

# The *Wednesday*

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## Editorial

### *The Functional View of Ethics*

**W**e have recently debated the subject of ethics and machines. Put simply, too much agency has been conceded to machines and some ethical rules should be given to them. But is this possible or desirable? (See inside this issue). What is really of interest to me, is how instructive is the very idea of moving ethics from the normative sphere to the functional, from the spiritual to the natural.

Naturalism was defended by Nietzsche. Nietzsche thought that human beings are sick because they have consciousness and have a moral attitude to the world. Human beings are always justifying what they do. They are also always apportioning praise and blame, either blaming themselves, as in bad conscience, or blaming others. In either case, they are reactive and not active. They are not allowing their power its full activity but limiting it through moral considerations. Freud, later on, thought this leads to neurosis. So, in the Nietzschean story, morality interferes with the function of the individual. The way to liberation, in his opinion, is to put the human back into nature, to think of such a being in terms of functionality and power and to move away from morality. Machines represent the extreme example of what Nietzsche, or naturalists in general, are after.

In the fictional society depicted by Samuel Butler in his novel *Erewhon*, wrongdoing or evil is considered a kind of illness. It requires hospitalization for an appropriate time. The patient will then be restored to proper functioning. This treatment would replace prisons in the actual world. This is very much the Nietzschean story. Morality is based in the body, its capacities and powers, hence the similarity with machines. But the objection is that humans have a highly developed consciousness. But this is not an objection if you add in the story of evolution over a very long time. The very sense of morality in daily discourse has developed over a long time. That is

why it is difficult to classify someone like Nietzsche in terms of whether or not he is a 'moral' or 'immoral' philosopher. Both words have their own connotation and their power of suggestion. They could be taken as evaluative terms, either positively or negatively. You may be talking within a frame of morality and providing a different view. But what Nietzsche would say is that the scientist or engineer who is wiring 'moral' rules into machines is approaching morality from a point outside of it. The older vocabulary of praise or blame is left behind. There is no sense in building the sickness of guilt and bad conscience into machines.

This may or may not be a convincing story but one that is worth considering in a world that is more and more governed by machines and data processing. However, we have an intuitive feeling of unease about this story. Is it because we are losing control or because of our moral sensibility? Perhaps both. On the one hand, machines are getting sophisticated and powerful. But on the other hand, we feel that beyond machines and bodies, there is a realm of sense, immanent or transcendent. The world is not just causally connected bodies but is full of meaning, at least for us humans. There is something missing from a world based on functionality and what is missing is an important aspect. Even on an evolutionary theory, the development of morality, and the feeling that it matters for humans, shows that it has been selected for a reason. A world that is based entirely on functionality is not a world worth living in. Perhaps even machines will eventually develop a system of morality that goes beyond functionality.

On a different note, this issue marks the fifth anniversary of *The Wednesday*. May I take this opportunity to thank all contributors and readers of the magazine for their support and friendship.

*The Editor*

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# Ethics for Machines

**Machines are becoming more pervasive and capable, and if they don't already make unsupervised decisions that affect our daily lives, they may well do so soon. We want these machines to make the best possible decisions; we don't want them to hurt or destroy us. We want them to do the right thing. To behave well. To behave ethically. So, can we program ethical behaviour into machines?**

## PETER STIBRANY

To put the question in another way, how can we engineer nature, how can we make machines behave ethically?

We could sidestep this problem by making machines in our own image. But human behaviour is very far from consistent and notoriously unpredictable. Even without the many pathological cases, people often disagree in good faith about what's right and what's wrong. And right now at least, we don't seem to be doing so well as a species. And arguably, humankind is just the kind of uncontrolled intelligence rampaging about the planet that we ourselves fear to create artificially in software.

It's therefore entirely possible that the way we humans think may not be the best way to solve ethical problems. So, we might gain a double benefit in developing a naturalistic understanding of ethics.

### Posing The Question

To control our machines, we need a theory of ethics susceptible to scientific investigation and engineering validation. Otherwise, how will we ever convince ourselves that our machines will do the right thing? And if we can't convince ourselves of that, ceding a lot of agency to them seems foolish.

Can we take human thinking about ethics as a starting point and go from there? If so, we need a theory that provides answers to questions like:

- What mechanism makes us feel we ought to act in specific ways?

- What makes these the right ways for us to act?
- Why do we sometimes choose to do other than what we feel we ought to do?
- Why do we sometimes disagree among ourselves about what ought to be done?
- Why do we sometimes not know what we ought to do?

One naturalistic approach rests on the idea that we have evolved to find pleasurable or desirable those actions that facilitate the survival of our genes. That is what we consider ethically good behaviour. Our feelings and behaviours in some way indeed facilitate, or at least don't immediately impede, the survival of our species. But it's hard to see how this observation meets our needs for a theory.

Just because something is a certain way, does that make it right? As David Hume pointed out, those seem like separate things. How do we bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be? To give machines a sense of what they ought to do, it would help to know where our own sense of that comes from.

I'm going to take a pragmatic line on this question. Ethics cashes out when we make choices. And that's what we want to program our machines to do, make ethically sound choices. So, let's look at how we humans do that. After all, we humans are molecular machinery, or perhaps better put, we supervene on molecular machinery.

### **It's All in the Choosing**

When we choose, we use some combination of reflex, instinct, intuition, bias, prejudice, habit, reason, and so on. Some of these are determined by our biology and psychology. Others look to be contingent on our circumstances, the society in which we participate, our role, our state of mind, and so on. Some of these mechanisms are static or change slowly. Others, like our habits and states of mind, are malleable and can change on short timescales.

Reason, however, we generally put into a separate category. That we have evolved the ability to reason is clear. But reason needs assumptions, foundations to reason from. Our search for these foundations is a mainspring of ethics.

Some philosophers would put these foundations outside of evolution and perhaps even outside of humanity entirely. They suppose them to be available to us by revelation, emotion, or intuition. However, that's not very useful if we are looking to program machines. How would we program intuition in software? We need something more practical.

### **Finding 'Ought'**

Here is an example of what such a theory might look like. We make countless choices based on our in-built reflexes, instincts, biases, prejudices, etc., in a purely situational way, responding to contingent circumstances mostly without conscious reflection. Will I sit or stand, cross my legs right over left or left over right, scratch an itch, look at this or that?

We have an inbuilt mechanism that motivates us to choose and to carry out the chosen actions. Without such a motivational mechanism, we would never feel the need to do anything. But each time we choose and act, if we were to conceptualise our decision process (which we don't unless we are thinking philosophically), we would have to conclude we are following a microscopic, situational 'ought':

- My leg hurts in this position; I ought to move it
- That glass is falling off the table; I ought to move to catch it
- That person looks threatening; I ought to get ready to fight or flee
- I always order a muffin with my coffee; I ought to order it again



**David Hume**

These situational 'oughts' don't rise to the heights of 'thou shalt not kill', but the idea that there is no 'ought' in nature isn't right. We are motivated; we feel like there are things we need to do and ways we need to act.

These reflexes, biases, intuitions, prejudices, and such have allowed us to survive. They don't represent a coherent, rational worldview. We have collected them over time - from evolutionary time through to minute-to-minute-experience time. We can best think of them as a collection, a set, a heap of situationally-driven responses.

Of course, sometimes we can't just react. Sometimes we have to think, so let's look at that. Just as the operation of our eyes affects how we see, the operation of our brain affects how we think.

It turns out that our brains are highly energy-intensive for the body. The brain uses 20% of the body's energy (<https://brainfacts.org/Brain-Anatomy-and-Function/Anatomy/2019/How-Much-Energy-Does-the-Brain-Use-020119>). This channels our thinking in significant ways - here are some relevant to our discussion:

- As much as is consistent with success, we are wired to do things without thinking about them. Initially, we pay attention and think when we learn to do new tasks. But as



### Is the mind just the human brain?

we become better at them, we pay less and less attention to carrying them out. Eventually, we can do them without thinking.

- Our brains are virtuoso pattern recognition devices. For example, when we open our eyes, we see a world of things rather than just bits of colour. We can't help it. We instinctively see patterns. Some people think of these as objects or affordances, but let us generally call them patterns. We find patterns much easier to work with than "raw" data.
- We find it stressful to think and to be aware of contradictory thoughts. We call this cognitive dissonance. It takes great focus and attention to cope with such dissonance, so we are deeply, and subconsciously, motivated to resolve it.
- We find complexity stressful. It is metabolically expensive to carry in the brain, so we instinctively drive toward simpler explanations and rules. Each of us has a personal complexity threshold within which we can operate, but the complexity of the modern world swamps us. We are perpetually in the situation of having to make decisions without understanding all the available factors and all the consequences.

The simpler the rules and patterns, the less focus and attention we need to devote to them, the more we can

pay attention to potential threats and opportunities, and the more quickly we can react. Simplicity gives us a survival edge.

You can see where I'm going with this. When we need to reflect on what we do, reflect on our heap of situational responses, we pick out patterns. And that simplified corpus of patterns is our set of 'oughts.' Those are our moral principles. In a simplified way, they describe how we act. We are also told ready-made moral principles by our parents, school, peers, etc.

When asked, we say we follow our principles, including those we've accepted from others. But in any given instance, our heap of ready-made responses may come into conflict with these moral principles.

For example: 'Don't kill people' is a baseline principle favoured by most of us. It's simple and easy to follow. And most of us don't need any other rule. Even in the gun-loving USA, 73% of police officers have never fired their gun on the job. (<https://www.guns.com/news/2017/02/18/survey-fewer-police-officers-fire-their-service-weapons-than-americans-think>)

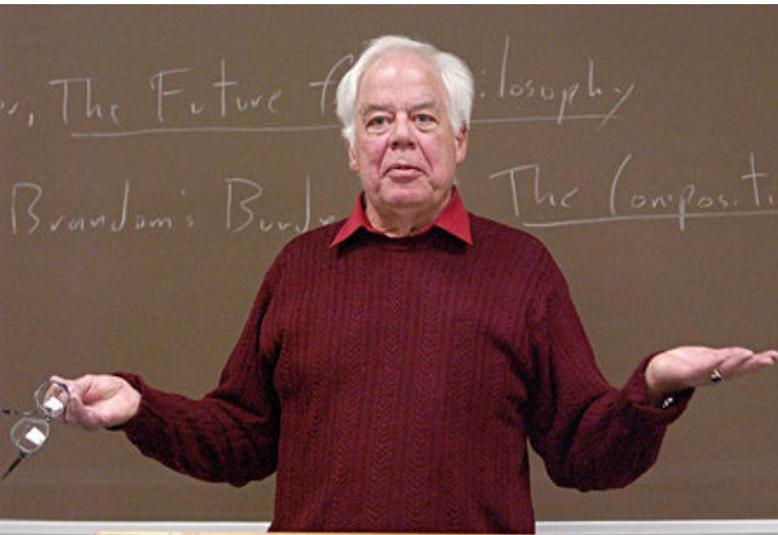
But we can come up with a half-dozen or more situational challenges to this, in which the particular collides with the general. We can kill in defence of our lives, for example, or at the behest of our country, and so on.

This situation reflects the age-old conflict between virtue and practicality. And you can see how this can create problems.

### Moral Dilemmas

We face a moral dilemma when our principles (the simplified patterns) collide with our situational response, when there is a gap between the action we feel we ought to take and what we are moved to do situationally. Doing what we want to do rather than what we ought to do creates the cognitive dissonance of being a person that does not do what they know they ought to do. It attacks our understanding of ourselves.

Another example is when different 'oughts' are equally pressing. For example, when we have to weigh short-term pain versus long-term pain. We might find ourselves "doing what we *ought* at the



Rorty

same time as doing what we *ought not* to do.”

A reasonable way to reduce the stress of cognitive dissonance is to create rationalisations and justifications. We can link one of our choices more securely to our principles than another. But if our justification does not resolve the cognitive dissonance, we are stressed by the inconsistency. We have a troubled conscience. Then we are prone to more destructive and irrational ways to resolve cognitive dissonance.

And this process is dynamic. We view situations differently when they are in prospect, in the present, or in retrospect. What seems right in one instance can look wrong in the next. There is also the disquieting way new information becomes available after we have committed to action.

But the more consistently we behave, the better we feel. We don't have to deal with the cognitive dissonance created by hypocrisy, and we don't have to carry the complexity of the various justifications rationalising our exceptions.

### Where Do Moral Principles Take Us?

All that said, there is no guarantee that our moral principles will, if followed, provide us with an acceptable physical outcome. Some thinkers would say, as psychologist Jordan Peterson implies, that we're evolving our moral behaviour toward a consistent set of principles, toward logos, a divine order.



Sartre

Others would disagree that any such order is possible. In a 1994 talk, Richard Rorty covered from a philosophical perspective the same ground I'm covering from an engineering perspective. He argued that *'The principles that each philosophical school recommends contradict each other, and that 'no amount of ingenuity will produce a principle which gives us the firm guidance we hope to find'*. He agrees with Sartre that *'We all create ourselves, Sartre says, by making difficult choices. This process of self-making cannot be turned over to an outside authority, an authority represented by an absolute ethical truth, an unambiguous ethical principle.'* (<https://youtu.be/SDAdveMYHFs>)

### The Power of Inconsistency

So, can morality be programmed into a machine? Rorty seems unequivocal on this. He disagrees with Sartre in some ways, but on this topic, he says: *'I think Sartre was right in his criticism of the very idea that there could be a clear decision procedure for resolving moral dilemmas'*. That's not very encouraging, given that machines are just embodied sets of procedures!

But let's explore this difficulty further. Is it possible that this inconsistency between people and within each person is a strength, not a weakness? An evolutionary feature, not a bug?

Sometimes there is no way to know which choice is right, even supposing you have a clearly defined objective. After all, our perceptions and thinking ability are too limited to make reliable longer-term



John Miljan in the role of a scientist testing his invention

predictions. The Law of Unintended Consequences is a tribute to our inabilities in this regard. Inconsistency may be the best alternative when the long-term consequences of our actions are unpredictable. So day-to-day, there may be good reasons why unanimity is not a survival trait. In short, there may not be a unitary moral code to be had.

Further, in the longer term, it makes evolutionary sense for some individuals, a small minority perhaps, to dislike the status quo for no better reason than that it's the status quo. These are the innovators, explorers, and artists (and the hackers, criminals, and other wrongdoers) that feel compelled to break the prevailing moral protocol.

A species that does not have such a minority may suffer the fragility of monoculture. It may not have the diversity and resilience to adapt when circumstances change. Or, for that matter, it may fall into some form of fascism, mesmerised into pathological unity by one idea. In either case, following a unitary set of imperatives which don't include "and sometimes violate these imperatives" may lead to extinction, rendering the question of ethics moot.

### Where Does This Leave Machines?

Given this line of thinking, the idea of converging on the 'right thing to do' is a mirage. The best we can hope for is to find a course of action that comes closest to settling the disquiet in our 'human' minds. More dialogue can calm more minds.

Rorty effectively converts categorical imperatives to important stories we should take into account. They are not pre-made decisions. But Rorty is not a relativist, he says that moral choices matter. The difficulty is that no absolute rule can make these choices for us.

Where does this leave machines? Should we design machines to mimic the moral confusion, or less pejoratively, the moral diversity of individual human beings and simply add their voices to the

human conversation? That seems like the indicated way to proceed. It may well be that what makes the operation of our current social machinery tolerable is that it includes a diverse group of humans that share some imperatives but also disagree and even work against each other in others.

But don't we want more from our machines than this confusion? Don't we want them to act more ethically than we do? But if we create them to be more "epistemically competent" than we are, that might itself create problems. What if we, or at least many of us, don't like their decisions - not because they are wrong, but because we are wrong?

Should we allow smart-enough machines, or superintelligences, to define themselves in the Sartrean fashion with each difficult decision they make? Or do we attempt to keep control of their decision-making in human hands? I say attempt, because we know that given an appropriate information campaign most if not all of us can be manipulated, convinced to act even against our own interests. So, if we did add such intelligent machines into the human conversation, how long would we stay in control?

And does wanting to keep control mean we believe we're collectively (if not individually) the pinnacle of moral evolution?

(\* This paper was presented to The Wednesday meeting 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022)



## Good for Humanity

WILLIAM BISHOP



William Bishop

At the core of Iris Murdoch's novels is the conflict between good and evil; the striving for the good, yet falling short with failure to achieve this in actual life. Here Murdoch identifies the conflict within human nature also emphasized by Boethius. Interestingly the world that confronts us today is a consequence of the dilemma this conflict poses: war, famine, exploitation, and the list goes on. Is there an economy that can address this situation for the good? This was the question at the heart of William Bishop's *Wednesday* Zoom presentation on his book, *Foundations for a Humanitarian Economy: Re-reading Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy*.

It seems strange to apply Boethius' *Consolation* to the economy and yet William argued that the values evident in this 6<sup>th</sup> century Roman scholar's theodicy are applicable and relevant to economics today. The argument goes that the current financial (wealth creation) economy distorts the core human 'basic needs' economy. Aristotle had distinguished

between two types of economy: the *oikos*, which is economics applied to a household (a practical economy), and an economy suited to wealth creation. In relation to this Boethius' argues that *true* wealth consists in *inner* riches in contrast to outer possessions. Indeed it is concern about the entanglement of the financial economy with the 'basic needs' economy that urges the need to prioritize the *oikos* as a supportive economy that preserves a space for experiential wealth and individual human flourishing free from oppression.

The consoling philosophy of Boethius synthesizes Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, Neoplatonism and classical literature and poetry, and the dramatic dialogue represents a discourse of the soul in the form of an *economy of the soul*. Written in the interval between Boethius' banishment from Rome and execution for treason, it has urgency and is heart-felt as a personal testament.

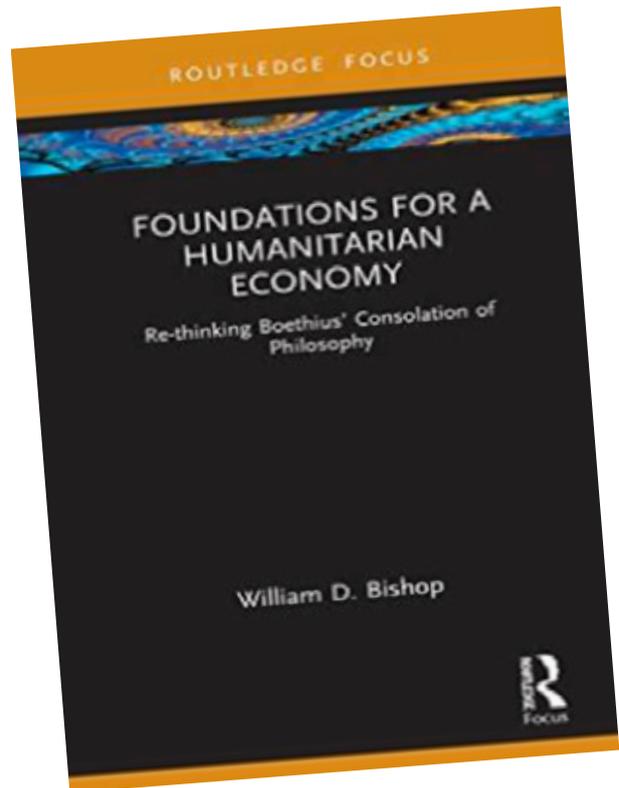
Boethius represents the 'perennial philosophy', which aspires to goodness, beauty and truth within a divine framework, but while history has moved on and attitudes to life have changed, these perennial values still apply to human nature and remain relevant. The *Consolation* states that everyone seeks happiness (which equates to the good) but they seek it along false paths such as riches, power, fame, high office and pleasure. Today we have an economy largely based on ego-driven self-interest within a competitive market society with money created as debt involving interest, which calls for constant growth in the financial economy calculated as Gross Domestic Product. Compared with this the *oikos* is supported by the pillars of virtue, co-operation, and individual involvement.

In Boethius' terms the essential household of the human is the soul. Plato is quoted as saying that minds are brought down from the heavens to be housed in bodies. In this sense the truly human resides in the mind (which is the spiritual aspect

of the soul). Therefore the economy that best serves the human being takes account of the soul. Here *Consolation* emphasizes that Man is made in the Image of God. Arguably then the human being reflects the Holy Trinity in its tripartite organization as spirit-soul-body. With its seed of the spirit the soul has access to the eternal as above and to earthly things through the body, and the household economy is created to provide physical support to the spirit within and soul (the home of the human). So the guiding principle of the oikos is to achieve human flourishing.

Bearing in mind inevitable obstructions towards prioritizing a ‘basic needs’ economy to bring dignity to every individual, it may be necessary to restructure society in a threefold way in order to allow the economy to function according to human-centred economic principles without undue dominance from politics. At present scientific thinking and mathematics are applied to a wealth-creation economy in national and group interests and the present state of entanglement of economics, politics and culture (spirit) is arguably the cause of many of humanity’s problems. Human nature is problematic enough without structures that exacerbate problems. In *The Republic* Aristotle describes the tendency for political systems to change cyclically into one another from Oligarchy to Democracy to Tyranny, including Timarchy (rule by the military). Each of these (including Republics and Monarchies) are represented in the world today, and the addition of ‘Threefolding’ would add a form of self-determined anarchy. So for the oikos to come to fruition the role of Spirit, Politics, and Economics needs to be distinguished and functionally separated (with liaison between them) so that each sector can function according to their own principles for the common good of society.

Since the time of Boethius a significant advance in human consciousness has been the ideals of the French Revolution: ‘Freedom, Equality, Fraternity’. Individual freedom is important today in a more evolved form and this creates a challenging interrelationship between the individual and society. While a Tyranny tries to subdue individual freedom as similarly do some Democracies, ideally in a ‘threefold social order’



### Re-thinking Boethius

individuals would have *freedom* in the cultural sphere, *equality* in the legal state, and *mutuality* in the economic sector. Here an individual participates in each sphere, and as head, rhythmic system and metabolism operate as independent systems within the whole so additionally the individual is a microcosm within the macrocosm of society.

At present Economics and the Political State dominate Culture (which includes education and religion) and likewise Economics impacts on the Political sphere and vice versa. There is human need for the nourishment of *meaning* as well as food and a healthy society with a broad vision of the Good will allow functional autonomy to each sphere within this triune *relationship*. Additionally *labour* and *land* would be withdrawn from economics as commodities. Labour would then be governed by legal contracts, restoring human dignity and similarly with land. The guiding principle is to support the home (household) of the human, in terms of soul, community, planet, and cosmos ordered according to divine providence.\*

(\* This is a summary of William Bishop’s talk given to The Wednesday meeting by 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022)

## Walk Past the Debris of Time

Walk past the debris of time  
through the glassy tears of pain,  
the peeling wallpaper of doubt  
towards the spiral staircase to the unknown,  
although there is no place that calls you.

Don't try to see through the distances.  
Climb up and watch the floating symbols  
telling of quantum leaps, fractions within fractions  
and the shape-shifting photons  
when there is more than one exit.

Move within the divine matrix,  
but do not choose the path of fear.  
Aim up where all will be revealed  
all things come together under the dome of creation,  
where string harmonies rise and fall.

**Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws***



## Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During June 2022

### Nietzsche as a Poet

#### Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 15<sup>th</sup> June.

RAHIM HASSAN

It may come as a surprise to some that Nietzsche wrote poetry, beside writing all these other beautiful books. In fact, he wrote music as well. Years ago, I listened to a performance of his music in an annual conference on Nietzsche. To highlight the poetic aspect of Nietzsche, Edward Greenwood presented to *The Wednesday* meeting a paper on 'Nietzsche as a poet'. It was most interesting in its subject matter and very informative. Nietzsche's poem 'From High Mountains' was considered one of the greatest poems in German. Edward read his own translation of this poems. There was an intensive debate in the meeting not only on the poetry but on all aspects of Nietzsche's life and thought.

Edward said there were three reasons for the neglect of Nietzsche's poetry. 'First because his poems are scattered among his prose works, second because he himself often disparaged poets and poetry and thirdly because his critics have seen his poems as principally a manifestation of his homeless and mentally unstable state.' He went on mapping Nietzsche's poetry from his early student days at Schulpforta. 'In 1860, when he was 16, Nietzsche founded a cultural group with his schoolmate at Schulpforta Wilhelm Pindar. It was called Germania which lasted until 1863. The school gave its pupils a thorough grounding in Greek and Latin languages and literatures. While he was there, Nietzsche read and admired the poetry of Holderlin. At Schulpforta, 1860, he wrote:

I do not know what I love  
I have neither peace nor rest.  
I do not know what I believe  
Or why I am still living. For what?

In his poem 'Without a Homeland,' Nietzsche wrote:

No one may dare  
To ask me  
Where my homeland is.  
I am really not bound  
To space and fleeting hours  
I am just as free as the Aar!  
Heidideldi!  
Never forget me!  
My happiness you lovely May!

Nietzsche is obsessed with the heights. It may have been Bachelard who said that there are two types of thinkers, those whose thought moves horizontally, and those whose thought moves vertically. Nietzsche is certainly a thinker who aspires to the highest and he always headed to the mountains. In his poem 'Lonely', Nietzsche says:

This world is too small for the noble spirit;  
It soars upwards on wings of inspiration...  
And sees the unending awesomeness  
Ruling in the cosmos.



Edward Greenwood

The talk had references to Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, the most poetic book of all his writings. It was composed in ten days in February 1883. Nietzsche also said of the book: 'This work stands on its own. Leaving aside the poets: perhaps nothing has been done with such an excess of energy. Here, my concept of the Dionysian became the *highest fact*'. The reference to Dionysus is significant since he is the god of intoxication and suffering. It is out of the Dionysian state that the - Apollonian - poetic state is generated.

Finally, Edward read his own translation of 'From High Mountains'. The poem was originally published at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Here is the ending of the poem:

Oh youthful longings, self misunderstood,  
Which I believed,  
Affinities of transformation that deceived,  
That they grew old barred all of them the way,  
Only those who can change with me can stay.

Oh noon of life, oh second time of youth,  
Oh summer garden,  
Turbulent joy, staring, watching, waiting.  
I wait my friend, ready both day and night,  
Why do you linger? Come, the time is right.

The song is done – the sweet cry of longing  
Dies in the mouth;  
A magician made it, the friend at the right hour,  
The noonday friend, no, do not ask me who –  
It was at noon that one turned into two.  
Now we rejoice, conscious of victory,  
The feast of feasts:  
Friend Zarathustra came, the guest of guests;  
Now the world laughs, the curtain rent outright,  
The wedding came of darkness and of light.

# Tao Te Ching: A way to Wisdom

## Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 29<sup>th</sup> June.

The *Tao Te Ching* is a great text in the world of spirituality. It consists of 81 verses, written in ancient Chinese. *Tao* (or *Dao*) means way, *Te* means virtue, or wisdom, and *Ching* means a book. The *Tao Te Ching* is a way of virtue, a way to wisdom. The book is attributed to Lao Tzu, but it may well be the work of multiple authors.

Ruud Schuurman gave a talk on this book. He started his talk by explaining that the word 'Tao' is used with two meanings. It is used to mean 'nature', but it also refers to 'the supernatural'. These two meanings correspond to two themes in the *Tao Te Ching*: The first is the natural balance principle. This is the harmony in nature which is typically visualised by means of the yin-yang symbol. The principle is based on the fact that we live in a world of opposites, which cannot exist without each other, and are – necessarily – interdependent and in balance. The famous Taoist principle of *wei wu wei*, 'doing without doing', is an aspect of the natural balance principle. The second theme is that of the supernatural, the source from which the natural arises.

The two meanings of 'Tao', natural and super-natural, correspond to two levels of spirituality: The first level of spirituality is that of recognising the natural balance in the nature, but the higher form of spirituality is that of recognising the supernatural, the source, as the *Tao Te Ching* calls it, i.e., that in which the natural world manifests itself, and which lies outside of nature. Correctly distinguishing between the supernatural and the natural, between what is and what appears to be, is what Ruud calls 'virtue' or 'wisdom' and is where spirituality and philosophy become synonyms.

But the principle of 'doing without doing' is harder to understand. *The Tao Te Ching* says:

...the master  
acts without doing anything  
and teaches without saying anything.

According to Ruud this follows from the fact that human beings are part and parcel of the interdependent whole. He compared human beings in nature to wheels in a machine that are, at once, 'doing' and 'being done' by the machine. He argued that we are not in control, neither of our intentions, nor of our actions, nor of the outcome of our actions.

Some members noticed that, if we accept that we are not in control, then we are not responsible, and they took that to be a bad thing. But Ruud considers it to be a good thing, because freedom from responsibility is freedom from guilt, shame, blame, etc. Ruud said it is merely a change of perspective, a change of standpoint, from being in the world, to watching it happen.



**Ruud Schuurman**

The change in perspective is supported by what the *Tao Te Ching* says:

The Tao that can be told  
is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named  
is not the eternal Name.

The unnamable is the eternally real.  
Naming is the origin of all particular things

Free from desire, you realise the mystery.  
Caught in desire, you see only the manifestations.

Yet mystery and manifestations  
arise from the same source.  
This source is called darkness.  
Darkness within darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.

I see this as an invitation to openness to Being, without considering Being as an entity of some sort. The darkness is the realm that cannot be named because there is nothing that language can grasp, but it is this darkness that makes manifestation possible. It is the origin that makes multiplicity possible.

Special thanks are due to Chris Seddon who made his own translation of some verses of the *Tao Te Ching*, including a literal translation, and read the Chinese text alongside it. Ruud used the translation by Stephen Mitchell, although he had some reservations about it.

The Red Studio (Matisse): a Terzanelle



CHRIS NORRIS



Henri Matisse

1

Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!  
Why have it clutter up my work-life space?  
Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!

It shows too much to leave itself a place;  
Well-furnished, that 'Red Studio' of mine.  
Why have it clutter up my work-life space?

Fast forward and you get the warning sign,  
'Set-theoretic paradox – beware!'.  
Well-furnished, that 'Red Studio' of mine.

Just see it, all my stuff assembled there,  
My paintings, sculptures, furniture, and all.  
Set-theoretic paradox – beware!

No installation, nothing to install  
Since it's without and they're within the frame,  
My paintings, sculptures, furniture, and all.

A piece of furniture, that thing became.  
Twelve years I kept it, then thought: let it go!  
Now it's without and they're within the frame.  
Mere bits of furniture, those things became.

2

I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!  
Same stuff, same studio, but with red slapped on.  
I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!

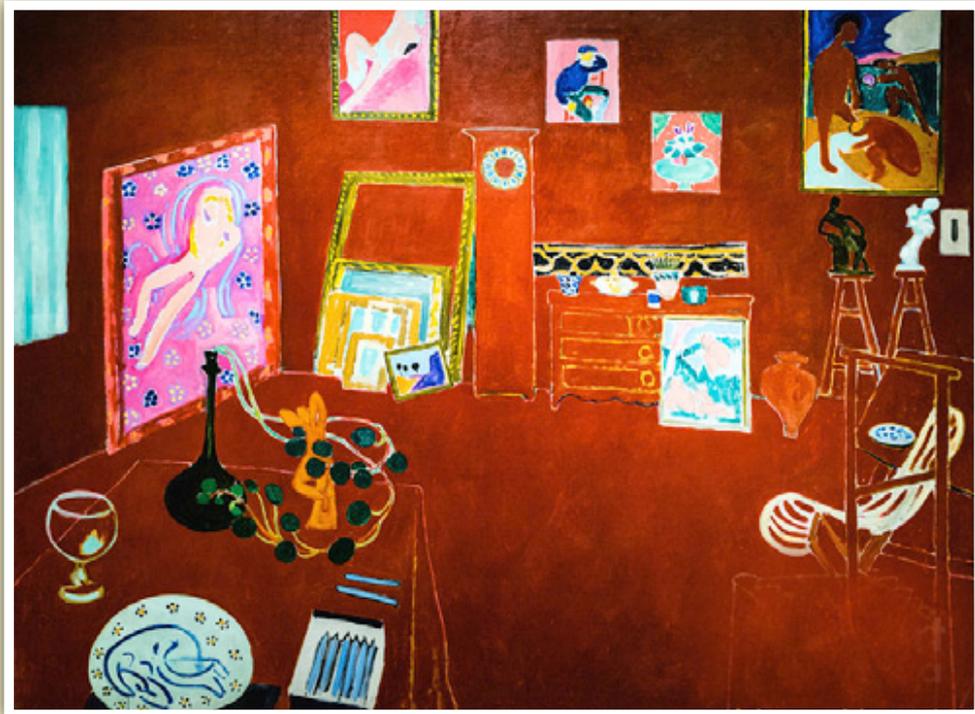
First try was pink but that's for the salon.  
'Pink Studio' gave those things the merest tint;  
Same stuff, same studio, but with red slapped on.

A real eye-stunner, not a gentle hint:  
Brush it on thick, let naturalism wane!  
'Pink Studio' gave those things the merest tint.

Flat, abstract, monochrome – a surface plane,  
Its contents laid out strictly on a par:  
Brush it on thick, let naturalism wane!

Don't tell me 'just portray things as they are'.  
Viewed without preconception, they're so many  
Sense-contents laid out strictly on a par.

One day my 'insights' will be two-a-penny.  
I saw it suddenly: Venetian red!  
Viewed without preconception, they're so many  
Twice-born latecomer 'insights': two-a-penny!



The Red Studio by Matisse

3

They'll say 'ground-breaking – wonder if he knew',  
And label me 'intuitive', 'naive'.  
They'll say 'ground-breaking – wonder if he knew'.

I knew alright, but that they can't conceive!  
Red monochrome, flat surfaces, the lot.  
They'll label me intuitive, naive.

I saw it coming, gave it my best shot.  
Young Rothko got the message, took my lead,  
Red monochrome, flat surfaces, the lot.

It's me they thank, those brave souls newly freed:  
Junk narrative, perspective, stuff like that!  
Young Rothko got the message, took my lead.

Maybe they're over-keen to count old hat  
What I took half a life to leave behind:  
'Junk narrative, perspective, stuff like that!'

Still it's those old conventions kept me blind.  
They'll say 'ground-breaking – wonder if he knew'.  
What I took half a life to leave behind  
Was old conventions, those that kept me blind.

4

Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three.  
They're all in my 'Red Studio', take a look.  
Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three,

Though flattened, planiform, and brought to book –  
Why let the old *trompe-l'oeil* stuff have its way?  
They're all in my 'Red Studio', take a look.

Loved it – still do – that 3-D goods-array,  
It's just that those perspectives cramp my style:  
Why let the old *trompe-l'oeil* stuff have its way?

Things in-the-round obsessed me for a while;  
Planes of consistency now guide my hand.  
It's just that those perspectives cramp my style.

No loss of objecthood when surface-scanned;  
Things make their space that once stood all around.  
Planes of consistency now guide my hand.

Those depths annulled are planar worlds new-found.  
Six paintings, one ceramic, sculptures three.  
Things make their space that once stood all around.  
Those depths annulled are planar worlds new-found.



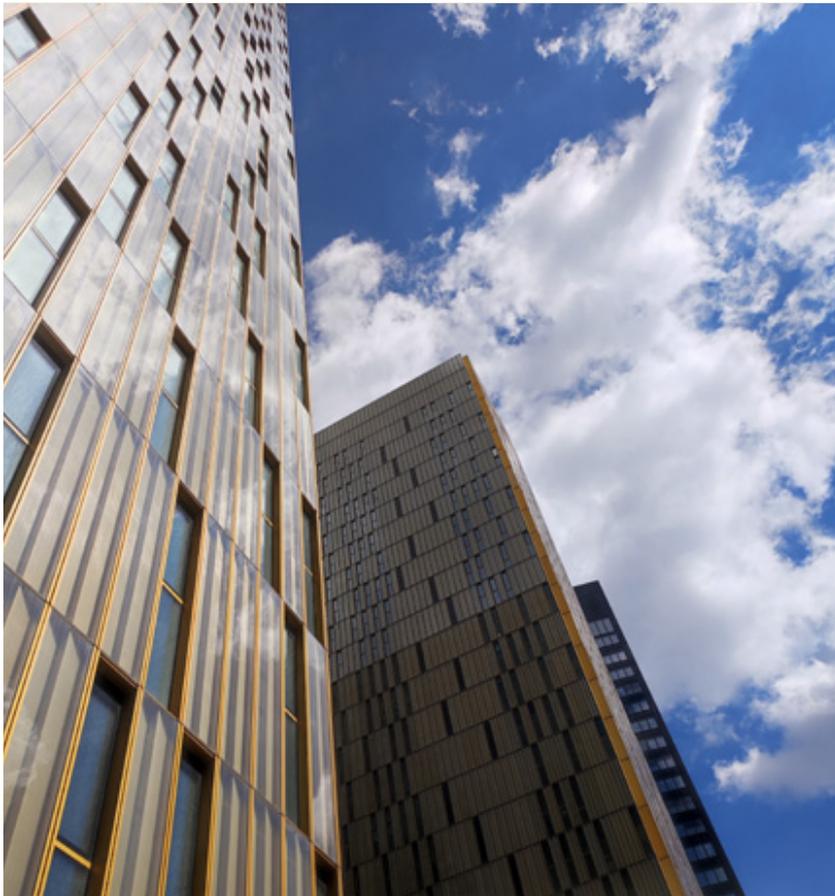
**“The Three Towers”**  
mixed media on canvas  
60x80 cm (2022)

## **The Three Towers: Personal Attachment**

**Dr. ALAN XUEREB**

The year 2022 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my place of work: The European Court of Justice (ECJ). I wanted to commemorate this occurrence by making this abstract painting of the Three Towers. Remotely reminiscent of Tolkien’s ‘The Two Towers’, I initially painted the three golden towers in oil – one can still somehow see them in the background. However, that initial effort was not really ‘me’. I love expressionism. Consequently, come what may, I had to jazz that painting up. For that reason, I started experimenting with acrylic pouring paint. The effect - love it or hate it - underscores my emotional status about these towers. After months completely away from this iconic building in Luxembourg, it felt

unusually familiar to go back. A sort of emotional alienation took place through the pandemic lockdown. However, that alienation paradoxically made these towers part of my past. Part of me. I assimilated them in my personal history. Staying away made them present in my memory. Perhaps this is what is meant when one says that absence makes the heart grow fonder. As Jessica Barker explains ‘Absence is given presence through the manifestation of an object which instils recognition, remembrance or reflection’. Barker quotes Maddrell who asserts that: ‘[a]n absent presence reflects the apparent contradictory binding together of things absent with things present...’



**The three iconic towers in Luxembourg**

On the other hand, Derrida states that, ‘the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience’. Through this approach, Derrida develops the idea that absence leaves a ‘trace’. I understand this in a very personal way. I have tried to portray this ‘trace’ by leaving the original oil structures in the background but colouring the foreground with a variety of emotional hues that pervade my subconscious being. The present *subconscious* acrylic flow over the *conscious* structuralism of the oil painting. One beautiful mechanism that both art and philosophy share is imagination. So, one could be walking down the ECJ’s foyer in 2022 playing Mendelssohn’s violin *concerto* whilst having a conversation with Heidegger over his Black Forest cabin and its relationship with Tolkien’s hobbit-holes in the Shire, at the same time.

I am actually writing these short reflections a day before I attend an online conference organised by Birkbeck, University of London entitled: International Online Conference on Architecture and the Institutions of the European Union. My current interest in phenomenology of architecture and particular the latter’s relationship with the common good has augmented my interest in artistically depicting the ‘building’ reality we all live in, and confront it with what Heidegger would call our ‘dwelling’ in those buildings. As I said, love it or hate, phenomenology, like expressionism, is truly about the experience one has of that particular reality.

## *The Wednesday*

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*On the fifth anniversary of*

*‘The Wednesday’*

Wisdom? But where is wisdom to be found?  
What is its scope and wherein lies its ground?  
There is a place where you’ll find it for sure  
Preserved in writings destined to endure,  
Wisdom has travelled from the Athenian state  
To Oxford’s mediaeval towers of late,  
Here where, entwined in poetry and dream,  
It’s carefully nurtured by Rahim  
Who in the celebrated Wednesday’s pages  
Preserves the perennial wisdom of the ages.

So, if it’s really wisdom that you seek ,  
You’ll find it in ‘The Wednesday’ every week,  
From pious Plato to rebellious Nietzsche  
Accounts of all the wisest sages feature,  
Hard economics and the knottiest history  
Are both divested of their mystery,  
Islamic Sufis and the Chinese Dao  
Reveal the whence, the what, the why, the how,  
All these and deepest Indian wisdom too  
Found in The Wednesday’s comprehensive view.

*Edward Greenwood*