

# The Wednesday

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## Editorial

### *Philosophical Fiction*

Philosophy and fiction may seem poles apart, but the reality is that they are closer than one thinks. Some philosophers use a fictional or a mythical style, to illustrate their point. Plato used myths, Boethius used a fictional framework to present his philosophy, and Ibn Tufail presented a full fictional story to demonstrate how a child, born on an island, could reach metaphysical truths just by reflection. Borges, a short story writer, set many problems for philosophers. These stories provoked philosophical research papers and numerous mentions in books and lectures. I also have it on some authority that the novel *Invisible Cities* by the Italian novelist Italo Calvino is a re-working of Leibniz's Monadology. Some philosophers were novelists, or playwrights, at the same time, for example Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, or Sartre and Murdoch.

All these and other stories deserve a separate treatment at another time. They show the close connection between fiction and philosophy. Put in another way, they show the connection between the imagination and conceptual thinking. But for now, I wish to discuss something different. Could philosophy, with all its claims to truth and certainty be just fiction or the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of reality around us?

Some important thoughts presented by great philosophers, such as Plato's Forms, the cosmology of Plotinus and Kant's 'things-in-themselves' were rejected by other philosophers and considered to be fiction. Plato's forms were rejected by Aristotle, and Kant's things-in-themselves were rejected by the post-Kantians – Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. These philosophers, in their turn, introduced ideas, such as intellectual intuition, aesthetic intuition, the Absolute and in Schelling's case a whole mythology of gods. Almost all these ideas were rejected by succeeding philosophers. Nietzsche introduced the idea of Eternal Return. I took it as a thought experiment, but he did, on occasions, believe it to be an ontological thesis and so did Gilles Deleuze.

However, in spite of what has been said above, I do personally like all these ideas and wish to defend the philosophers who promoted them. Philosophy is conceptual, art uses intuition. But it is not clear-cut. A philosopher may have an intuition that he developed conceptually. This development goes by the name 'construction'. The result is a complete thought or, in some cases, a system. But these ideas and systems may not agree. So, what makes it the case that a given idea, or a system is the correct one? The simple answer is the starting point, or the foundation, and the logical deduction. But if these were taken in the absolute sense, why are there different alternatives? I will suggest that there is a plurality of starting points, and all these starting points are available to the philosopher. I call these 'constellations' that we map out in different ways to create different systems, that is, we impose 'closures' on them. We can take the world as 'open' to so many possible patterns but through our conceptions of them, we frame them as closure. (See, Hilary Lawson: 'Philosophy as Saying the Unsayable' in *What Philosophy Is.* 2004). I will add that to claim that a closed system is absolutely correct is to be dogmatic. I will go further and suggest that all philosophy is just one big game (as in Herman Hesse's novel *The Glass Bead Game*) and that every master, or great philosopher, adds another significant move in this game.

Hence, philosophy, in general, is no more than different accounts constructed to help us to cope with life. In this sense, it is not different from, but complements other narratives in art and religion. These offer a different perspective on reality, and they should be given space. Of course, I am not saying that all perspectives are equally valid. Obviously, some perspectives are better than others. But I am against the exclusion mentality that wishes to limit the scope of philosophy and dismiss out of hand other branches of philosophy or other discourses.

*The Editor*

# Fiction and Non-Fiction: Some Questions and Answers

**Issue 167 of *The Wednesday* included my introduction to a discussion on meaning and truth in fiction and non-fiction. This article addresses some queries that arose during the discussion.**

## CHRIS SEDDON

In the discussion I suggested that, although I believe that language and thought arise from the evolutionary advantage of understanding and expressing beliefs and intentions, the pragmatic generality of this task means that false beliefs or failed intentions may be useful as long as they are true or successful enough, and abstract ideas may be useful as long as they can be combined to form useful beliefs or intentions. I drew a parallel between fiction and mathematics, in that neither fiction nor mathematics describe how things actually are, since fictional events are merely false, and mathematical theorems are merely necessary. Their purpose is not to express beliefs or intentions, but to illustrate useful abstract concepts that can be used with other concepts to express beliefs and intentions. I drew a similar parallel between the lessons learned from fiction and science, since although science aims to identify true laws, there is every reason to believe that they will only ever be true enough, not completely universal.

A number of queries arose during the discussion, some of which I attempt to address below.

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### **Is Mathematics Really Divorced From Reality?**

Mathematical theorems do not express significant propositions, but they do illustrate concepts which can be combined with other concepts to express significant propositions.

The distinction between an analytical proposition and a contingent proposition is crucial in understanding the nature of mathematics. If a



Chris Seddon

proposition is contingent, we can test it against available evidence, but if it is analytic we will know whether it is true or not without further evidence, simply by understanding how it was formed from other concepts. Such understanding may not be easy, but mathematical theorems do not express significant information; they do not rely on evidence, so they say nothing about evidence. True mathematical theorems all express the same trivial analytic proposition - but they each do so by combining different concepts. They are conceptual structures, the purpose of which is to illustrate the component concepts.

Although mathematical theorems do not express significant propositions, mathematical concepts play a role in expressing significant propositions. Mathematical concepts defined in axioms and

illustrated in theorems may usefully be combined with other concepts defined empirically to express contingent propositions which would otherwise be difficult or impossible to express. For example, Pythagoras' theorem illustrates the concepts of the sides of a right angled triangle, which could, to cite just one instance, be combined with the concept of a taut knotted string to construct a right angle in the foundations of a building.

Thus, mathematics is an investigation into concepts which are useful, rather than a direct attempt to express significant truths. This is also true of fiction. Although the propositions in a work of fiction are typically not analytic, they, like the analytic theorems of mathematics, are interesting not because they are literally true, but because they illustrate concepts that help us understand truths. For example, a story may illustrate concepts of courage and loyalty in adversity, which could be applied or merely appreciated by the reader.

### **Is This A Correspondence Theory Of Truth?**

That a sentence is true for me means that the proposition which it expresses for me is true. That a proposition is true means neither more nor less than the proposition itself. The abstract concept of a proposition as the meaning of a sentence is useful for a number of reasons:

1. A proposition can be believed or intended even if it is not expressed in a sentence;
2. A proposition can be true even if it is not believed or intended;
3. Depending on the vocabulary and grammar we use to interpret it, a sentence can express any number of propositions - including none;
4. Different sentences can express the same proposition;
5. Different conceptual structures can form the same proposition.

It is tempting to adopt the abstract concept of a fact, or a state of affairs, as the referent of a true proposition, but this is useless. To say that a proposition corresponds to a state of affairs is a mere circumlocution for saying the proposition. There is nothing to be said about a state of affairs corresponding to a proposition that cannot be said

about the proposition. Even when we test a belief against available evidence, we are just testing it against other beliefs.

### **Are Lived Emotions And Experiences Merely Beliefs?**

Emotions are a tendency to focus on certain types of belief. For example, agape love is a focus on ways to help the beloved, fear is a focus on ways of escaping a threat, and anger is a focus on ways to neutralise a threat. These and other emotions are typically more nuanced, which is one reason why we turn to fictional narratives, poetry and art to express them. Experiences are beliefs.

Ascribing a belief or an intention to ourselves or others only makes sense as a statement about actual or potential action. Beliefs and intentions are not merely verbal. They need no internal monologue. They explain our actions whether we are aware of them or not. Some beliefs and intentions grow out of our personal experience, but this could not happen if we did not inherit some basic beliefs and intentions from our evolution as members of a species.

We typically have more information about our own beliefs and intentions than we do about others'. In a sense we may know them more directly, but since they are about potential action, we really only know more directly some of the symptoms of our own beliefs and intentions (and emotions). We may associate certain physical symptoms such as butterflies in the stomach or a cold sweat with fear, but these are only symptoms of fear rather than another emotion because they are associated through instinct or experience with a focus on ways of escaping a threat - or whatever focus best represents the nuanced concept of fear that we care to attribute.

### **Are Moral Values Merely Intentions?**

There are some intentions that we have only because we believe, rightly or wrongly, that achieving them will help us achieve some more general intentions. I may only work for money. I may only want money to eat. I may only eat to live. This web of intentions is complex and usually involves resolving conflicting intentions. Ultimately these dependencies must end in an

unconditional intention. I want to live simply because that is the kind of creature I am. I may want to eat to live, in an evolutionary sense, but evolution is messy, and sometimes my instinctive appetites may become ends in themselves.

Moral values are shared intentions of the most general type. The purpose of moral debate is to resolve potential conflict by identifying relevant shared intentions and how to achieve them.

The complexity of conflicting intentions in practice means that moral values are not simply whatever we superficially want in the moment. They are what we truly want, taking into account all our relevant intentions. Naturally we value general principles based on probable outcomes, because these give a degree of predictability to the results of our moral debates. Fiction can help us explore such principles.

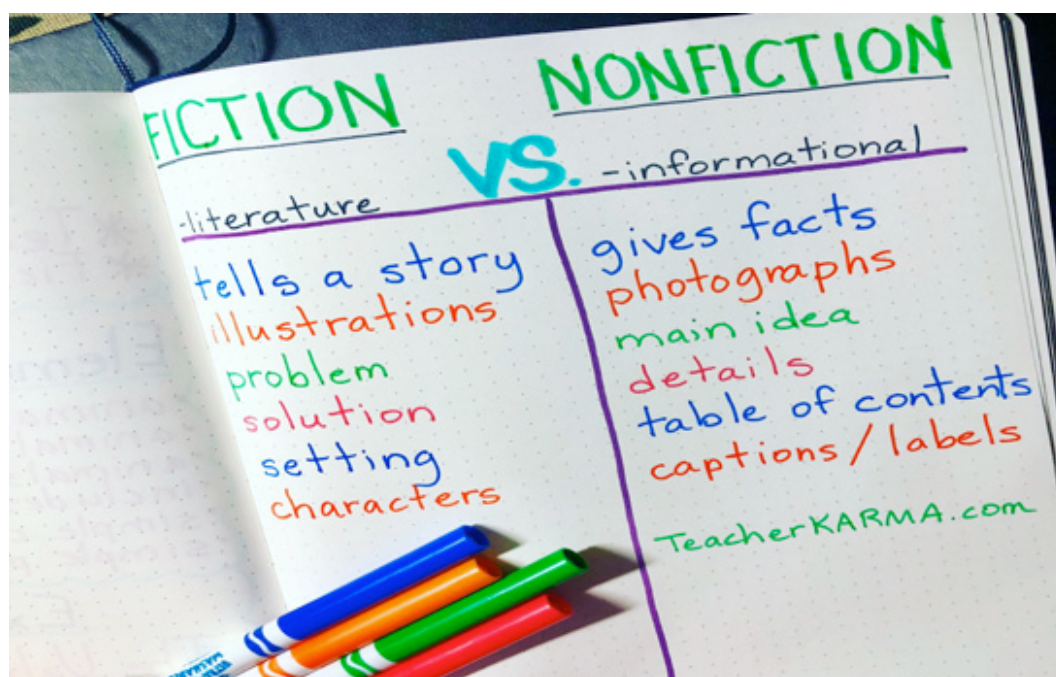
### Does The Concept Of 'True Enough' Undermine The Concept Of Truth?

An explanation of a specific event is a rule which appears to be generally true, of which the specific event is but one instance. Scientific explanations

are very general and often predict very precise measurements, and so are unlikely to be universally true.

However, they may be true often enough of the specific events we are most likely to be interested in. For example, we may know instinctively that when we let go of an object it will fall. Subsequent experience letting go of objects lighter than air may lead us to refine our initial theory, as might letting go of objects under water. It would take a cleverer mind than mine to refine the theory further based on the motions of the planets as Newton did, or to refine it even further based on experiments with light as I believe Einstein did. Although my instinctive theory is not true of all instances, it is true often enough to be useful. Newton's theory was not true of all instances either. There may be no known reason why Einstein's theory is not true, but at one time that applied to Newton's theory too.

We can improve a theory by explicitly ruling out exceptions or specifying a margin of error in the measurements, but theories are superseded precisely because the exceptions and errors were not foreseen. We may include a version of the





theory as a special instance of a new more accurate one, but it would be disingenuous to pretend that the original theory meant that all along, or that our latest theory will never need to be improved in turn.

Hence, just as fictional accounts do not need to be true in order for the concepts they illustrate to

be useful, scientific theories do not and probably never have been absolutely true in order to be true enough for the time being. The fact that true enough theories can be improved does not undermine the idea that some propositions are true - indeed it relies on the fact that a greater number of relevant inferences will be true.

## Comment

# Fiction, Non- Fiction, Thought And Language

EDWARD GREENWOOD

I have some initial difficulty with Chris's sentence: 'Fiction does not have to be literally true...I would like to consider some ways this might also be true of non- fiction' (*The Wednesday*, issue 167). My difficulty is that it is the notion of truth which separates fiction from non- fiction. Fiction cannot be literally true because it relates things which have only intentional inexistence, that is exist only in the mind, whereas history is by definition non- fiction in that it relates what occurred extra mentally.

However, I see my own view needs immediate qualification for a history of the civil war say, such as Clarendon's *History of the Great Rebellion*, must incorporate narrative devices which will also be present in say, a novel about the same events. A novelist might imagine say Charles the First's interior soliloquy at the scaffold and present it as what literally occurred. A historian cannot do this.

The key element here is that of time and process in time, for events and actions take time. They are planned, performed in the case of actions, and have consequences. Here Paul Ricoeur's book *Time and Narrative* might be helpful, despite its wordiness and obscurity.

In volume 3, Ricoeur points out that a document is an artefact of the past which requires imagination on the part of the historian if its context and its significance are to be reconstructed. The historian has to produce a text, just as the writer of fiction has to. Both, as Wayne Booth emphasizes, employ rhetorical devices (p160). As the Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden pointed out there are always 'gaps' in a narrative. And as Husserl emphasized the present is not punctiform. It involves retention and protention as when we are



Edward Greenwood

listening to a melody, to what might be called, to borrow part of the title of Anthony Powell's novel 'the music of time'.

In part three chapter eight Ricoeur speaks of 'the interweaving of history and fiction' which I take to be Chris's theme. A calendar and a chronology and dates are central to any narrative. (p183). Hegel's philosophy of history is rightly characterized as 'philosopher's history;' rather the 'historian's history' (p194). Here Burckhardt's characterisation of Hegel's philosophy of history as a monstrous centaur might be mentioned. Nietzsche's second untimely meditation on history is rightly seen as countering Hegel (pp235 and following). Ricoeur reminds us of the important distinction made in German between '*Historie*' or what actually happened and *Geschichte*, the narration of what actually happened. And of the important distinction between the epochs of Antiquity, the Middle Ages and what the Germans call '*Neuzeit*' or modernity (p215).

### *Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During July 2022*

RAHIM HASSAN

## Husserl and his Phenomenological Method

### *Notes of The Wednesday Meeting*

We were pleased to invite Elizabeth Pask to talk about Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology. Husserl was born in Czechoslovakia in 1859 and died in Germany in 1938. He studied astronomy in Leipzig, where he attended courses on mathematics, physics, philosophy and psychology. He was greatly influenced by Brentano's lectures on psychology and logic. He followed Kant's transcendental philosophy. He was interested in the life of consciousness and the relationship that exists between subject and object. His method of bracketing (*epoché*) encouraged the accusation that his method leads to solipsism, and he did later on modify his analysis to include inter-subjectivity. Husserl influenced generations of philosophers, such as Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, Sartre, Ricoeur, and others.

Elizabeth divided Husserl's research development into three phases, and she gave a special attention to what she called Husserl's 'Transcendental Phenomenology'. She described how Husserl recognised the paradox that we face in having consciousness that discovers itself both in the world and for the world. The mark of consciousness is intentionality, or aboutness. For Husserl, the ego is split or separated between the transcendental ego and the ego that is immersed in the world. The transcendental ego can meditate or reflect upon objects within consciousness, and this includes a capacity to reflect upon one's ego that is immersed in the natural world. The source of consciousness is transcendental subjectivity or the ego. Husserl's phenomenological method is interested in explaining experience from the position of the transcendental ego. The world can be seen from the empirical ego, and this is what Husserl calls 'natural attitude', but also from the philosophical or transcendent ego.

Husserl's early research focused on the structures of consciousness. This was a static descriptive phase. He then became interested in the movement of consciousness, as inner temporal flow. But then, he moved towards the understanding of inter-subjectivity, or the ego in relation with others. Elizabeth explained all three phases in her talk. She said that in his final phase, Husserl developed a 'Genetic Phenomenology' which was concerned with ethics. It situates the subject within a culture.

Husserl is remembered for his slogan 'to the things themselves' or the way things appear to the subject at



Elizabeth  
Pask

the moment of experiencing them. This is his method of bracketing. The bracketing leads to a phenomenological (eidetic) reduction which is concerned with the pure apprehension of 'essences' (*eidotes*). Elizabeth mentioned that Husserl claimed that his phenomenological method led him to a phenomenology of transcendental intersubjectivity or a universal transcendental philosophy.

There are key concepts within Husserl's method, such as the *noesis* or the mental act considered as a specific mode of the ego. The *noema* is the intentional object. Their relation is called noetic-noematic correlations, as Elizabeth explained. Other terms include *immanent time* and *unity of experience*. They explain how it is that when we listen to a piece of music we discern harmony and rhythm, not simply a series of notes. *Horizon* is another important concept. It refers the field of vision or understanding.

Is Husserl a realist or idealist? Elizabeth said that for Husserl 'the route to knowledge is through consciousness itself, not through our attempts to explain what we know, by trying to reach beyond ourselves into the real world. The real world exists within our conscious experience and is exhibited in the natural attitude. Husserl might be classified therefore as both a realist and an idealist.'

Has phenomenology delivered on its promises? That was one of the questions raised by a participant in the meeting. The answer is yes, to a large extent. It explains human experience and how the world appears as meaningful to the subject. It had an impact on literature and art. Some of the phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty, wrote on art. It also introduced the body into philosophy and provided an analysis based on an embodied, not abstract, subject.

# What should I do?

## *Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 27<sup>th</sup> July.*

The question ‘what should I do?’ is a perennial question of philosophy but it is always worthwhile visiting and subjecting it to new considerations. Ruud Schuurman suggested the question to *The Wednesday* meeting and the question generated a few answers and some comments.

Ruud considered it at once the most practical and profound question. For him, If one is wise and knows what one should do, then one could do it single-mindedly, untroubled by shame and blame. Notice here that Ruud framed the question, What should I do?, in the first-person present tense. He gave two reasons for doing so. Firstly, because it is a question each individual should answer for him/herself. It is not about what a social group should do collectively. Secondly, because the question is expressly not about what others (e.g., dead philosophers) may have said about it.

The obvious to the question ‘What should I do?’ is that: I should do what is good. But this then, raises the question: What is good? Looking for help, one might think that moral or ethical theories concern themselves with answering this question. But they do not. Instead, they focus on helping us decide what to do, *given* that we already know what is good. In other words, they start from the assumption that we somehow already know what is good.

Ruud gave examples from the following moral theories:

- Consequentialism argues that we should do what will result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Clearly, this presupposes that we already know what the ‘greatest’ good is.
- Deontology argues that we should do what is ‘intrinsically’ good. Clearly, this too, presupposes that we already know what is ‘intrinsically’ good.
- Pragmatism argues that we should do what is useful in practice. But what is ‘useful’? It seems to be just another word for ‘instrumentally’ good.
- Divine command theory. It assumes that what the divine commands tell us is good.

Ruud pointed out that these theories do not tell us what is good, but only help us decide what we should do *given* that we already know what is good. They are instrumental, about *how to attain* what we already know to be good. But that is not what his question is about. The question ‘What is good?’ is about what is intrinsically good (that is, an end



**Ruud Schuurman**

in itself), rather than what is instrumentally good (a means to a given end).

This leaves us with the possibility that this question is unanswerable. Besides, it could be argued that we know what is good, even if we cannot formulate it explicitly, for example by intuition. But then we do have conflicting intuitions within ourselves and with others. These conflicts cause more harm than good. So, is there anything of which we can say that it is good, unconditionally, universally, an end in itself rather than a means to a farther end? If so, what is it? Ruud argued that there is. He argued that it is good to be wise, which is simply to know what is true, which is to know what is not possibly false, which is to know what is undeniable, which is that I am and that all else appears (to me). Ruud claims that there is nothing more to being wise than to correctly distinguish between my self and all else, and between being and appearing. He claims that this is wisdom, and results in all that we typically associate with wisdom. Another participant suggested it is love. Love here moves the concentrating on the isolated individual and brings the question into the social sphere. Within this sphere, we seem to know what to do and what good to aim for. Another participant suggested that the good is relational. It is a relation between a group of individuals and how those individuals may together achieve their shared desires. It had also been pointed out that concentration on rationality and the analytic approach is inadequate for the answer and that we need to involve the emotions.



# Philosophy and Sociology

## EDWARD GREENWOOD

The topic of philosophy and sociology is interesting. Here, I discuss a number of sociologists who were interested in philosophy. I accept the English sociologist L T Hobhouse's division between natural sciences and social sciences. The natural scientist need not have a second order concern with the methodology of his subject, whereas the social scientist still needs to. The natural scientist does not have to be concerned with the history of his field, whereas the social scientist does.

I will mention first the social ideas of English philosophers, before turning to French and German thinkers, such as Comte, Weber, Alfred Schutz the author of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. (1932) and Runciman. I will then highlight the main ideas in Schutz's book. Schutz was influenced by Dilthey, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Edmund Husserl.

Max Weber moved away from value judgments, to make sociology *Wertfrei*, that is to free sociology from political and social ideologies. Weber starts from the category of social action and relationship and posits two categories of social relationships, communal relationships and associative relationships. Weber is a methodological individualist unlike the French sociologist Emil Durkheim. Weber wants to see all social-cultural structures of 'objective mind' in terms of the experiences and decisions of individuals. Though there are no universal laws such as natural science uses, there are some useable theoretical constructs. A very important one is that of 'ideal types'. These can presumably be applied both to character (as with Theophrastus' 'the miser') and to action as with, say, the social phenomenon of 'flirting'.

But the concept 'the meaningful act of the individual' is by no means a primitive concept, as Weber thought. He makes no distinction between the act in progress and the completed act. He does not fundamentally clarify the relation between the self and other selves, a relationship in which two 'perspectives' meet. To the social scientist the world is one of 'systematic scrutiny' rather than that of the 'lived experience' of the participants. But the meaning is of course available to those participants, it does not have to wait on the social scientist to confer it. The problem of meaning is central, and central to that problem is time. But this is not the measurable time of the physicist, but the 'lived time' or 'historical' time of Bergson and Husserl. Husserl had been the pioneer



Max Weber

in the investigation of what he called 'internal time consciousness', a consciousness of the duration of the episodes one lives through and of one's own duration. The ego orders its attention according to 'interpretative schemes'.

Action is not mere behaviour, but it is meaningful for the actor. Often it involves purposive action. If two cyclists collide accidentally that is an event. If they engage in a dispute about the responsibility for it, that is a social action. Meaningful behaviour as opposed to pure affect, tends to be rationally goal directed. But, as Schutz adds, 'the meaning of an action is one thing, and the degree of clarity with which we grasp that meaning is another'. No experience is entirely devoid of meaning.

Finally, I mentioned W.G. Runciman who in 1972 published a brief but comprehensive study of Max Weber: *A Critique of Max Weber's Philosophy of Social Science* in which he engages with many of the issues raised by Schutz. Runciman sees Weber as going wrong on three issues. Runciman maintains that these are: the difference between theoretical presuppositions and implicit value judgements; the manner in which 'idiographic' explanations are to be subsumed under causal laws; and the relation of explanation to description. This relation is unique to the social sciences, and it constitutes the real contrast between them and the natural sciences, contrary to Weber's reliance on the Windelband 'nomothetic/ideographic' dichotomy. Nevertheless, many of Weber's contentions are entirely sound.

(This is a short version of Edward Greenwood presentation to *The Wednesday* meeting 20<sup>th</sup> July 2022)



# Being Human: Ableism and Ways of Knowing

URSULA MARY BLYTHE

Analytical philosophy is concerned with human qualities such as the mind, language, logic, and what constitutes knowledge. These philosophical domains prioritise intellect over the complexities of the body and intersections of identity, such as disability ('DIS'). Beyond the classic mind-body distinction, philosophy rarely concerned itself with the 'lived experience' of the body, until the rise of feminist philosophy and research on social constructionism. This is often deemed as a form of anti-realism; however, a growing number of contemporary analytical philosophers defend views that are well-defined in terms of patriarchal power, the reality of social hierarchies, and the ethics of phenomenology (Fricker, 2007; Haslanger, 2012; and Barnes, 2017).

The concept of 'ableism' is regarded as a recent phenomenon, yet the Oxford Dictionary traces the word back to 1981, defining it as 'discrimination in favour of able-bodied people'. In sociopolitical terms, this equates to the prejudice against people with 'DIS' in education, employment, and everyday life. However, I will demonstrate how ableism impacts societies beyond 'DIS' and what it means to be human through one's lived experience. Undoubtedly, assistive technology has increased access for many disabled people, but ironically it is retrofitted over mainstream technology for nondisabled users, whilst also providing capitalist gains due to accommodating several types of 'DIS'.

Zoom and other platforms have enabled us to be remotely connected during the pandemic, but equally forced us into an accelerated techno-functioning that removes agency in our private lives, such as having to adapt to online medical services, online banking, online shopping, and many other human endeavours. These applications may be convenient, but also remove people's freedom and human interaction. Moreover, the pandemic fuelled ableism by problematising 'older bodies' who were more vulnerable to Covid, yet the UK government did not protect them, resulting in high fatalities within care-homes. This raises philosophical questions about what types of bodies matter, or which are more productive, particularly in the current 'AI' obsessed societies.

Historically, patriarchal structures such as the mainstream media promoted the so-called 'perfect' body and ableism. An important chronological illustration is how women's ideal body type has changed throughout



Ursula Mary Blythe

history. Such examples include the 1950's hourglass figure of Marilyn Monroe; the 1990's thin silhouette of Kate Moss; and the more recent slim-thick-hourglass of Kim Kardashian. Thus, ableism and capitalism prioritise a 'mythical ideal body' as being superior to other kinds of bodies, but this notion is not fixed (see Robin Dembroff's forthcoming publication on gender and patriarchal structures). On reflection, bodies have been accepted, rejected, and reinvented through 'ableist' social constructions and epistemic injustice.

Ableism can take various forms, but in the broadest sense, it can be understood as attitudinal, physical, and structural norms (i.e. psychological or social barriers), such as pushing everyone towards virtual self-management. Interestingly, media folks in the 1950s believed that technology was 'a mere extension of bodily skills employed for the satisfaction of bodily appetites' (Polanyi, 1958). Indeed, it is often asserted that the online world makes life easier for human beings. However, I would argue that technology reflects universal principles of standard design and ways of functioning, making the body redundant and removing one's agency, particularly for disabled people. In conclusion, ableism is re-fuelled by patriarchal mechanisms, productive technology, and social phenomena over time and space, resulting in renewed epistemologies and ways of categorising people.

## The Seagull

It was only part white; the seagull  
that swooped down on us nearly  
brushing us with its wings, but in my head  
I saw this ghost of a bird, shadowless,  
a white absence, blind negative

in the light of the lake. No reflection glides  
over the water where it flies, weightless,  
no sound from its beak.

And though you say they look all the same,  
for me it is unique. I see  
how it speeds out of the distance,  
gathers weight and darkens  
till it meets its own blackness, grows

into lustre; mew, gull, seagull  
that quickens the heart, as it sweeps  
towards the sunset, its shape ringed with gold.



Poem and Artwork by  
*Scharlie Meeuws*



## Silences: Todtnauberg



CHRIS NORRIS

Although Neumann brings new insights to the infamous meeting between Celan and Heidegger on July 25, 1967, by delivering an autobiographically coloured interpretation of Celan's poem 'Todtnauberg', he portrays himself as a silent witness, one who did not just drive his contemporaries, Celan and Heidegger, from Freiburg to Heidegger's Black Forest hut but who also felt driven to make an impossible confession of guilt happen.

**Markus Hallensleben,**  
review of Gerhard Neumann,  
*Selbstversuch*

Gerhard, they told me: keep tomorrow clear,  
Leave off your studies, check your tyres and then  
Drive Celan out to Todtnauberg and hear,  
If it goes well, how those death-haunted men,  
Poet and thinker, find their way to steer  
A course uncharted till this moment when  
The thinker deems it timely to invite  
The poet born to live *in dürftige Zeit*.

I took it on – who wouldn't? that old yen  
We scholars have for being first to write  
Some charged encounter up – and found his den,  
The famed Black Forest 'hut' where they'd unite,  
I hoped, to broach the silence that could pen  
Them both in its tight grip, the one in flight  
From his dark nemesis, the one whose fear  
Of a just reckoning dogged him year on year.

I drove them there and listened to their light,  
Inconsequential chit-chat – kept an ear  
Attuned to things of interest, stuff that might  
Make thesis-fodder (I'd my own career  
To think of), but the talk was mostly trite,  
Botanical or suchlike – just small beer,  
So I cut loose, said I'd be back again  
To fetch him, and bid them 'Auf Wiedersehen'.

Two decades on I sort-of keep au fait  
With all the scholarship around that trip  
Of his, the Jew-survivor bound to pay  
His debt so long as guilt retains its grip  
And trapped, like some death-captivated prey,  
In the spellbinding, monstrous authorship  
That seemed to haunt the poet's every word  
With thoughts of that encounter long deferred.



One thing the commentators tend to skip  
 Is silence – silence of the kind I heard  
 Them both preserve lest either should let slip  
 Some detail of what passed as I chauffeured  
 Them back, the poet sworn to bite his lip,  
 Let drop no harsh word, suffocate what stirred  
 Within him, while the thinker thought to say  
 No word beyond what no word could convey.

I listened to them there, a silent third,  
 A witness without secrets to betray  
 Since either nothing notable occurred,  
 For better or for worse, throughout that day  
 Of their now fabled meeting, or – absurd  
 As it may seem – the thinker found some way  
 For depth of shared thought-venturing to tip  
 The poet's judgment, have like-thinking zip

The mouth of truth and justice. Often they'll  
 Ask me, those scholars: what's it meant for you,  
 That journey back, let's hear the driver's tale  
 One's judgement up; how closely they accord,  
 What must have been a period off-the-scale  
 For silence that spoke volumes. I say: true,  
 It's left a mark, though nothing to afford  
 You earnest puzzlers your long-sought reward.

I learned that deep philosophy may do  
 No moral good; that all the wisdom stored  
 In those depth-plumbing etymons may screw  
 A thinker's judgment up; how they accord,  
 His Rectoral Address, the retinue  
 Of *echt*-Deutsch poets, and the Nazi horde  
 Just waiting for the word; in short, how frail  
 Thought's decencies when savage gods prevail.

And he, the anguished soul I had on board,  
 The poet, Paul Celan – how words must fail,  
 My words, his, anyone's, to say what roared  
 For redress, justice, truth, yet might entail,  
 If spoken, such a reckoning as implored  
 That silence end their poet-thinker trail  
 To that Black-Forest hut. I pay my due  
 Of silence still, witness each interview.



Celan



Heidegger

## Art and Reflections

### **‘Nebula’**

(40 cm x 50cm - mixed  
media on canvas) 2022



## The Riddle of The Cosmos

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

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We have all seen the wonderful images relayed to us by the James Webb Space Telescope. (NASA's James Webb Space Telescope, is a partnership with ESA (European Space Agency) and CSA (Canadian Space Agency))

NASA administrator Bill Nelson had this to say about these images:

‘Today, we present humanity with a ground-breaking new view of the cosmos from the James Webb Space Telescope – a view the world has never seen before’.

Nelson added that these images will help to uncover the answers to questions we do not even yet know to ask; questions that will help us better understand our universe and humanity's place within it. This endeavour is to my eyes a philosophical one besides being self-evidently astronomical.

Since the ancient Greeks drew no distinction between philosophers and astronomers, one cannot discuss one without the other. Indeed, the Greek philosophers based their philosophies on their interpretations of

astronomic events so that Greek philosophy and astronomy advanced together until the beginning of the Christian era, when Christianity, particularly Catholicism, began to replace Greek philosophy as the correspondent of astronomy and continued to do so for the first 1550 years of the Christian era. The universe was not, Giordano Bruno OP insisted, a finite globe composed of concentric spheres, 'like an onion', to use a common simile. In contrast, it was an infinite, homogeneous expanse populated by an infinite number of solar systems like our own.

Of the early Greek philosopher-astronomers, Thales of Miletus (640-560 BC) and his younger disciple Anaximander (611-645 BC) were the first to propose cosmic models that are based, at least to some degree, on the movements of celestial bodies and not merely the manifestations of mythological superstitions. These ideas, so basic to us, represented remarkable progress in our understanding of the universe as an orderly structure.

Like all early Greek philosophers Anaximander had his own theory of the origin of all things. He hypothesised that the universe originated from the separation of opposites. Hot 'naturally' separated from the cold, followed by the separation of the dry from the wet. He completed these ideas by postulating that all things eventually return to their original elements. The Big Bang should have created equal amounts of matter and antimatter in the early universe. Nevertheless, today, everything we see from the minutest life forms on Earth to the largest astrophysical objects is made almost entirely of matter.

We now know that the universe was probably born in an annihilation between matter and antimatter wherein a bit of matter remained. Physicists are still trying to figure out exactly how matter won out in the early universe. We have to thank this *natural* mysterious asymmetry for being here.

This entire preamble has been written to introduce my painting, 'Nebula', initially inspired by these cosmic images we received first from the Hubble space telescope and now from the Webb counterpart. I have to admit that this painting was the precursor of my other painting The Fissure presented here in *The Wednesday* some issues ago. The interesting thing about this painting is that depending on how much and from which direction light comes, it does appear different. The liquid resin used here reflects and refracts light giving the painting a three-dimensional sidereal depth, besides its permanent wet look.

The question arises whether the Aristotelian formulation *ars imitator naturam* still holds when it comes to abstract art. Nevertheless, nature is sometimes more colourful and more abstract than we care to admit. From the quantum realm to the cosmological one, we see patterns and images that have more to do with expressionism than with classical painting. Therefore, indeed, the rule that art imitates nature is not broken when one has a look at these images our scientists regularly gift us with.

## *The Wednesday*

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## *The Trees Are Shrouded In The Heat*

The trees are shrouded in the heat  
That shimmers round the silent stone  
Of the cathedral towers which greet  
My gaze as I stand here alone.

So many times have I looked out  
Upon the Canterbury scene,  
Pondering what Anselm thought about,  
Pacing the monastery green.

Contingent beings met his eyes,  
But he'd another one in store  
Existing beyond contingency.

He'd prove it with the stringency  
That all logicians idolize,  
Though few believe it anymore!

*Edward Greenwood*



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