequate in itself to deal with life. But psychotherapy, converting from atheism to Christianity, re-reading classics such as the Tao Te Ching, and discovering the Twelve Step recovery programme, all helped. He also turned towards the early work of Russell, Wittgenstein and Gödel.

Chris Seddon concluded that 'when I recall the unique concatenation of experiences that has, gently and not so gently, provided both the urgent need, and the opportunity of learning, to live wisely, I see that whatever else I have been or will be, I must always be a philosopher'.

Chris Seddon

It seems that the way leading to philosophy is shaped by a crisis. Sometime the crisis is a matter of life and death. It was Camus who said that the central question for philosophy is suicide. One of our members considered that seriously when he was a child. He said:

'As a child I was in and out of hospitals all the time and, at one point, wanted to commit suicide. I did not succeed. But I learned something:

(1) Death is not what it seems. It is not the enemy. Not something to be afraid of, but an escape if ever I needed one. This means I can simply do whatever I like. It does not matter what the consequences are. If it gets too bad, I can just commit suicide. Game over. So:
(2) When I was ready to give up life, life turned out to be mere possibility. I can do as I please. Surprisingly perhaps, I think I did not do anything wilder than I would have done. It seems I was actually always already doing what I wanted to do.

At the time, I did not realize all this so explicitly. I just went back to school, and life went on as usual. But that life was not satisfying. Worldly success is irrelevant to being happy. So, I started a search for what had happened to me back then, at the hospital. I tried everything and looked everywhere, and ended up with the Tao, the Buddha, Nisargadatta, Byron Katie, and others like it. I realized they were all saying the same thing. Even the Bible! They were trying to articulate the same insight I had had as a child, but had largely ignored up to then. Namely, to just be, empty and free, and let it all happens, spontaneously and effortlessly. In other words: I am not doing anything, I am being done, and that is fine.

Ever since, I am only trying to articulate this insight ever-more accurately. (Nobody listens, you say? That's not the point.).'

There were many other answers, and I may ask participants to write their experiences so that we can publish them in subsequent issues of *The Wednesday*.

Human Nature and Evil: Xunzi, Xìng, & Xin

URSULA MARY BLYTHE

Xunzi's philosophy is often approached through his controversial "Chapter 23", entitled: *Xing'E* (Human Nature is Evil) which was the most cited text until more recent scholarship. In Chapter 22, Xunzi argued against the notion that "when people engage in learning, this manifests the goodness of their xìng" (p. 292). Hence, he set the scene for his claim that human nature (xìng) is bad, so goodness is a matter of "deliberate efforts" (ibid). Xunzi warns of natural or instinctive human desires such as a fondness for sensual pleasure, profit, and corruption. He argues that xìng lacks an innate moral compass, so left to its own devices falls into contention and disorder, which is why he characterises xìng as inherently bad. Ritual (lǐ) is an essential part of a stable society, as well as studying the classics and crafting one's character through "deliberate efforts" (Xunzi in Van Norden, 2005: 298-306). In contrast, his predecessor (Mengzi) promoted moral "reflection" based upon humans holding innate dispositions towards a more virtuous life, while not denying the value of the classics, lǐ, and deliberate ethical-cultivation.

The 'heart/mind' (xin) is the bedrock of Xunzi's philosophy, as this powerful combination links the internal human to the external world (i.e. the self to the state). He emphasises diverse mental processes related to 'xin', such as appreciating that thinking often draws simultaneously on feeling and reason. In Western psychology, we may refer to this faculty as a type of emotional intelligence. For Xunzi, moral cultivation is about "correctly perceiving" (thinking) and "applying the dao" (action). He claims that we come "to know the dao" by means of our heart/mind, which has three fundamental attributes, namely: emptiness (xu), unity, (yi), and tranquility (jing). His discussion of 'tian' sets up his argument where he borrowed these terms from earlier discourse, mainly from Zhuangzi (Goldin, 1999), but Xunzi reveals a more complex analysis of heart/mind.

Xunzi

According to Xunzi, the 'xin' is the chief organ that commands other human facets due to enabling self-consciousness (Lai, 2017: Ch.3). As the heart/mind can control itself as well as all other bodily organs, it is the font of 'artifice', or the deliberate actions needed to transform the morally deficient xing, for example:

> *When the heart/mind reasons and the other faculties put it into action - this is called 'artifice'* (Xunzi, 22.1b).

Xunzi asserts that the 'xin' is capable of overriding every human compulsion, if we deliberately focus on the correct moral 'patterns' through the Confucian dao. He believes that humans have the essential faculties to recognise corruption, but if we allow ourselves to tread an immoral path, we cannot blame our emotions or desires. Rather, we must accept that our 'xin' has failed to exercise the necessary discipline or self-control. For Xunzi, when we speak of 'we', we are referring to our heart/mind. For this is the receptacle where these all-encompassing moral deliberations occur. Like all Confucians, Xunzi concludes with the importance of taking personal responsibility. Fundamentally, Xunzi's conception of the heart/mind also figures in a distinctive correspondence that he hypothesises between human nature (xìng) and statecraft. Indeed, Xunzi and his Confucian predecessor both reflected upon the resources available to humanity for ethical-cultivation (xiushen), but they each articulated contrasting views regarding the 'essence' of xìng at different periods during the Warring States.

(***This is a summary of a paper by Ursula Mary Blythe presented to The Wednesday meeting 19th January 2022).***

From his Point

The kitchen is hers
and the stove is hers, as it is warm,
for the warmth comes from her,

from her womb that grew the child,
who is hers,
though the seeds in his sac
were his.

As his are the boots and the axe
that cuts the wood into logs
which she burns in her stove.

The tea that he drinks is his,
unless it is drunk in the kitchen
that is hers
and therefore, not his, when

he's cooking the steak
that is his,
which is tough and fibrous,
rather than soft and pliable,
like the child,
who won't stop whining
in the ear
that is his.

Though its hunger belongs to her,
as does the bed and the dresser and the mirror,
but the hammer and saw
and the house he built
he guesses are his,

for he wanted them in a safe place,
where bad things would not enter
like the illness of other people,
who were not his,

only the ache
he carries in his belly
of the many mixed emotions
of loving her from the start,

when being sucked into a fire pit
and falling right into it.
And all he knows that the burn was his,
this blaze of the woman
bent now in the garden
to smell the coriander,

as though she does not know,
his head is split with hating her
and loving her,
for she is an ache and a kink and also
the furrow, the groove and the rut
and birth and death and peace and strife…
And no, it is not easy
though he'd go on and live life.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

A Courtesy

CHRIS **NORRIS**

It is Proust's courtesy to spare
the reader the embarrassment of
believing himself cleverer than
the author.

T.W. Adorno, 'Dwarf Fruit',
in *Minima Moralia*.

Adorno

1

No doubt of it, a courtesy in Proust
To grant his readers that illusory sense
Of knowing better, that deceptive boost
To self-esteem when maybe confidence
Was running low or nerves becoming tense
Through this unprecedented test of their
Devotion, memory, intellect, and – whence
The courtesy – their eagerness to share
That magic zone: *mémoire involontaire*.

No thought of mine but wings it home to roost
In my next thought, no point but gives offence
To some aspiring ephebe, someone used
To less demanding tasks, yet not so dense
As to neglect how thinking must dispense
With all the usual props if it's to bear
The Proustian trial and, after that, commence
On memory-paths beset with many a snare
For those with *trouvailles* only to declare.

Proust

2

A courtesy in Proust, in me the sign
Of kamikaze intellect, of thought
Resolved to spite itself and take the shine
Off any hopeful types who might disport
Themselves with positives, or think to court
The fool yea-sayers with a craven show
Of optimism judged the proper sort
To win their favour, silence doubts, and go
Down well with those self-licensed ‘in the know’.

I lack that Proustian courtesy, count mine
At times a monstrous calling, one with naught
Of kindliness about it, yet repine

The less for knowing what its converse brought,
What came of those false positives that taught
So many to shun courtesies and grow,
At power’s behest, skins thick enough to thwart
The sympathetic impulses we owe
To others’ part in memory’s ebb and flow.

"Earth 2.0"; oil on canvas (50cmx70cm)

"Earth 2.0" Humanity as a spacefaring species

Dr ALAN XUEREB

I have to admit that I am a big sci-fi fan. I find particularly philosophically intriguing the series Star Trek. The latter series was not only entertaining but also technologically and culturally prophetic in so many ways. However, perhaps the best drama sci-fi ever is Battlestar Galactica (BSG) the reimagined series. This series has even made it to the UN. From the very beginning, BSG has dealt with moral issues – what it means to be human, the rule of law vis-à-vis military might, the arguable merits of armed insurgency – issues that find themselves on the UN's docket almost every day. Nevertheless, the most scientifically faithful and most recent personal favourite is Interstellar. These three productions have one thing in common, and that is that humanity has at some point to become spacefaring. The latest efforts to find another Earth through astronomy and the plans to send a manned mission to Mars appear to be baby steps in that direction.

If humanity becomes an interplanetary species, an array of philosophical and other issues will arise. The primary technical issue I see is that of gravity. For example, Mars has a much lower gravity than Earth. This means

that it would affect the humans living there permanently in terms of blood circulation, musculoskeletal functions and so on. Of course, this will eventually be overcome through generational adaptation. But the philosophical question is whether this is morally acceptable since it would mean that many people will suffer and die prematurely as a result of these planetary conditions.

The political-legal-philosophical question would arise as to who would be the owner of the planet. Imagine if it is a private corporation that sends the first human colonists there. Would this be akin to the role played by the Weyland Corporation in another of my favourites, Prometheus? Other eventual philosophical/moral questions arise if we decide to terraform Mars for example.

The alternative to the Martian quest, which could be actually not mutually exclusive, but could run in parallel, is to find another Earth. Possibly a planet already teeming with life. You know how the saying goes, where there is water is probably life. There are trillions of planets with water out there. The issues abovementioned will become more complex and more difficult to answer. Even if only vegetable and/or animal life would be found on such a planet, do we have the right to *invade* it and possibly bringing our own pathogens to that planet, with the risk of wiping out alien whole vegetable and/or animal species? This *invasion* issue becomes more convoluted if sentient beings are found who are less advanced than we are. Think what we have done to the Indios. In Star Trek the Prime Directive protects unprepared civilizations from the dangerous tendency of well-intentioned starship crews to introduce advanced technology, knowledge, and values before they are ready. Whether you believe it or not, this directive exists in real life. Professors Scharf and Roberts remarked on the resemblance of the Prime Directive to article 2, paragraph 7, of the United Nations Charter. That provision states that "[n]othing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state," except insofar as the Security Council may take enforcement action under the Charter. Non-intervention is also a principle of customary international law.

All these reflections (and more) were triggered by a painting I have just finished, entitled “Earth 2.0”.

The Wednesday

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The Library

In memory of Georg Simmel who wrote so well on Love

I arrive around the last stamped date,
find a chair in a niche, and some books -
borrowing again, always in debt;
resting in a state of restlessness;
straining the reach of words
for some hoarded proof of me
from tomes that remain preoccupied
by the weight of their own thoughts.
Part of the argument of this house
is to set down on a plaque, where mullions
and mouldings declare their original design.
I finger slipcases, riffle through pages,
I confront, I co-opt, I combine.

Erica Warburton

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