

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Against Dogmatism

Dogmatism, as ordinarily understood, means believing something to be true and taking that truth to be absolute. This applies in matters of religion and philosophy. More specifically, dogmatism has been understood philosophically as a belief in an independent entity or reality. Dogmatism as applied to the concept of truth will consider truth to be some sort of metaphysical entity that is located not in the mind nor in the world of sensible objects but in a third realm, the realm of ideas. This world has been taken as eternal, immutable, and superior to the sensible world.

Against such conceptions of truth, many ideas have been suggested within analytical philosophy to undermine the attraction of such a conception of truth. These are called deflationary theories. The aim in most cases is to do away with such metaphysical notions as truth, meaning and value. But if truth is not in another realm nor in the material realm, where then could it be?

An intellectually interesting alternative is to say that truth is a social construct. This claim could take two forms, a strong and a weak version. The strong version denies the objective reality of truth that is assumed in the dogmatic belief. Truth is taken on this view to be just a social construct. Another version of this thesis denies the notions of facts and truth. Instead, it replaces them by the notion of interpretation. Truth, according to this view, is perspectival and the best perspective is the one that promotes life and creativity.

There is an interesting twist to this view. Interpretation itself is said to be grounded in the health and abundance of the subject or in the opposite states of sickness and poverty. Truth is on this view located not in consciousness itself but in the body with its instincts and drives. What matters here is the power of life or the will to power. It is, at its most basic level, the force that forms everything in existence, including

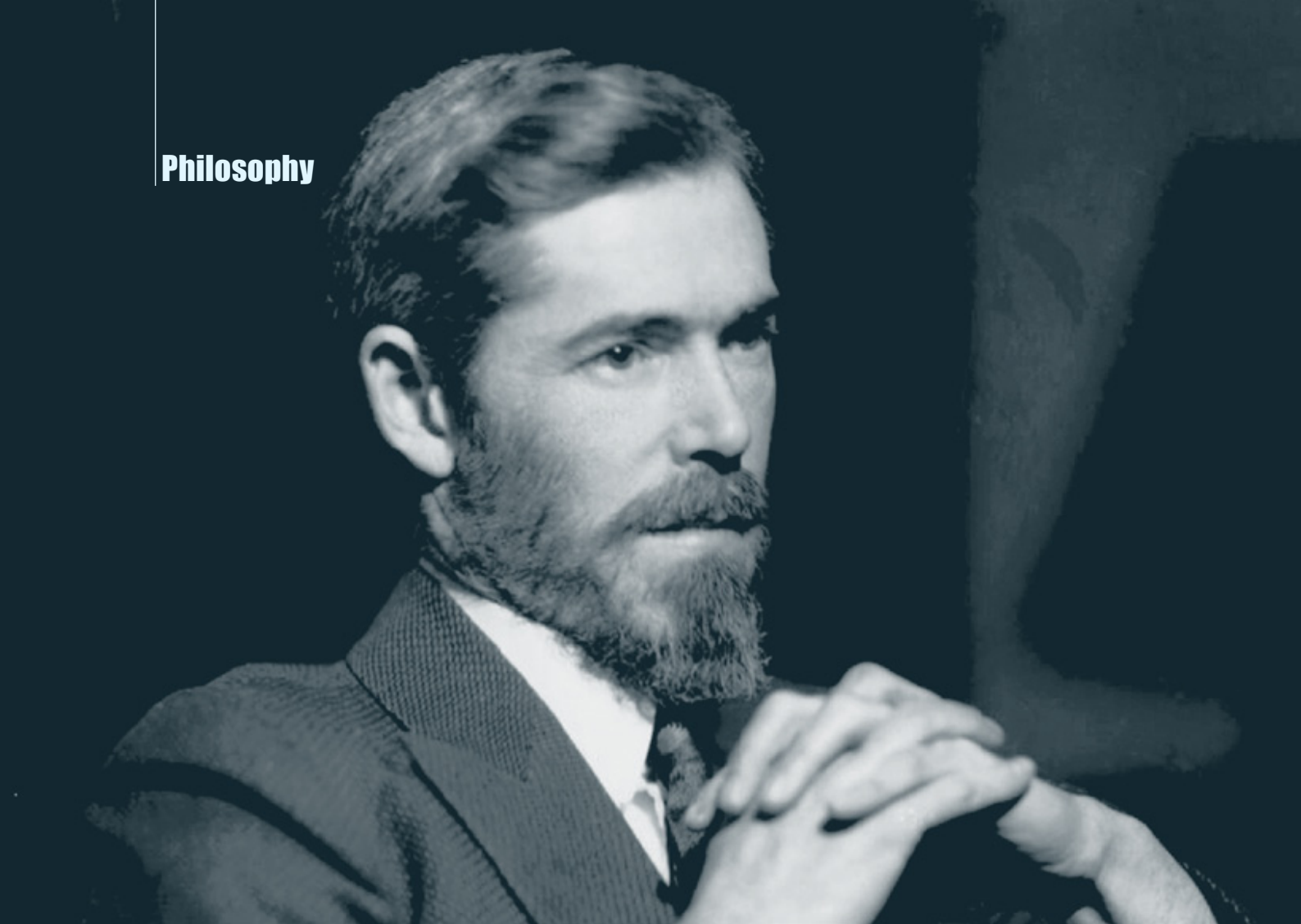
the human being. This is on the physical level. On the ethical level, truth is not contrasted with falsity but judged according to its capability of promoting life and expanding it or denying it and limiting it. It is related to the activity of the subject who raises a question or suggests a view: is the subject active or reactive?

The weak version agrees with the dogmatic view that there is a truth in a metaphysical sense but denies that any one party has the right to truth at a given a moment of history. Rather, truth is considered as developing all the time in a conversational way.

Truth according to these views is linked to consistency or coherence rather than the correspondence version of truth. In its extreme form, reality – the world of facts – could be put into doubt, perhaps opening the way to a post-truth society with the danger of the demolition of the border between truth and non-truth.

All the above suggests a weakening of the notion of truth and a loosening of dogmatic attitudes. However, the irony of the matter is that these views could, in turn, become dogmatic themselves. Some objectors to dogmatism connect this notion with religion and think that by rejecting religion they have achieved open-mindedness. However, they may become dogmatic in their views and cannot see the alternatives. The main idea I wish to suggest and highlight here is that of revisability. I think that no view is immune to criticism and revision. Revisability is in my view connected to intellectual honesty. Opposing a view that you think wrong does not give you the right to be dogmatic. Holding on to the notion of truth, on any of the above conceptions, is important to philosophy. Philosophy is a search for truth and not about practical results.

The Editor



John Macmurray: A Revolutionary Philosopher

The Problem of Evil and the Need for a Philosophy of Action*

Late last year I received the text of some unpublished lectures given by John Macmurray in 1944 on 'The Problem of Evil'. To deal with evil, the lectures set out the need for a philosophy from the standpoint of action.

JEANNE WARREN

Each of us, if we are reflective, has a more or less worked-out view of human life and how it works. Our view accompanies us as we go through life. It will contain elements which we hold in common with others in the culture in which we live, as well as elements unique to ourselves. In times of change we become more aware of competing views, because we are consciously looking for guidance in new situations. The present is such a time, as we confront political changes, together with climate change and a global pandemic. World War II was another such time, because the reality of the Holocaust ended a long period of optimistic idealism about human progress.

In 1944 John Macmurray gave a series of lectures on 'The Problem of Evil' (1). They were delivered in an academic setting and never published. They provide a snapshot, during his career, of his thinking at a time when 'evil' had again become an urgent issue. He was concerned to move thought forward in a way which embraces the truths contained in both the religious and the philosophical traditions of our culture. I want to try to present that attempt briefly, and thus inevitably incompletely. The relevance to today is as a contribution to the efforts of those whose efforts to deal with current problems are being frustrated.

Our Judeo-Christian religious tradition still affects us strongly, regardless of the falling numbers of 'believers'. It sees evil as a matter of the will, of human disobedience to the divine will. Our philosophical tradition is perhaps more hidden but it, too, is powerful, especially in the academic and political spheres. For it, evil is a matter of a lack of knowledge, of error. This is a *theoretical* problem, a problem of reflective knowledge. For philosophy, the life of reflection is primary. For the religious tradition the *practical* life is primary. The crux of Macmurray's efforts is to do with integrating the practical and the theoretical conceptually, to produce a thought system which is both coherent and adequate for application to real human situations and problems.

Let us remember at this point that Macmurray valued freedom, friendship, science and art as well as religion and philosophy. He was not seeking power or prestige, though he did hope for his ideas to be studied. The final presentation of his philosophy came in his Gifford Lectures on 'The Form of the Personal' in the 1950s. The advantage of studying this earlier presentation of some of the ideas is that he connects them more immediately with an urgent problem.

Our inherited philosophical tradition is wedded to the standpoint of the reflective or contemplative self. 'The contemplative self is the self in reflection, withdrawn from action, whose essence is thought and whose end is knowledge and appreciation. To such a self, action must appear extrinsic and peripheral, something in which it is accidentally involved, but which is foreign to its true nature.' (Upton Lecture 1) Perhaps the climate campaigner Greta Thunberg put it succinctly when she accused world leaders of just giving us 'Blah blah blah'.

Macmurray argues that evil is the result of things that are *done* rather than of things that *happen*. Evil needs to be distinguished from suffering. The conditions of life bring suffering, and it is good to alleviate it when possible, but the problem of evil is different. It is the result of intention, that is, of human action. One way of stating this is that evil lies in the will. Moreover, the individual

will is not self-contained but part of a network of inter-related wills, so evil can become epidemic. This can put individuals in tragic situations, where there seems to be no right choice which does not involve doing evil oneself.

There is a current fashion for down-playing our capacity to act in favour of viewing us as the result of sociological factors or brain chemistry. In my experience though, people readily admit that they do things, however they argue philosophically. They agree that they make choices. Even the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn, whose latest book *Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet* came out shortly before his death, says within pages in his book both that we have no self and that we can do things to help save the planet!

In three lectures of dense philosophical analysis (Upton Lectures 2, 3 and 4) Macmurray concludes first of all that the reflective self DOES NOT EXIST (cannot exist) apart from the practical self, the doing self. Action is primary (not 'should be' primary but 'is' primary). Our philosophy, coming from the Greeks, through Descartes's 'I think therefore I am', has focused on human thinking to the exclusion of human doing. This is a fundamental mistake. Doing and thinking are intertwined, and to sever the connection when reflecting on them leads to conceptual problems which can never be resolved. Kant, Macmurray thinks, got as far as anybody could in that thought structure. Macmurray sees no progress on the issue since Kant, at least until the Existentialists – who, however, were not very interested in constructing conceptual systems!

If we regard evil from the theoretical standpoint, then avoiding it becomes a matter of *knowing* what it is good to do. It suggests that knowledge of the good leads to its performance. It also makes evil-doing an individual and never a collective action. This is because in reflection we withdraw into our individual selves, whereas in action we are in contact with what is beyond our individual selves. The theoretical standpoint is not an adequate one from which to understand evil. We need to think from the standpoint of action.

Furthermore, the idea of the Will itself is incoherent if we are thinking from the standpoint of reflection. In reflection, we think of what exists. In action, we create the future, which does not yet exist. Of course, we can imagine a future state of affairs, but then we are thinking of it as existing, and it seems determined. The freedom to determine, to shape what exists, is experienced in action but in reflection it is absent, by definition. This leads to the antinomy between free-will and determinism in thought.

What does a philosophy from the standpoint of action look like?

A. It starts from the position that we are doers, agents who can make conscious changes in the world. The practical is philosophically primary, the theoretical is philosophically secondary. This does not mean that philosophy becomes a practical rather than a theoretical activity! Philosophy is part of our theoretical life and affects our action only indirectly, through our reflection. To think from the standpoint of action is still to think, not to do.

B. We can only think about what we already know. Our original knowledge comes from our experience in action, in relationship with the world. Macmurray suggests the terms 'primary reflection' for the thinking-in-action with which we gather our original knowledge, and 'secondary reflection' for the kind of thinking about this knowledge which our reflective activities, which include science, art and religion as well as philosophy, perform.

C. A philosophy of action will examine 'doing' in a way which I might term phenomenological. Without pre-conceptions, what is action? Macmurray points to motive, which provides the energy or power, and intention, which provides the goal of action. He analyses action into the dimensions of movement and thinking. They take place concurrently in action, not sequentially.

D. To accommodate the phenomena, Macmurray says that a new conceptual form is needed, and for this he suggests 'a positive which includes

and is constituted by and subordinates its own negative' (for example, action necessarily includes its negative, reflection.) This concept has been a stumbling-block for many (including me), as it is quite foreign to our habitual ways of analysing things. Having lived with it for a long time, I can now use it to help me understand what otherwise would seem to be contradictions if we take action seriously. Moving from thinking from the standpoint of theory to thinking from the standpoint of practice is like moving from two dimensions to three dimensions in a model. Things which were formerly the same are revealed to be different. But to compress again the model to two dimensions (philosophy is a reflective discipline, not an active one) without losing the insights gained from examining the third dimension, is tricky. I can see that a new form is needed. Whether Macmurray's is the right one can only be determined by others who share his intellectual journey, and few have done so.

How does this viewpoint help us to understand evil?

We cannot understand evil until we can conceptualise action, because evil is a matter of what is done. Painful events happen, but this is not what we mean by evil. Evil is done by somebody, who might not have done it. An earthquake is not evil.

To consider this matter properly requires another paper. Macmurray does not lay down individual rules of behaviour. The fifth and sixth lectures discuss the formal and the empirical nature of evil and conclude that good intentions require a will which is heterocentric, willing the good of the whole rather than of just the self. Evil intentions can arise from a will which is egocentric. Of course, this requires to be argued for, not just stated. That is for another time.

* This is the text of Jeanne Warren's presentation to *The Wednesday* meeting 30th March 2022.

(1) John Macmurray: The 1944 Upton Lectures on 'The Problem of Evil' delivered at Manchester College, Oxford. Unpublished. Digital text currently available from Jeanne Warren (Jeanne.warren@btinternet.com).

Epistemic Injustice: Patient Voices in Psychiatry

Psychiatry as a medical field ended the 20th century with a problem of stigmatisation for both patient and practitioner, but for different reasons. On this basis, this talk problematised the *Concept of Mental Disorder* and the historical trajectory of psychiatry and patient confinement (e.g. Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, 1964). Life or death can be impacted by how these concepts are defined in ancient and contemporary societies, which affects people's rights, obligations, and epistemic justice in the form of testimonial or hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007).

Philosophers of psychiatry are well placed to explore and problematise the concept of 'mental (dis)order' as they endeavour to account for theories of the mind, responsibility, identity, and ethical deliberation. The 'medical model' of (dis)order continues to receive philosophical analysis and moral evaluation, inclusive of arguments against 'models of deficiency'. As clinical phenomena, these conditions (i.e. mental disorders or mental illnesses) also reflect an inevitable 'normative' reality; giving theoretical inquiries further pressing implications, such as socioeconomic and moral analysis (Varga, 2015).

The capacity to be treated 'equally as a knower' has increasingly become more prevalent in contemporary epistemology, ethics, and the philosophy of psychiatry. Epistemic Injustice is a philosophical argument which illuminates the reality that people can be unfairly discriminated against in their capacity as 'a knower' based on prejudices relating to the speaker, such as a person's accent, ethnicity, or gender. Epistemic Injustice has been widespread in traditional Western psychiatry which placed more emphasis on correction and mitigating feelings and symptoms via administering medication or shock treatment (Crichton et al, 2018). Therefore, relations of 'epistemic power' require profound study and analysis, particularly concerning the person's experience of psychiatry on a more equal epistemic footing.

Contemporary hermeneutics examines the interpretive analysis of the 'medical model' of (dis)order which is underpinned in Western methodology and numerous diagnostic claims that are continuously in flux. The depths of such conceptual issues are unique in the philosophy of psychiatry. Furthermore, 'epistemology and normative issues are deeply connected when it comes to the nature of health and disease' (Varga, 2015: 4). Hence, Varga argues that both philosophy



Ursula Blythe

and empirical fields of enquiry can benefit from inter-disciplinary exchange.

This philosophical project will investigate the uneven epistemic power relations between practitioner and patient, whilst exploring the dialogical praxis in the current field of psychiatry within a Western context. Although it is not widely adopted, the more neutral "mental difference" perspective better accommodates both sides of this controversial debate, thus the choice of language employed should not promote a disorder, illness, and stigma, but equally respect the fact that people can experience extreme mental distress.

At this early research stage, I offer an argument for epistemic justice and human empowerment, as part of the philosophy of health. I will endeavour to avoid the language of medicalisation in raising awareness of the ingrained hermeneutical 'othering' and perhaps misdiagnosis of people's childhood trauma, significant life events, and difficult 'lived' experiences. Hence, the idea of 'mental (dis)order' is contentious and problematic, as it seeps into several diverse, but interrelated forms of human knowledge (from medical fields of expertise to the person in distress). In sum, it is important to listen to survivors who have had these kinds of experiences, endeavour to understand epistemic exclusion, and engage in inter-disciplinary research that disrupts epistemic power.

- This is a summary of a paper presented to *The Wednesday* meeting 9th March 2022

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During March 2022

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

*'To Open The Eternal Worlds'**

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 2nd March.

Poetry has its own relationship with Being and has a unique access to it. It is not simply conceptual but a work of the imagination. Poetry, in this regard, complements philosophy and provides an alternative route to the mysteries of the world. Barbara Vellacott selected a few poems that have a metaphysical dimension to them and which take us to a bigger realm beyond that of the individual ego. These are not a set of arguments or abstract ideas. They are deeply felt experiences and they demand from their audience a similar degree of receptivity and discernment. The poems were written by five poets who lived in different times. They were: D.H. Lawrence (1885 – 1930), Frances Leviston (b. 1982), Michael Symmons Roberts (b. 1963), Emily Dickinson (1830 – 1886) and Wallace Stevens (1879 – 1955).

Emily Dickinson's poem sums up the difference between mystery in the depth of reality and rational arguments in the first line of her poem:

This World is not Conclusion.
A Species stands beyond –
Invisible, as Music –
But positive, as Sound –
It beckons, and it baffles –
Philosophy – don't know –
And through a Riddle, at the last –
Sagacity, must go –

However, we find in Wallace Stevens' poem 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour' what amounts to a philosophical argument. He mentions the 'good', the 'indifference', the 'central mind', the 'imagination' and 'God':

Here, now, we forget each other and ourselves.
We feel the obscurity of an order, a whole,
A knowledge, that which arranged the rendezvous,

Within its vital boundary, in the mind.
We say God and the imagination are one...
How high that highest candle lights the dark.

Out of this same light, out of the central mind,
We make a dwelling in the evening air,
In which being there together is enough.

At the same time he offers wonderful images of the experience of the interior dialogue that the poem embodies: 'light the first light of evening', or 'a shawl wrapped tightly round us'.

D.H. Lawrence in his poem 'Song of a Man who has Come Through' seems closer to poetic experience and letting go of oneself for the sake of receiving a message from the angels:

Not I, not I, but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I let it bear me, carry me, if only it carry me!

And he finishes the poem with receiving the angels. They are his inspiration or the deliverers of the answer to the riddle:

What is the knocking?
What is the knocking at the door in the night?
It is somebody wants to do us harm.

No, no, it is the three strange angels,
Admit them, admit them.

But are all messengers fit for the task? That is what Michael Symmons Roberts questions in his poem 'Your Young Men Shall See Visions'. It describes a boy who has a vision of Beauty – 'O mother of beauty' – is overwhelmed by it and becomes incoherent in trying to express it.

I asked. What form of body? But the more he said
the less he knew. He lay in rapture, glazed eyes
and St Vitus' tongue. Why did you choose
a messenger so unfit to bear truth, the single truth
we had to hear, O mother, O mother of beauty?

This maybe a source of hesitation in matters of faith as was highlighted by Frances Leviston's poem 'Atheist lighting a candle in Albi Cathedral'. It talks about the experience of being in the Cathedral. It abstracts from formalities and the particular creed but reflects a deep concern for both spiritual enlightenment and an altered state of consciousness

but what's not authentic at the Virgin's feet?
She knows I am not a bad person, just troubled.
She knows the wick is burning.

Needless to say, the group loved the poems and the whole session. We will endeavour to arrange a second meeting to discuss more poems with Barbara.

- 'To open the Eternal Worlds' is from William Blake's *Jerusalem*

In Defence of Formal Poetry

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 16th March.



Edward Greenwood



Chris Norris

We were very pleased to have had a second session on poetry during March. Edward Greenwood and Chris Norris gave a joint presentation on formalism in poetry. Edward presented an historically oriented account of formalism in poetry starting with the Elizabethan debate about versification and rhyme. This was followed by a discussion of the different views of metre taken by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Coleridge put forward a theory of metre as a 'spontaneous effort that strives to hold in check the workings of passion'. He also noticed that: 'It tends to increase both the vivacity and susceptibility both of the general feelings and of the attention.' For Coleridge, metre is 'the proper form of poetry and poetry defective and imperfect without metre'.

Edward then followed the story of metre from the Greeks to the Imagists of the early twentieth century, such as Aldington and his wife Hilda Doolittle who influenced Ezra Pound. He made the point that free verse style adopted by Imagists and modernists did not mean the end of stanzaic rhymed verse. But does poetry require the traditional formal aspects, or should it go beyond it? This is the topic of Chris Norris's paper.

Chris Norris's presentation was entitled 'On Formalism in Poetry: a defence'. It is based on his experience of poetry as a poet and critic. He thought that there is an ambiguity about the word 'formalism'. On the one hand, 'it can signify the kind of poetry that deploys a range of formal devices, verse-structures, rhyme-schemes, symmetries, and other such marked deviations from everyday prose discourse as a means of achieving greater pointedness or heightened powers of expression'. This is the view of formalism he called Type-1. But 'On the other it is used to indicate allegiance to a view of poetry as somehow existing in a realm of formal autonomy or closure,

effectively quarantined from all commerce with 'outside' (prosaic) interests or concerns,' and this Type-2. It is the attitude of US New Criticism took.

Type -2 had its origin in the twenties of the last century in the work of Richards. Richards was trying to find a role for poetry in a world dominated by science. Poetry in his view has a different function from science. For Richard, poetry does not have a propositional content that can be analysed by positivist philosophers because it involves feelings. But this idea cut off poetry not only from science and philosophy but social and cultural issues. That is why New Criticism carried out detailed verbal analysis. But this forced them to smuggle in large amounts of cultural history, biography, and other information against their declared intentions.

Chris added that 'Type-2 formalism is a doctrine more favoured by critics than poets and one that, in theory, places tight constraints on how we think about poetry while Type-1 formalism is a verse-practice with no such designs on our creative, interpretative, or intellectual freedoms'. So, Chris favours 'a Type-1 formalist, much devoted to rhyme, metre, and various sorts of complex verse-form but convinced – *contra* autonomist creeds – that poetry can and should partake in all manner of debates across the greatest range of subject-areas'. He also observed that 'rhyme and metre are often written off by anti-formalists, together with anything in the least complex or challenging in the way of verse-forms, on the grounds that these are irksome constraints which fetter creativity, falsify experience, trade feeling for artifice, and constitute a barrier between poet and reader'. But in his view, 'rhyme is a vital creative-exploratory resource, a means to open up new possibilities of poetic thought through the access to semantic, conceptual and speculative regions unreachable by prose discourse'.

What is Death?

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 23rd March.

The recent death of some members and friends of *The Wednesday* group brought home the question of death. In his presentation ‘What is death?’, Ruud Schuurman gave a mind-boggling theory about death. He approached the question from different angles, starting with more ordinary views on death. That, from the point of view of the one who is dying, dying is like falling asleep, and being dead is like being asleep. We do it every night and is nothing to be afraid of. In fact, it can be most welcome to rest in peace after a tiring day.

Ruud then argued that ‘The human being cannot die: It is either still alive, or already dead.’ This might sound like an Epicurean thesis about death. Epicurus said: ‘death is nothing to us, since while we exist, death is not, and when death exists, we are not. So, death is neither the living nor the dead since it has nothing to do with the former and the latter are not’. But Ruud’s thesis is more complicated than this and far deeper. For him, there is no death, only being. He is in this respect the opposite of Mark Twain who gave all reality to death and deprived life of its significance. Twain thought that ‘Life is not a valuable gift, but death is’.

The third take on death was presented by means of several analogies. In one such analogy, Ruud compared life to a game of Pac-Man. Of course, you try to survive for as long as you can but, in the end, you die. Well, ‘you’ do not die of course;

only your Pac-Man dies. And this was exactly the point of the analogy: That Pac-Man dies, does not mean that you die. Likewise, that the human being dies, does not mean that you die. The death of the human being (‘Pac-Man’, Ruud) is not the death of you (‘the player of the game’, the self). So, it is crucial to distinguish between the human being (‘Pac-Man’) and you, your self (‘the self’). In other words, it is crucial to know thyself.

Ruud’s view on death is based on his metaphysics. According to Ruud, death only happens to the human beings, and not to that which we really are. He argues that we are not our bodies or minds—we cannot be, because both have changed completely, and are still changing moment to moment, while we remain the same selves, the ones that are aware of such changes. Instead, he argues that we are what we are in essence, what we cannot be without, which is the capacity to be conscious. After all, as long as we are conscious, we are. Even if it is in a dream or in an afterlife or whatever. This view implies that consciousness is prior to and independent of the body and mind. So, the fact that our bodies and minds may die, does not mean that we will die. Ruud believes that death is just a change of scenery.

One reply to Ruud which was raised in the meeting is that we live in the world of individuation and plurality, and we take seriously the empirical existence of ourselves, other people, and the world. This is true and I don’t think Ruud will disagree with it, but he would say that this is like saying that Pac-Man lives in a world of individuation and plurality, and we take seriously the empirical existence of Pac-Man, other creatures in the game, and the field with all its dots and walls. He would say that that is not a valid view that any serious metaphysics has to account for, but a false view that any serious metaphysics has to discard. To really face up to Ruud’s challenge is to show that his position is not consistent but that is hard to do. Sure, his view is a counter intuitive, but so is science, and is hardly a reason to dismiss it.



Ruud Schuurman



Credo: a sonnet



CHRIS NORRIS

How else redeem the quickening lapse of time,
How justify the minutes, days and years
Unless by grace of some pluperfect rhyme,
One that persuades our wits to trust our ears,
With a fresh-minted stanza scheme that wakes
In us an answering wish and will to say
Things once unsayable, and – what it takes
Besides – our sense-led happening on a way
For meter, in its running counterpoint
With living speech, to tweak the rhythmic drift
And so, as if by chance, achieve that joint
Effect that lies in words' redemptive gift.
Such, then, the aerial prosody that brings
Us formalists the chance to spread our wings.

Yellow Dull Winter Days

They have come fast,
yellow dull winter days,
short on the tablecloths of snow, stain
suddenly the copper-coloured earth.
Few rusty shingle roofs remain
and charred cathedrals, ribs of rafters,
crossbeams and bolts burst
the dark lungs of winter storms.

Past views are killed. Each dawn discovers
new skylights, chimneys born
and raised by night wind's
dark pipes of a devil's organ.
Crows, living black leaves,
tear themselves loose in swarms -
smoky soot flakes, metallic wings
break the dull yellow stripes of dawn.

Spirits are low, eyes become misty. Days
freeze with cold and desolation.
That makes us think of loaves, the previous year
cut with blunt knives and without appetite
in long forgotten lazy sleepiness-



Poem and Artwork by
Scharlie Meeuws

How Has Philosophy As The Love Of Wisdom Helped Me To Live More Wisely?

The question above was debated in *The Wednesday* meetings during January and February. Many answers were presented by members of the group. We promised to publish them and here are a few answers.

DAVID FOGG

As someone who thinks ‘None the wiser’ would be appropriate as the epitaph to be inscribed on their headstone, I’m wary of claiming anything, including philosophy, has helped me to live more wisely. On the other hand, there’s a well-meant question here, interpretable as an opportunity to say why philosophizing is ‘a good thing’ and it would be churlish to duck it on a technicality. But I should say right from the start that philosophy leads me to very few convictions, being more a matter of entertaining alternative possibilities and running with them simultaneously.

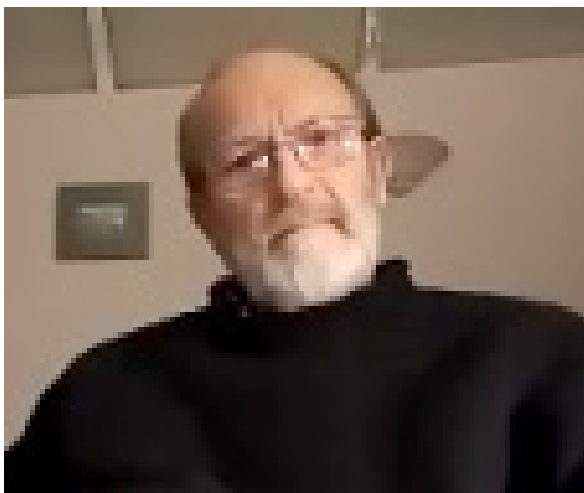
To start on a positive note though and bearing in mind the request not to take too narrow a definition of philosophy, let’s say that a successful outcome from it would involve an improved understanding of some matter, of seeing things aright in a broad sense, and to that extent I could respond more wisely to the topic or situation involved. Incidentally, it was in relation to the way we see things that I probably had my first philosophical insight as a youngster, on hearing that bees see different patterns on flowers because they can’t register red but do see ultraviolet. The idea that not everybody and everything sees the same world as I

do came as quite a shock.

Anyway, so far so good. On the other hand, I’ve none of the examples others may have of where a philosophical bent influenced a major life decision or resulted in a change of job, so I’m thrown back on searching for counterfactuals about how I might be living if I hadn’t been bitten by the philosophy bug and those are much harder to imagine and give credence to. They are of the type ‘If I’d been even less wise, I might have done this’ (!). Hardly the sort of concrete endorsement for philosophy we’re presumably after.

And while I’m in a negative mindset, let me examine nagging worries about the question we started with to see if they are pedantic, trivial or more substantial, applying the usual sort of queries that arise when faced with a philosophical issue, starting with a look at the words ‘wise / wisdom’. With philosophy as the ‘love of wisdom’ does the question to address become something like ‘How has the love of wisdom helped me to live more wisely?’. Is that similar or different from e.g. ‘How has the love of power / art / logic ... helped me to live more powerfully / artistically...?’. Or is the order the other way round; we live / think artistically / powerfully / whatever and hence develop a special commitment, a ‘love’ for something?

Maybe wise / wisdom deserve to be treated as a special case, referring as they do, so broadly, to people, actions, judgments... And ‘wisdom’ arguably has an inherent moral aspect, rather than being merely prudential. So, are we talking about a call / attraction towards the good and how that relates to living well? While we’re on this tangent, I take it that moral philosophers, the specialists in their field, are no more moral than the rest of us because of their expertise! And that, if love of wisdom can be taught as philosophy, it doesn’t make philosophers like Wittgenstein or Colin McGinn good teachers. That is to say, that philosophy is something worth learning, worth passing on to others, is separate from the motivation or ability to pass it on that a good teacher might have.



David Fogg

Next, I take it that people can live wisely without being at all taken by philosophy. Philosophy, to the extent it's seen as thinking rather than acting, might even stand in the way. Would it be more wise to put philosophy aside? Too late a recommendation for me, as I've been philosophizing since my teens and don't intend to stop now!

Which leads back to the heart of this theme; what's the personal pay-off from philosophizing in terms of living wisely? I'd say it comes down to what an individual thinks philosophy is and that that might not be a commonly agreed notion. We don't have to revisit the ongoing quest by *The Wednesday* group for a definition of philosophy to say that individuals' responses here will depend on what they think is key for them in

philosophy and / or wisdom. Philosophy covers so many topics and in so many ways that it can feel like doing a crossword one minute and pursuing the meaning of life the next. Like composing orchestral symphonies was for Anthony Burgess when he wasn't writing novels; both engagement with a majestic artform and something to pass the time, like knitting. Moreover, if philosophy incorporates the history of ideas and fine detail on one thinker's approach, the same content, the same philosophy, may be a dry subject for some and life-enhancing for others. And finally, if philosophy is thinking about thinking about a given issue with a view to improving understanding, as some suggest, it may or may not lead to any discernible nuggets of wisdom, but the times spent on such thinking itself, alone or with others, are times lived more wisely than many others.

The Fog That Never Clears

ELIZABETH PASK

For myself, I came to philosophy through having an interest in ethics that developed while I was nursing, and particularly while I was teaching nurses both in the clinical area and in the classroom. I learned to work with the stories that nurses told, and by this means I learnt a lot about the heart of nursing. While undertaking my philosophy degree my main interests were ethics, aesthetics and continental philosophy. These areas of study remain of interest to me though I would describe my interest now as being in philosophy and art, and less so, aesthetics. Anthony Grayling was one of our lecturers at Birkbeck. When we were fresh undergraduates, I remember him telling us that the fog never clears when studying philosophy. It is always there, but one might begin to find a way through. This is a small note of wisdom that has stayed with me.



Elizabeth Pask

Thinking Through A Different Mental Lens

ERIC LONGLEY

I am not confident that for me philosophy is the 'love of wisdom'. Certainly 'doing philosophy' that is listening to debates, thinking about thinking and repeating readings to arrive at different meanings and perspectives has had some effect - probably made me tolerant or perhaps slower to react as I think through things with a different set of mental lenses. I may not be wiser but am perhaps better informed. If anything, 'philosophy' has provided me with some of the tools to help shape my understanding of the world so that I can be part of those changing the world. Philosophy and history have situated the world. Without philosophy understanding is limited and without history nothing can be changed, two sides of the same coin! I do not think philosophy has helped 'us' live more wisely.



Eric Longley

Philosophy And The Better Life

EDWARD GREENWOOD

The question is: 'Can philosophy help us to lead a better life?' In answering this we must first make a distinction between action and reflection and secondly between what we can undertake and what we must undergo.

There are certain things we must all undergo as individuals, in particular the passage of time, love, aging and death, the perennial subjects of poetry and literature in general. We cannot avoid these things because they are part of the general course of animal life, and we might say these are necessary occurrences. Each of us has a unique individual trajectory within the general trajectory. But then there are the contingent facts of the period and place we are born into. Here we are in the realm of more stories and of the larger story we call history. We must grasp that we are historically embedded creatures and develop a philosophy of history taking in first of all our own nation, and then the world at large with all its fraught

situations and conflicts. What should be our reflective stance towards history? In the past transcendental religions held sway in a world which lacked the knowledge of natural science which our world has. The world of science gives us knowledge of the causal processes in physical nature which would still be going on if we were not here to observe them, if, to put it philosophically, there was no human intentionality to register and reflect on.

There is an absolutely crucial distinction here between the world of non-human natural processes and the human world of history. It is in this historical world of actions and happenings that our individual will supervene, and our choices can, even if only for most of us to a limited extent, make a difference. In the case of Truman, for instance literally in the poet Auden's words:

The hand that signed a paper felled a city and I think Anscombe was right to condemn him for sanctioning the use of the atomic bomb.

How to decide on what is the right action in any given circumstances? Here moral philosophers split between intuitionists who say we must not take consequences into account (the so-called deontologists) and consequentialists who want the best outcome. Here there is a further split between those who want to make it the best outcome for the individual (the supporters of egoism) and those who want to try to make it the best outcome for as many people as possible (the supporters of Utilitarianism). Our actual moral judgments often incorporate elements of both and of the tension between them.

In my view axiology, the judgment as to what is good, must precede and condition morality. It is the individuals' task to bring into existence the greatest good possible. This may well not be hedonistic. It may be necessary to



Shelley

suffer to bring that good into existence. It is in this sense that Nietzsche thought certain kinds of suffering were a value because they were step to a further and possibly a more lasting value, as when an artist suffers to create art.

The greatest good in a world where transcendental consolations are impossible is, as Matthew Arnold saw, culture. This is the propagation of the best that has been thought and said in the world to the greatest possible number. The best that has been thought and said may be in works of history, or literature (poetry, drama, novels) or philosophy itself. But here philosophy may not necessarily have precedence. As the critic F. W. Bateson wrote in his article 'Literature and Atheism' published reprinted in *Essays In Critical Dissent*, Longman 1972, 'The crucial issue in our culture is, I suppose, the adult individual's attitude to his (or her) death.' This is vital to those who like Bateson and myself endorse Shelley's view of the necessity of atheism. We are taught through the figures of Greek tragedy and through Hamlet and Lear and, I would add Anna in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, to fortify ourselves in our reflective moments that, even in the face of our total physical destruction, 'it can nevertheless be *right* to die.'

When Julian who represents Byron in Shelley's *Julian And Maddalo* accuses Shelley of Utopianism Shelley replies:

"It remains to know,"
I then rejoined, "and those who try may find
How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;
Brittle perchance as straw ... We are assured
Much may be conquered, much may be endured,
Of what degrades and crushes us. We know
That we have power over ourselves to do
And suffer -- what, we know not till we try;
But something nobler than to live and die --
So taught those kings of old philosophy
Who reigned, before Religion made men blind;
And those who suffer with their suffering kind
Yet feel their faith, religion." "My dear friend,"
Said Maddalo, "my judgement will not bend
To your opinion, though I think you might
Make such a system refutation-tight
As far as words go..."

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Encompassed By The Dark



I am encompassed by the dark
When waking in the night,
And, switching on the light,
It seems as though I disembark
From some strange voyage, step ashore
In the familiar world once more.

A simple touch and all is changed,
The world is back again
Its light makes all things plain,
Unlike the darkness which estranged.
Now I have left the world of dream
Where nothing is, but all things seem.

But day has just begun
That kingdom of demand
Which we must take in hand,
The world of earnest which I shun,
The world, with its quotidian pain,
That makes me want to dream again.

Let dream's inconsequence come back
With all its strange unrest,
It's like embarking on a quest
To gain some treasure that I lack.
Which I prefer's not hard to say,
The world of night to that of day.

For night is not just night alone,
But peopled by myriad forms,
A world of calms, a world of storms,
A unique and peculiar zone,
A world of questing unfulfilled
Until with waking all is stilled.

Words spoken in some foreign speech,
Strange situations that involve,
Deep questions that I cannot solve
And destinations I can't reach,
Perhaps, after the night's unrest,
Day may turn out to be the best!

Edward Greenwood



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