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Editorial

Searching for a State of Innocence

Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* wrote a very memorable parable of the metamorphoses of the spirit. The early stage of the spirit is symbolised by a camel. The camel is a patient animal. It accepts tasks given to it without question. But there comes a point when the camel starts to question what is given to it. It becomes a lion and goes on the attack. This stage is when the spirit generates a 'sacred No' for itself. Perhaps we can call this metamorphosis the stage of critique. But there is a limit to critique and naysaying, beyond which a lion cannot go. The next stage of metamorphosis is one of creating anew, a total beginning, a total innocence. This innocence is when the spirit becomes a child: 'The child is innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning, a sport, a self-propelling wheel, a first motion, a sacred Yes'.

I read in these metamorphoses a history of philosophy from the Middle Ages to the present moment - that is, pre-Enlightenment Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment. But examining philosophy generally, and Nietzsche's thoughts in particular, we can see that the 'sacred No' is still dominant, and the 'sacred Yes' is nowhere to be seen. The child has not been born in Western philosophy yet. Perhaps if this thought is applied to logic and academic philosophy one does not feel the need for such a metamorphosis, but if one considers the value of philosophy for the individual, culture and civilization the situation becomes more urgent. The anxiety within the individual and fragmentation in culture and society seek a resolution, a resolution that comes with the birth of the child and innocence.

The failure to go beyond the naysaying is what Nietzsche called pessimism and nihilism. He struggled with this question from his first book *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT) to his final and posthumously published notes. Nietzsche's answer is to become a Dionysian, a divinely strong and affirming character. Maudemaire Clark in a Zoom meeting at Warwick University last month, contrasted Nietzsche's thought on nihilism in his early and late works. She concluded that whereas the Dionysian was metaphysical in BT, in *Twilight of the Idols* it became expressive of a way of life focused on this world rather than metaphysics. However, in my opinion, the task of 'Yes' saying may need a strength beyond that of a human being.

One reply to thi s is to say that Nietzsche might be talking about a general direction of philosophy and history. He is talking about a history far ahead. It is in the making and we have to work towards it, no matter when that goal is reached. I think this is what Nietzsche had in mind but did not achieve himself. His life is one of struggles not only with physical illness but with his own strange and exciting thoughts.

Nietzsche was aware of the weight of the task of thinking, and he recognised that there are truths for the strong that they would crush the weak. Perhaps this symbolises the first two stages of the spirit, the bearing of a weight and the ferocity in attacking. Nietzsche himself collapsed under the weight of his own questions and his illness.

What I am hinting at here is that the way Nietzsche attempted may not be achievable. It may be like his idea of continuous overcoming which is difficult to live with. Life needs stability as well as overcoming. Continuous overcoming may lead to mental and physical collapse. The same is true of the difficult questions that the lion raises. Maybe we need to look at other traditions, to see how they could help. Hadot in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* found such resources in Greek thought, William Bishop, a member of *The Wednesday* group, found good ideas in the Roman Christian philosopher Boethius (see William Bishop's book *Foundation of a Humanitarian Economy: Re-thinking Boethius' Consolation of the Soul*). There might be another opportunity to discuss both.

For now, I wish you all a peaceful celebration of the festive season and may I wish you a Happy New Year.

The Editor

Thinking

Peter Stibrany responded to a link to Science Cannot Think, an article by Tryggvi Ulffson exploring Martin Heidegger's 'radical critique of science', and contrasting this with 'poetry as an alternative to scientific philosophy', suggesting that the same modes of thought, or for that matter, lack of thought, were present in both science and poetry; what makes those fields different is not their mode of thinking, but their object and purpose.

PETER STIBRANY

Many scientists do the equivalent of routine, logical thinking, the kind we use to decide how to go shopping. But the primary role of theoretical physicists and theoreticians of other disciplines is to perceive, envision, understand, and to work out and express, typically in the language of mathematics. Poetry too moves to the realm of perceiving, envisioning, understanding, and expressing. Poets express in a language different than mathematics, but that's a minor detail. We might also follow the direction of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and put philosophy on the table as well.

The article reminded me of a cartoon from about thirty years ago, a vignette from the ACME Soap Company. Two executives walk past the door of Smedley, who is reclining, feet up, eyes closed, wearing a dreamy smile, under a big sign with the company motto: 'Think!'. 'But' asks one of the executives of the other: 'Is Smedley thinking soap?' Smedley could be daydreaming, but if he is daydreaming about soap, he might be thinking productively for the ACME Soap Company. In the joke, the executives are looking for content, not mode of thought.

If we separate content from process, what does it mean to think? At one level, arguably, everything the mind does is thinking. But that's not a useful analysis. Next, it seems like there is a difference between having something in one's mind and paying attention to it. A moment's reflection reveals that most of us act and react in the world by habit, on automatic control for long stretches, arguably without thinking. This is true even when we interact with each other, a process that might demand attention. But we fall easily into the button-pushing model of interaction. They say *this*, we say *that* in a predictable action - reaction sequence. We are triggered by their words to react automatically with our words. So, perhaps *paying attention* is one attribute of thinking.

On the other hand, a whole movement of 'mindfulness' has grown out of the idea that it's probably better if we *inhabit* our interactions in the world and with others by paying attention, rather than leaving them to run on automatic. The outward symptom the words in the conversation might remain similar, but if our spirit is present, the feeling is different. Does 'mindfulness' alone transform routine, repetitive reactions into thinking? If we say, 'How do you do?' and mean it, is that thinking, where saying it automatically is not?

Heidegger

I have not yet found where Heidegger or Deleuze and Guattari analyse the interpersonal nature of our worldview generated by our interactions with others. But I believe these interactions play a powerful role in the mode of thinking we are willing to engage in, or whether we are ready to think at all. Mindfulness aside, sometimes we do take the trouble not just to pay attention but thento explore what another person says, to interact with it and come to understand it. To think about it. Thinking makes such an interaction more complex, and time- and energy-consuming.

But thinking is risky. A new viewpoint discovered by thinking might push us to restructure our opinions and reintegrate our worldview around different givens. We might have to change our behaviour and habits, which would demand energy, focus, attention, and action - resources we deploy reluctantly. There is risk in that we don't know who we will end up being after this restructuring is over, or whether the restructure will converge on anything at all.

Also, our worldview is stabilised by our established relationships to other people, the social circle with whom we share our minds, and to which we desire to remain connected. Changing our minds has consequences that ripple out and are reflected back to us, and that makes change more difficult.

This restructuring left undone, our worldview becomes peppered with the unintegrated flotsam of captivating new givens we can't shake off or ignore. You know someone has this issue if frequently they unintentionally contradict themselves or appear hypocritical in their actions. If too much flotsam accumulates, we may feel the strain of not understanding the world anymore and fall into crisis. On this view, it's not a wonder that thoughtful interaction is rare, and we principally employ the button-pushing model of information exchange, sometimes leavened by mindful presence.

Science, Logic and Thinking

I've argued in the past that science involves a conversation with nature. We do something within our control, and something results, not in our control. That's a conversation, like chess is a conversation between two players, in the language of the actions of chess. But nature is a demanding and pedantic conversationalist. We may find what it says obvious, subtle, fascinating, or mystifying, but it's always consistent and it splits hairs. So, we have no choice but to integrate our own minds with what nature tells us if we want the conversation to proceed to new territory. But the coherence of nature's conversation removes the risk to our own identity. We inevitably change, but there is no existential threat from a conversation with nature. So, I'd argue that it's less risky for 'science' to think.

Then there is the question of logical reasoning. Is that thinking? It seems like it should be. But, if I understand him correctly, Heidegger was after something different. This is where the missing context of the 'Science Cannot Think' headline becomes important. Heidegger thought logical reasoning less significant because it acts according to inflexible laws. Being constrained by definitions and theoretical models brings you into the realm of nature governed by laws, God's or science's, and 'no final significance can be attached to human decisions, since the scope of our decision is constrained on all sides by laws.' (Pattison: *The Later Heidegger*; 114).

I interpret this to say that if an outcome is sufficiently determined by its conceptual premises, then the process

Holderlin

of getting to that outcome is what Heidegger calls a technological kind of thinking, the 'Science Cannot Think' kind of thinking. Heidegger reckons Plato to be the first purveyor of technological thinking, which now dominates Western thought, and pervades philosophy as much as it does science. Heidegger's essential thinking is not a mode of thought, exactly, but a mode of being prior to thought. The place were premises come from, and the spur to thinking. Only 'essential thinkers' can inhabit this. And Heidegger's cardinal hermeneutic principle is to find this 'unthought thought' implicit in their writings. 'The thought is both given by the text, and also hidden by it' (Pattison: 117). We '… endeavour to hear "what is unthought" in it [the text], since it is in this unthought that the true depth and uniqueness of a thinker is to be found'. 'The more original the thinking, the richer will be what is unthought in it'. 'The unthought is the greatest gift that thinking can bestow' (Pattison: 117; Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking*; WCT: 76).

Heidegger is assuming that each 'essential thinker' is a portal through which we can sense something unthought in him that resonates within us. The problem is: how do you know where you are, when you are in the 'unthought thought'? Are you thinking?

'The world is the world is
Love and life are deep
Maybe as his eyes are wide'

(Lyric fragment from *Tom Sawyer* by Geddy Lee, Neil Peart, Alex Lifeson, and Pye Dubois, 1981)

Aber du sprachst zu mir; auch hier sind Götter und walten,
Groß ist ihr Maas, doch es mißt gern mit der Spanne der Mensch.

Then, though, you said to me: here also are gods,
and they govern,
Great is their measure, but men take as their measure the span .

(Fragment from Friedrich Hölderlin's, *The Traveller*, tr. by Michael Hamburger.)

It seems to me that this essential thinking has a lot in common with perception, with experiencing. Heidegger lays out observations, like a traveller recounts experiences from trips to exotic places. The coherence of his thought does not come from logical consistency so much as from the coherence of this

Guattari

Deleuze

experience. Heidegger coins jargon to capture ways to describe his vision. He also uses metaphor, or poetical expression, and sometimes what appears to the untrained eye as gibberish (like 'unthought thought'). But … is perception thought?

It takes very little energy, focus, and action to experience a 'gestalt', say. This is best done in a quiet, almost dreamy state. Certainly not with a lot of striving. So, if anything the mind does can be considered least like thinking, I'd say *experiencing* is a good candidate. By this view, 'essential thinking' is not thinking at all. But it does take a great deal of effort to describe any experience to people who have not had a similar experience. How do you describe colour to a colour-blind person? You fall to using metaphors, and poetic expression, and, well, gibberish. So, maybe it is this effort to express the 'unthought thought' conceptually that Heidegger really means to call 'essential thinking'.

That idea might have been in the minds of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They focus on this process of how to express experience through art, science, and philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari use their own version of travelogue writing to bring their points across. They also coin or alter the meanings of words to suit their purposes, but their imagery is a lot more exuberant than Heidegger's. In *What is Philosophy?* they say:
'In short, chaos has three daughters, depending on the plane that cuts through it, these are the *Chaoids* - art, science, and philosophy - as forms of thought or creation. We call *Chaoids* the realities produced on the planes that cut through the chaos in different ways. *The brain is the junction* - not the unity - *of the three planes.*' [WP: 208]

Oddly, it's Martin Heidegger's view of 'essential thinkers' that offers a clue for how to interpret Deleuze and Guattari. His idea is that each essential thinker only brings forward one contribution, which is to be found in the unthought-thought behind their writing. This view grants a license to ignore what Deleuze and Guattari wrote and perhaps even thought, and to guess what might have been behind their effort. This seems like an odd way to further the intellectual adventure, but it does demand participation.

It seems to me that some of the most radical and innovative concepts are coming from physicist philosophers. So, the puzzle I'd like to focus on is how Deleuze and Guattari distinguish thinking in philosophy from thinking in science. So, I dove some more into their book *What is Philosophy*.

Deleuze and Guattari see reality as chaos, and they see art, science, and philosophy as modes by which we attempt to grasp it. By my understanding, they see Art as not merely reproducing sensation, but as creating within us 'a being of sensation' that retains the chaos even though the artwork itself is a projection from chaos to the anorganic medium in which the art is expressed. [WP: 203] This seems a pretty good capture of what Art does. What they don't say, but I think is true, is that artists are just as liable to unthinking conceptual regurgitation in their work as is anyone else. If one were to count only the 'essential artists' (to bring in

Heidegger) as artists, there would be few artists in the world, just as there would be few scientists and few philosophers.

Deleuze and Guattari see science as slowing down and extracting from chaos *independent variables* that can be put into relation with each other to reconstruct a global cosmology [WP: 202]. I like this formulation as well, despite its unwelcome whiff of essentialism. For me, the utility of science is to find relationships that do not change, because only what does not change can be used to understand the past and predict the future. So, I'm with Deleuze and Guattari on the slow, or ideally stationary, independent variables.

So finally, philosophy. Here are their words directly: *'What the philosopher brings back from the chaos are* variations *that are still infinite but that have become inseparable on the absolute surfaces or in the absolute volumes that lay out a secant [sécant] plane of immanence: these are not associations of distinct ideas, but reconnections through a zone of indistinction in a concept'. [WP:202]*

My impression is that the *concepts* brought back from the chaos by philosophers are like little boxes filled with live chaos, as it were. And these boxes, though separate and handle-able by human minds, connect with each other by an interaction of their chaotic interiors via the *zone of indistinction*. Sort of like entangled particles can be far apart from each other and yet still form a single, integrated system.

On the other hand, they see the *independent variables* of scientists like crystals with all the chaos frozen and inactive. They are the same inside and out, and therefore completely in the gift of the scientist's mind to manipulate.

My issue is that scientists and philosophers seem to me to engage in both kinds of chaos lucky dip. A scientist does not know the nature or the independence of the variable they are defining any more than the philosopher understands the nature of the concept they are formulating.

Deleuze and Guattari say that science and philosophy are both aiming to solve problems. And I agree that concepts and variables only gain definition and value as they are applied, as they interact with the problems they are aiming to solve. But for me, none of them is ever completely understandable. Science is magic you can rely on, as a technomage might say. And I would add, science is philosophy that works.

At the risk of being misunderstood, I'm gingerly going to quote from Richard Rorty on Pan-Relationalism (1996, https://youtu.be/-CNbYJKZZOA:

'Pragmatists don't think the truth is an aim of inquiry. The aim of inquiry is utility'.

An inquiring disposition is a mode of being. Is it thinking?

In summary: I believe the same modes of thinking are present in science, philosophy, and art, though those fields have radically different purposes and languages.

In science, it's more obvious that the objective is to grasp something outside the mind, through the window of experiment and measurement. In philosophy, it's easier to mistake a mirror for a window; to describe oneself rather than the world.

Deleuze and Guattari posit that philosophy is a unique mode of thinking, because in it alone are concepts created. But I haven't been able to understand the difference they see between concepts in science versus philosophy.

Hence my thesis that all the modes of thinking are present in art, science, and philosophy.

(This paper was presented to *The Wednesday* meeting 28th September 2022)

Time's Getting On

CHRIS **NORRIS**

Time's getting on; the harbour-lights recede;
Each day the profs look younger; journals bring
Reports that some once pillar-shaking creed
Was just a transient rumble, our big fling
At old-guy taunting just the sort of thing
The old guys did; increasingly there's talk
Of publishers and journals vanishing,
While those still hanging on are said to balk
At all that theory stuff. We'd wares to hawk,
You'll say, so why complain? - 'twas ever thus
And those with snazzy goods who'd walk the walk
Should view the mark-down without too much fuss.
No avant-garde but soon brings up the rear;
Where now the *dernier cri* of yesteryear?

Jesus as a Minoritarian Philosopher

CHRIS SEDDON

Following Rahim's editorial in *The Wednesday* of last month (issue 172) Chris Seddon led a discussion on Jesus as a minoritarian philosopher who used language and other symbolic acts to disrupt dominant power, challenging not only external religious and secular authorities, but more importantly the personal and cultural habits of thought which tend to dominate our personal world-view. Each member was invited to identify some words of Jesus or events in his life - whether regarded as fictional or not - that have challenged them in a constructive way.

Parables

Not all members were able to accept this invitation. Some approved of a parable - for example that of the good Samaritan - but only because it reinforced their existing world-view. At the same time, they were challenged by other narratives - for example 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' - but they could not discover any constructive interpretation, seeing it only as the ravings of a narcissist.

Others, however, were able to recall passages that both challenged their pre-existing world-view, and helped them towards a more constructive one.

One such was when Jesus told his disciples that he always spoke to the crowd in parables 'so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven'. This fostered a new world-view in which, rather than being given a miraculous cure to our problems, we are challenged by a narrative or series of life-events, which, over a period of time, will foster ongoing healing. Indeed this gives a clue as to why Jesus spoke in and acted out parables: his purpose was not to give us authoritative solutions, but to provoke us into thinking and feeling for ourselves. Only when we are finally ready to be provoked out of our habitual world-view by spoken narratives or life events and seek to make sense of them for ourselves, do we have eyes to see and ears to hear what they have to teach us.

More than one member reported that desperation and perplexity were a path to enlightenment. The effort to resolve perplexities - including Jesus's words and actions - forces us to discard erroneous beliefs, in particular the error of blaming yourself and others for the fact that you want reality to be different than it is.

Another member was challenged by being asked to 'Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'. Members suggested various lessons: to avoid needless worry; that for most of us our basic needs are being met; to take a broader perspective; and to focus on what is truly important. But just as this saying in context reminded different members of different aspects of life, so too it carries a deeper message, which cannot easily be put into words - and often we are still left with an unresolved parable, a continuing journey of discovery.

The subsequent advice to 'seek ye the kingdom of God' was related by one member to other uses of that metaphor, including 'the kingdom is within (among) you' and 'my kingdom is not of this world'. Paradoxically that repeated contrast between everyday distractions and mysterious inner truths brought them to consider the interconnectedness of God's kingdom, broadening the commandment to love your neighbour as yourself beyond not merely racial divides, but any division between human and nature.

Sometimes it is Jesus's apparent callousness which challenges us: 'And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead'. Not only does this seem to disregard the disciple's need for mourning, but to disrespect those who stayed behind, as if they too, were dead. Although some commentators question whether the disciple was really just finding an excuse, others felt that this underlined the need for the rigorous focus on a new kingdom illustrated by

Jesus preaching on the mount by Gustave Dore

the previous parables, also remembering the times when Jesus abandoned or rejected his birth parents and siblings to continue his work for a new family under the fatherhood of God into which all could be reborn.

Forgiveness

Many members were led to ponder on the nature of forgiveness, including forgiving the unforgivable. In some cases it seemed that the parallel in Jesus's teaching between receiving unconditional forgiveness from God and giving unconditional forgiveness to others was not apprehended directly from reading the Gospel, but only via other philosophers.

Another member reflected that forgiving wrongs requires not forgetting them, but an act of love, ultimately by the victim, which reconciles the situation in a new way. Another aspect of this was brought out by a member who considered how Jesus's teaching 'love your enemy and pray for those who persecute them' as transmitted in the Islamic tradition challenged him to learn experientially that praying for such people meant overcoming negative feelings and thus being freed from hatred and resentment.

One member reflected on the story of Jesus resisting Satan's offer of all the kingdoms of the world, which he felt was at the root of his current attitudes towards wealth and transient glory, even whilst he felt that the good words of Jesus were not enough to compensate for the evil ideas of the Old Testament and actions of the Christian Church. He was not the only one who drew a distinction between the superstitious dogma of so-called 'Christianity' and the example of 'that bloke Jesus'.

This open discussion illustrated that no one teacher speaks to every person, although it is remarkable that most reported some constructive challenges significantly affecting their life from the teaching of a man who apparently never wrote a word beyond, arguably, a few lines in the sand. Although one member felt that every religious teacher claims to have found wisdom, and so cannot be considered a philosopher, nearly every other contribution illustrated the contrary - that some such teachers can through symbolic stories and actions provoke us gently to pour the new wine and sew the unshrunk patches of our own experiences into the new wineskins and onto the new garments of our evolving personal world-views.

(Chris Seddon led the discussion on *Jesus as a Minoritarian Philosopher*, *The Wednesday* meeting 16th November)

Reflections on The Trial of Socrates

DAN McArdle

The trial of Socrates is both one of the most well-known and least understood events in all of philosophic history: despite millennia of ink spilled about it, we constantly unearth new insights. In our recent discussion, we first explored the context and sources, attempted to infer additional context from said sources, and then engaged in, at times, rather passionate debate over some of the key topics raised.

Socrates was tried and executed in the midst of massive political instability resulting from the Athenian defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian war. As we have nothing that he himself wrote, we must view the trial, as well as his ideas, through the lens of Plato and Xenophon, who, as students of his, have questionable objectivity. We should also consider the potential motives of Meletus, the main prosecutor, and why he chose to bring these charges when he did, given that Socrates had been a known figure for decades.

While the group accepted that there was significant bias in the sources, in particular from Plato, there was some argument as to whether Socrates' actions rose to the level of a criminal offense. In particular, questions circulated around his use of rhetoric, and whether rhetoric in itself is positive or negative. A point was raised that seeking the truth is different from trying to persuade people in a specific direction, and Dan McArdle countered with the fact that many of Socrates' questions were loaded with intention. Dan also commented about how realistic Socrates' dialectic opponents were, as they sometimes appear closer to caricatures in the dialogues surrounding the trial. But it was also pointed out that in other dialogues they are more realistic.

The group also asked questions about Socrates religious beliefs: first, whether he claimed a belief in 'god' to sidestep Meletus's accusation of atheism, and second, whether he was a monotheist. In the original text, the singular dative form of 'θεός' is used, but we were hard pressed to explain exactly what that word meant. There is no evidence that the Athenians were aware of Judaism at the time, and every other known religion in the area was polytheistic. However, it was quite rightly pointed out that Aristotle was also a monotheist, as evidenced by his 'prime mover' argument in his Metaphysics.

Dan McArdle

In the remaining time, we tackled whether Socratic questioning is ethical. Dan suggested that the 'do no harm' interpretation of Socrates was hampered by the fact that while he engaged in no physical attack, his mental and verbal techniques left people in a state that ultimately lead to the trial itself. It was responded that there is a big difference between being offensive and doing harm, citing Jonathan Haidt's 2018 book *The Coddling of the American Mind*. It was also mentioned by a member of the group that she has used Socratic questioning in her classrooms with great success.

From the beginning of the discussion, Dan was clear that he was exploring the topic, and not only had no answers, but saw strong arguments on both sides of various questions he was asking. The one clear agreement that came out of the discussion was that freedom of speech and inquiry is of paramount importance. The trial of Socrates was discussed before by the group, and our present talk may have inspired at least one future discussion about rhetoric.*

(This is a summary of Dan McArdle's paper presented to *The Wednesday* meeting, 9th November 2022).

Frederick Douglass and The Struggle for Liberation

URSULA MARY **BLYTHE**

British historians and philosophers are generally unaware that the former black slave Frederick Douglass (c. 1817-1895) travelled to Ireland in 1845 to give a series of public lectures to raise awareness of the anti-slavery movement. At the time, Ireland was entering the early stages of the Potato Famine (otherwise known as the Great Hunger) in which over one million Irish perished and two million emigrated. Douglass's trip to Ireland was initially scheduled as a four-day visit but evolved into a four-month stay when a Quaker printer, Richard Webb, offered to publish an Irish version of Douglass's *Narrative.*

While overseas, Douglass was impressed by the relative freedom he had as a man of colour, compared to his experience in the USA. In October 1845, he left Dublin and began a tour through Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, and Belfast. Of his experience in rural Ireland, Douglass wrote:

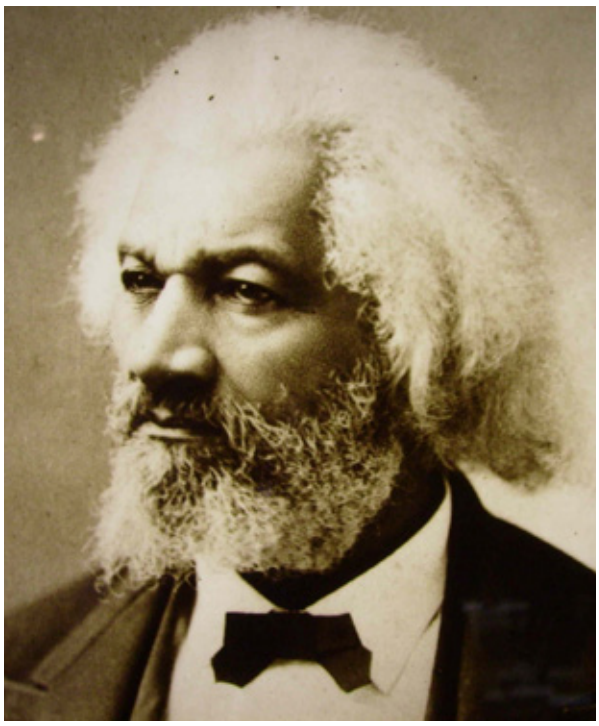
> *I saw no-one that seemed to be shocked or disturbed by my dark presence. No one seemed to feel himself contaminated by contact with me*.

His time in Ireland afforded Douglass the space to gain perspective, sharpen his focus, and secure his position at home. Indeed, Ireland was and still is a land of thinkers and debaters, so he found a vibrant intellectual community.

Douglass's primary goal was to abolish slavery, but he also recognised the wider fight for justice and freedom for all of humanity. For Douglass, ending slavery was not enough; equality must be achieved. He wrote in 1846:

> *I seem to have undergone a transformation. I live a new life… Instead of the bright blue sky of America, I am covered with the soft grey fog of the Emerald Isle. I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man.*

From Ireland, Douglass continued his lecture tour in Scotland, England, and Wales through 1846. In a controversial twist, Douglass's freedom was purchased by a group of female abolitionists in England. This was the only way Douglass could safely return to America and get back to his important work at home, where he would go on to set up an abolitionist newspaper: *The North Star.* 'The Liberator'that is, Daniel O'Connell



Frederick Douglass

became an inspiration for Douglass's later work on black emancipation and women's rights. Douglass's sociopolitical ideas were framed in his dual philosophy of 'resistance and integration'. (Ballard, 2004: 51-75).

In practice, this equated to black self-reliance, whilst holding white folks accountable for justice and racial equality. In Angela Davis's pioneering 'Lectures on Liberation' (1969), she observes that:

> *The collective consciousness of an oppressed people entails an understanding of the conditions of oppression and the possibility of abolishing these conditions* (Davis [1969] 2010: 49).

Davis effectively articulated the complex intersection of class, gender, and race that had resulted in pervasive aspects of oppression over six decades of her academic career. Most deservingly, she was recently named one of *Time* Magazine's Most Influential People (2020), as she raises awareness of important social struggles, despite contradictory accounts of her work.

(Ursula M. Blythe gave two talks on the concept of race to *The Wednesday* meetings of the 2nd and 23rd November)

I Dreamt a Dream

I dreamt a dream, where I was small,
a little child in a white dress,
who held an angel's hand in mine
and walked with him through thoughtfulness.

The flowers were so colourful,
there was a yellow butterfly…
No fear nor sorrow could intrude
nor inklings of a blurred distress.

I felt so safe as never before
and my whole life was aiming high.
The angel smiled without a word
and pointed to the final door.

High up it gleamed and was a sign
for me to walk to its dark frame,
as everyone that went before
and never has returned no more.

When we arrived, I saw the light
emerging from this heaven's door.
The angel left me just before.
An overwhelming love inside

pulled me right in and held me tight,
so that my self dissolved its part.
All thought had left, the light was white
and flooded my entire heart.

Poem and Artwork by
Scharlie Meeuws

Art and
Reflections

The Return of The Sacred

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

This is one of my favourite projects of all time. I realised this work of art with my six year old daughter, Alea. From beginning to end. It was her idea and I just played along. She had seen the technique we used whilst watching some art video and wanted to try it out with me. Alea painstakingly cut all the cardboard rolls we had hoarded during the Covid-19 months, and glued them to the canvas. The next phase was a sort of papier-mâché coating to the whole structure and at the same time creating the hint of two figures by using Styrofoam balls and leftovers from the cardboard rolls. Then she meticulously used the brush to give a coating or two of a special paste I had prepared for her made of gypsum and glue diluted with water. The last part I basically did on my own, since she is too young to handle a spray can. I sprayed the whole thing with brass-bronze aerosol and applied a Powertex bluish grey patina when dry, which gave it that weathered appearance. The last touch was with a copper pigment, dusted strategically all over the work.

Alea decided that the name of this joint work of art should be 'Heilige Reich' loosely translated as 'Holy Kingdom', perhaps because she sees two figures that reminded her of the sacred family in her much beloved Christmas crib.

The connection my daughter is making between art and the sacred is particularly interesting for me since recently I was reading Karsten Harries's appraisal of architecture and building in *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. An idea that wedged itself into my subconscious from this book's chapter entitled 'A representation of life' is that of the return of art to the sacred. That spiritual experience filled with awe that one feels whilst at Christmas mass on Christmas Eve, sort of thing. This work, as most of his works, is helping me develop my own thesis about the concept of architecture for the common good. My current philosophical project is focussed on this theme.

Harries in fact tells us that like Nietzsche before him, Heidegger refused to accept the finality of the separation of art from the sacred that is demanded by

Heilige Reich - Holy Kingdom
(30 cm x 80 cm)

the aesthetic approach. Moreover, Harries explains that like Hegel, Heidegger thus thinks art in its highest sense has become something of the past. The art that is in keeping with our modern world, is art subject to the aesthetic approach,that is, art serving aesthetic experience in the widest, highest and lowest sense. According to Harries, Hegel did not mourn this development, quite the opposite: he considered it part of humanity's coming of age, and mourning the death of art in its highest sense as silly as nostalgically wanting to return to one's childhood. Nevertheless, Heidegger would not accept Hegel's understanding of the age as the glorious culmination of the progress of history, but sees, prowling behind that progress, the spectre of nihilism. Therefore, he dreams of an art that will let the sacred return.

When Harries is asked whether Heidegger had an ontological conception of the 'beautiful' and in this respect was he following Hegel, he replies that by an ontological conception of art he means one that ties 'art to truth'. In Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* such an understanding is taken for granted. Hegel knows that much art has always been no more than a petty diversion: decoration or entertainment. However, he demands more of art: the true purpose of art is to provide us with 'the sensuous representations of the absolute itself'. Beauty is understood as 'only a certain manner of expressing and representing the true'. So understood, an ontological conception of the beautiful is not particularly Hegelian — equally well one could point to Plato, Thomas Aquinas, or Heidegger — to give just some examples.

Finally, Harries tells us that the beautiful work of art does not so much reveal reality as it offers a vacation from it. Emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the aesthetic object leads thus quite naturally to an emphasis on aesthetic distance, on that separation of art from reality which Kant, and following him, Schopenhauer, were to insist on. Such distance is implied by that disinterested pleasure in which Kant found the key to the essence of aesthetic experience. For a time the experience of art allows us to leave behind the burdens of the everyday. As the art historian Michael Fried wrote in *Art and Objecthood*: "presentness is grace'.

I leave you with these thoughts and also with the hope of peace in this love-filled month of December. In the words of Tiny Tim, from Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*: 'God bless us everyone!'.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all my fellow Wednesdayers!

The Wednesday

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My Old Friend The Autumn Mist

My old friend the Autumn mist, that great concealer,
And, when it lifts, the great revealer
Of towers and trees. It even catches
Autumn at her silent work, for soon the leaves

Will all be gone, and only the merest snatches
Of birdsong will be heard. Autumn's own spirit grieves
Time's passing, for Time proves Hotspur wrong,
Time will never stop, endless, endlessly long!

The eternal complaint of the poet's pen,
It really is a blessing, for it gives
A final term to everything that lives,

Which once it's gone, will not return again,
For every 'now' must turn into a 'then',
And grains do not leap back into their sieves.

Edward Greenwood