

The Wednesday

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

Philosophy on the Fringe

There has been a phenomenon in recent years of an increasing number of clubs and societies for discussing philosophy. Some are within academia, others are more like intellectual clubs, or regular platforms for thinking. You may call it 'Philosophy in the public sphere' as it was suggested by the *Review Internationale de Philosophie*. Philosophy may not be the sole interest, but it may come to dominate. This may be the case in *The Wednesday* meeting at the moment, but it should not distract from the fact that the group originally had a wider interest in thoughts generally, including art and poetry. Academic papers are most welcome, but the meetings are not organised in competition with academic establishments and their more rigorous way of discussing philosophy.

This is generally the case with informal meetings that have no academic connections. But the temptation always is to imitate academia, especially when members are themselves ex-academics or participating in academia. There are many examples of older people taking courses in retirement, and even succeeding in obtaining PhDs in philosophy. Some groups have already started running their own courses, but with no qualifications awarded. That is fine. It did cross my mind to push in this direction, but I did not have the expertise or enough contacts to manage such courses. If I do, it will not be on analytical philosophy, but on a philosophy that shares a lot with literature and the social sciences.

If you do a social analysis of these fringe groups, you will find that members join at a later stage of their life, with experience in different fields, not necessarily philosophy, although they wish to know or expand their knowledge of philosophy. But what kind of philosophy are they interested in? I would suggest that there are two broad categories, one is professional and technical philosophy, the other is more interested in ideas and their relation to this stage of their lives, particularly the meaning of life. I have an interest in both categories, although I am very much in favour of the second. My reason for being so is that there comes a stage in life

when one asks him or herself: Where am I going and what does it all mean? It is the search for meaning that motivates many people to join philosophy clubs and societies. But there is also the need to discover new ideas. Furthermore, one may wish to relate ideas suggested in philosophy to a general intellectual interest in life.

I find in most cases that there is a trend towards making a close connection between philosophy and science, either through a philosophy of language or a philosophy of mind. But in this case, philosophy loses sight of the individual and society at large. Kierkegaard once objected to Hegel's system by asking: what does it mean to me? The objection is valid especially when we are talking about someone in a later stage of life. On the society front, we may discuss different aspects of philosophy, but how do these thoughts contribute to society at large? One quick answer is that philosophy helps people to think in an orderly and logical way. But that is a limited task. What may be more relevant is the question of meaning in the life of the individual and society. Such meaning could be expanded to the practice of philosophy itself, by asking about the value that philosophy contributes to society. Philosophy, for the most part, is not involved in social criticism. But outside technical philosophy, such as in literary criticism and the history of ideas, a framework can be developed for the right connection between philosophical thought and society. However, some philosophers managed to make the connection themselves. For example, Nietzsche's interest in cultural criticism and his endeavour to vitalise Western civilisation by fighting nihilism and all ideas that cause the weakening of individual and society, produced powerful thoughts and generated interest in his philosophy.

It is always good to have platforms for thinking and to form societies for this purpose. I am most happy if *The Wednesday* has contributed to this aim and I wish other societies and clubs every success with their work.

The Editor

Personal Knowledge

The argument presented here is that knowledge is information enlivened by being. This living dynamism marks the difference between information and knowledge and implies a link between Being, knowledge and the knower. This relationship distinguishes Artificial Intelligence (AI) from knowledge as lived experience.

WILLIAM BISHOP

As the experience of the First World War undermined the value of Western philosophy for John Macmurray, pressing him to develop an epistemology based on action, so Michael Polanyi's experience of war convinced him of the need for morality to be injected into the 'objectivity' of the Western scientific paradigm. As we know, Modern Western philosophy rejects tradition based on belief and faith in favour of knowledge obtained on the basis of doubt (Descartes), and on scientific empiricism which excludes the human subject (Bacon/Newton), and a blank slate as the initial stage of the human mind (John Locke). However Polanyi reasoned that a scientific notion of objective knowledge developed on a materialist foundation, becoming mainstream in philosophy and Western thought, led directly to nihilism and war. Polanyi argued that the human subject is necessarily involved in producing knowledge and that a stable society needs the foundation of tradition to support progress.

It is assumed that knowledge acquired by empirical science is objective knowledge, but since this is a combination of mind and sense data it contains a 'subjective' component. The mind has to participate in gaining this knowledge by supplying a concept by which the sense data is interpreted. Consequently empirical knowledge gained through the experience of observation must acknowledge its subjectivity. In this respect scientific knowledge is no different from other forms of knowledge where human faculties are brought to bear on sense data.

Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) had a brilliant career in chemistry before turning to philosophy

to address social problems, which he saw to be caused by defective epistemology. He reasoned that a science that limits its account of reality to facts of matter could not account for non-material realities, so that when taken as a worldview 'scientific objectivity' leads inevitably to a world without soul and morality and therefore to loss of meaning. While accepting experience of an external world, he came to the conclusion that all knowledge is personal, and argued that so-called 'objective knowledge' is logically impossible because knowledge involves the person; and the human being is embedded in the continuum of reality and therefore participates in it and cannot be excluded from the process of cognition. Polanyi's contention, as an experienced scientist, was that belief and faith are as much involved in the process of discovery of scientific knowledge as they are in everyday life, and the reduction of all valid knowledge to materialist 'scientific objectivity' limits the scope for knowledge of reality by denying primary validity to values and what is non-material but no less real.

Knowledge requires a knower for it to be 'knowledge' and this calls for a *conscious* person. In this sense knowledge is personal knowledge but not necessarily subjective. Reality is so infinitely rich that absolute knowledge is hardly possible so personal knowledge is partial and potentially influenced by a person's conditioning and culture. An Individual conceives an *idea* from *their* viewpoint, yet the *idea* itself is objective. This is called *Objective Idealism*, which is neither Solipsism nor Objectivism but personal knowledge of the idea. Polanyi emphasized that such personal knowledge comes with responsibility, and this



Michael Polanyi

is where morality comes in. Knowledge is not inert but may open a door to meaning, beauty, truth, goodness, justice and freedom. These ideals interact with the conscience and sensibility of a person.

When an idea conforms to a phenomenon, participation in the cognized idea is knowledge of the phenomenon from inside. Polanyi spoke of tacit knowledge and practical knowledge such as a craft skill, which can only be learnt by example and practice, and also knowledge gained through intuition. Reasonable belief and faith are also relevant here. If it is true that knowledge acquired by the scientific method has in reality the same status as other forms of knowledge then there is no reason why it should be regarded as *the only valid knowledge*, and therefore it can be seen to be on the same level playing field as knowledge gained through art and the humanities. The *personal* has to be distinguished from the *individual*. Although there is a subtle connection, individuality is characterized by subjectivity whereas what relates to the person aspires to universality. The question of the universality of knowledge is vital since action in life is taken on the basis of knowledge and belief.



Goethe

In his Riddell Lectures (1945), published as *Science, Faith, and Society*, Polanyi argued that contrary to the sanctioned view, scientists actually employ hunches and intuition in their work and depend on tradition and the authority of a community of practicing scientists. His attitude to the search for knowledge is that it requires affirmation and commitment rather than doubt and abstract passivity. He emphasized the importance of Gestalt psychology and proposed that *knowledge* involves intuiting the overall pattern created by the individual features of an entity, so recognition of a face requires a leap from the particulars to the whole. Focus on particulars (parts) does not provide meaning while focus on the whole does, although this depends on awareness of the subsidiary elements.

By abolishing the distinction between *facts* (obtained by science) and *values*, Polanyi establishes confidence to accept values such as truth, beauty and justice: '*If personal participation and imagination are essentially involved in science as well as in the humanities, meanings created in the sciences stand in no more favoured relationship to reality than do meanings created in the arts, in moral judgements, and in religion*'. Polanyi

noted that totalitarianism, known for its human violations, stemmed from ‘objectivism’, which invalidates moral claims. Polanyi also envisaged multiple levels of meaning in contrast to reduction to a single level of meaning: *‘All meaning lies in higher levels of reality that are not reducible to the levels by which the ultimate particulars of the universe are controlled. . . . What is most tangible has the least meaning and it is perverse then to identify the tangible with the real. For to regard a meaningless substratum as the ultimate reality of all things must lead to the conclusion that all things are meaningless’*.

It is worth remarking that for various reasons people become attached to a particular standpoint, and while a view can be true within the sphere to which it applies, it may not be universally applicable. For a balanced or comprehensive view it is necessary to take account of other standpoints. If there are twelve identifiable standpoints (such as idealist, materialist, etcetera) these can be arranged as the different hours on a clock-face, for reference.

Status Of The Idea

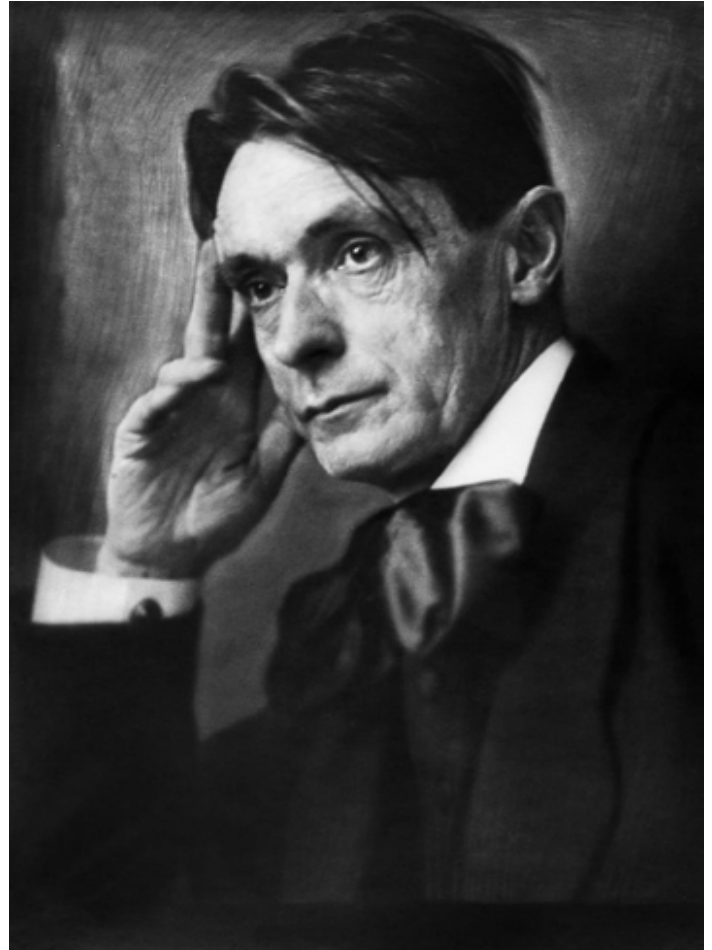
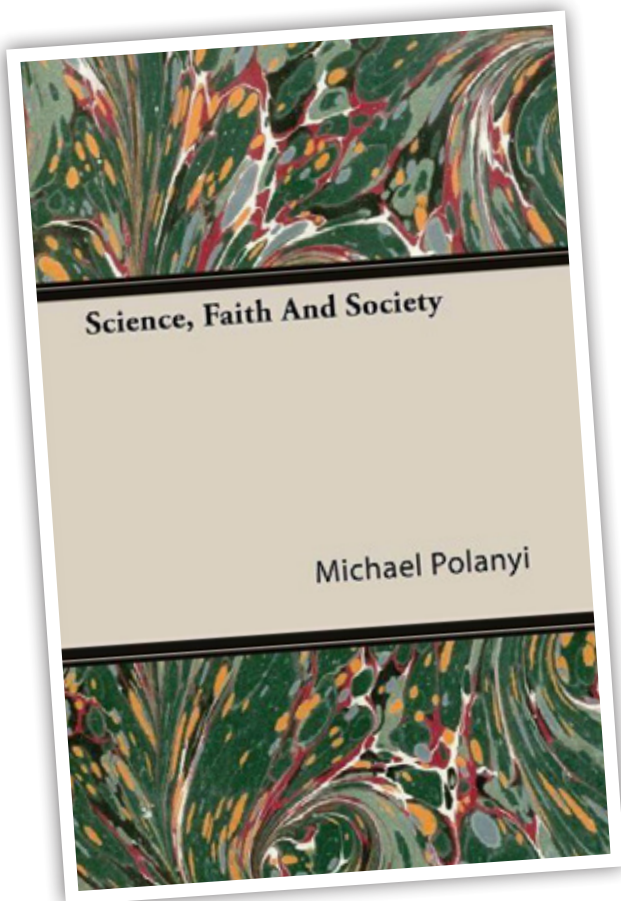
‘Everything we become conscious of and everything we can speak of is simply a manifestation of the idea’. This statement by Goethe in *Verses in Prose* arose from his belief that people are capable of developing their capacity for knowledge to the degree where ideas become as visible as the external world is to the senses. He explained to Schiller how he followed in his imagination the life cycle of an annual plant and derived from this the leaf as the archetypal (Protean) plant form (the plant as the metamorphosis of the leaf). Schiller said this is an idea, to which Goethe responded: *‘Well then, I can see ideas,’* In this case the idea of the plant is its complete life from seed to flower and fruit. This is the idea as an *archetype* or *type* that *lives* within the plant as a formative force. In the sense in which Goethe *saw* the idea, thinking is an ‘organ’ for *perception* of ideas. The active (living) idea is the *entelechy*, the type, the being in itself, or ‘is-ness’ of the entity. This applies to the organic world and its equivalent in the inorganic world would be *natural law*. The idea has the status of objective reality but is apprehended

subjectively within human consciousness.

Goethe’s participatory mode of cognition stems from his reverent attitude to nature. This mood contrasts against the skeptical mood of the day. His contemporary, Schelling, understood the principle, or objective reality of nature, to be activated within the ‘I’ or spiritual identity of a person (their being). Similarly for Goethe, objective truth was not in outside appearances but could be grasped within the human being, which is to say, in the world of ideas. Goethe’s worldview recognized the essential nature of things in ideas and conceived knowledge to be a living-into the being of things. Therefore reality was constituted in the meeting between outer objectivity and inner subjectivity.

Goethe thought of the human being as the pinnacle of nature and a higher nature that interprets nature. Writing in his introduction to Goethe’s scientific writings, Rudolf Steiner states that time arises only when the being of something manifests externally, so that time belongs to the world of appearances and has nothing to do with the being, or essence of a thing, and such being can be apprehended only as idea. This essence of a thing accordingly is indestructible, beyond all time and in fact determines time. If we consider this viewpoint with an affirmative attitude, then *‘living into the idea’* gives cognitive connection to fundamental reality, with being. A relationship can be discerned here with the prologue of the Gospel of John: *in the beginning was the logos (Idea)*.

So to recap, cognition involves inserting the human mental organization into the world process, interrupting the continuum to separate object from subject. The percept then has to be matched with its appropriate concept. This is possible if thinking is ‘universal primordial being which pervades all men’: a self-sustaining spiritual essence grasped through intuition. According to the supersensible perception of Rudolf Steiner *thinking* impresses itself on the human organization producing consciousness of self, so that the ‘I’ arises within the process of thinking. It is then that intuition associated with the ‘I’ grasps the concept or idea. Here it is relevant to consider Descartes’ insight: ‘I think therefore I am.’ The fact that Descartes



Rudolf Steiner

felt he had found a self-supporting ground for his existence in thinking provides a key to resolve the subject-object dilemma. Because the world, as a process, is continuous, it only divides into subject and object when the human constitution is inserted into the process. What appears to be dualism is actually monism for the human conscious self (the 'I') responsible for the subject-object split, unites percept with concept through thinking.

Being And Knowing

Knowledge is closely allied to being. The world is information before it becomes knowledge. Knowledge requires a knower. Who is the knower and what is their being-status? Is it the case that being transforms information into knowledge through its life-giving facility? There is a strong desire for certainty in knowledge. This is not easily achieved and maybe it is wise to hold knowledge provisionally or theoretically like a scientific hypothesis. Will increase in knowledge increase being in the being that is becoming? Presumably it will if the soul, as the centre of personal life, is the 'place' of knowing. Increase in knowledge will then contribute to self-development. Here we have the notion that knowledge changes a person.

At the absolute level it is assumed that being and knowledge are the same, but this is not necessarily so at the personal level. Experience involves 'contact', so is experience the mediator between being and knowledge? Is knowledge without words possible? To gain knowledge of some things it may be necessary to bear an attitude of love because some knowledge may only be gained in an open, interactive and listening mode. This will particularly apply to living things and nature, where a one-sided utilitarian attitude could create a barrier to participatory knowledge. This is where Polanyi's injection of morality into scientific cognition is relevant. Finally, regarding the human desire for conscious connection (contact) with Being, can it be that when a person is said to become one with the Cosmic Spirit that this is attunement to 'universal primordial being', which as the logos resonant with the creative vitality of thinking, manifests as Idea? Ultimately, and to conclude, we need being in order to have personal knowledge but in our condition of becoming, human knowledge develops, and for this to happen Being appears to be the be-all and end-all.

Physicalism Dissolved

Modern physics has dissolved the intuitive notion of ‘the physical’. Is it time to dissolve the physicalist intuition in the context of the philosophy of mind as well? Does our intuitive concept in this case disable rather than enable understanding?

PETER STIBRANY

I listened a while back to a debate between the physicist Sean Carroll and the philosopher Philip Goff about whether the ‘physical’ or the ‘mental’ is fundamental in the universe. I got to wondering about the definition of ‘physical’, so I consulted the trusty Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (SEP) entry for Physicalism. An enormous depth of thinking has gone into this question, but not much consensus beyond the circular: The general idea of physicalism is that the nature of the actual world (i.e. the universe and everything in it) conforms to a certain condition, the condition of being physical.

Ultimately, ‘physical’ appears to be a foundational concept. The SEP entry notes David Lewis’s thought that ‘circularity is only a problem if the conceptions are interpreted as providing a reductive analysis of the notion of the physical. But there is no reason why they should be interpreted in that way. After all, we have many concepts that we understand without knowing how to analyse’. [SEP entry on Physicalism].

But do we understand it outside of our everyday context? I think not. Modern conceptions of ‘materials’ and ‘physical objects’ have travelled very far from when we understood them. My objective here is to show that the term ‘physicalism’ no longer means what we thought it meant and should no longer be used to

describe a metaphysical position.

Physicalism

To be sure, in an age of ‘virtual’ and ‘augmented reality’ environments, video conferencing, and software, ‘the physical’ is, if anything, a more useful concept than ever. The sentence ‘I physically went to see him’ might have struck our great-grandparents as odd, but it means something these days. But in fundamental physics, the intuitive idea of the ‘physical’ or ‘material’ was dissolved a hundred years ago. Nevertheless, most philosophers today retain what the philosopher James Ladyman laments is an ‘A-Level Chemistry’ version of the world.

In a Wednesday group discussion a couple of weeks ago, I promised one participant to show how modern physicists, attempting to create a narrative of how nature works at the smallest scales, have been forced outside the intuitive categories we take for granted. Perhaps the most famous attempts to categorise the primitive concepts in which we think were made by Aristotle and Kant. Kant’s ‘strategy is to show that the categories are necessary conditions for experiencing objects given in intuition’ [Jill Vance Buroker, Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason: An Introduction*, pp. 103 - 135, Cambridge University Press, 2006]

Some Physics

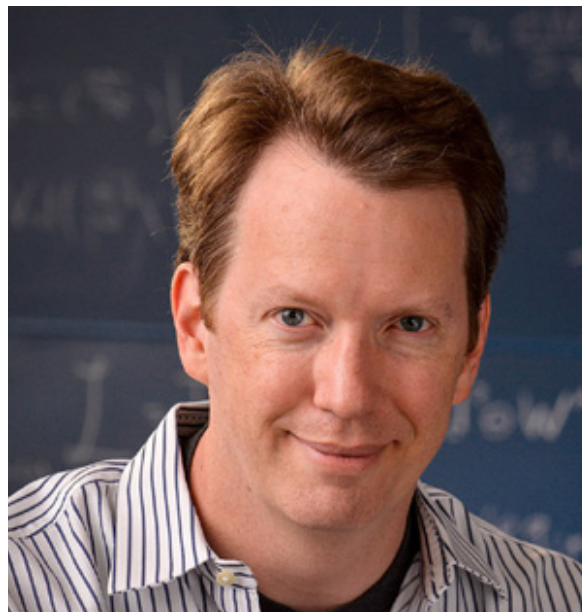
According to the prevailing interpretation of quantum mechanics, when we are not measuring a fundamental particle, there is 'no fact of the matter' about its properties. For example, electrons until they are measured are not 'things' in any intuitive sense:

- They are everywhere and nowhere; all we can say is where they are likely to show up when we make a measurement.
- We don't understand how measurement 'causes' them to be in the place where we measure them.
- We don't understand how they instantaneously become impossible to find anywhere else.

This instantaneous transition from 'possibly anywhere' to 'this one specific place' is the famous 'spooky action at a distance' that made Einstein think quantum mechanics could not be a complete theory. We are held in thrall by our intuition of object permanence, but the only conclusion we can draw after decades of experiments and careful thinking is that between measurements, electrons both exist and do not exist simultaneously, everywhere and nowhere.

Next is the knotty problem of 'entanglement'. It turns out that particles can be created in matching pairs. The frequently used analogy is that these pairs are like pairs of left and right shoes, say, or gloves - if you know that one of them is right-handed, you know the other must be left-handed. But it turns out, again despite careful thinking from Einstein and Schrödinger, among others, that this is not the case, as Alain Aspect, John Clauser and Anton Zeilinger were awarded the 2022 Nobel Prize in Physics for proving. What we now know is that:

- Two particles created as a matched pair continue to be a single entity, even as they race off in different directions.
- We know there are two of them because they can be detected and measured independently.
- We also know that there is no fact of the matter about which is the left one and which is the right one until a measurement takes place.
- And we also know that once we measure one of them, the property of the other one is set 'instantaneously' - i.e. it 'knows' whether its partner was measured as left or right, and instantly completes the matching pair.



Physicist Sean Carroll

It also turns out that 'entanglement' is not a rare exception. There is strong suspicion among theoretical physicists that space itself 'emerges' from entanglement, rather than entanglement just being restricted to be a property of some particles in space.

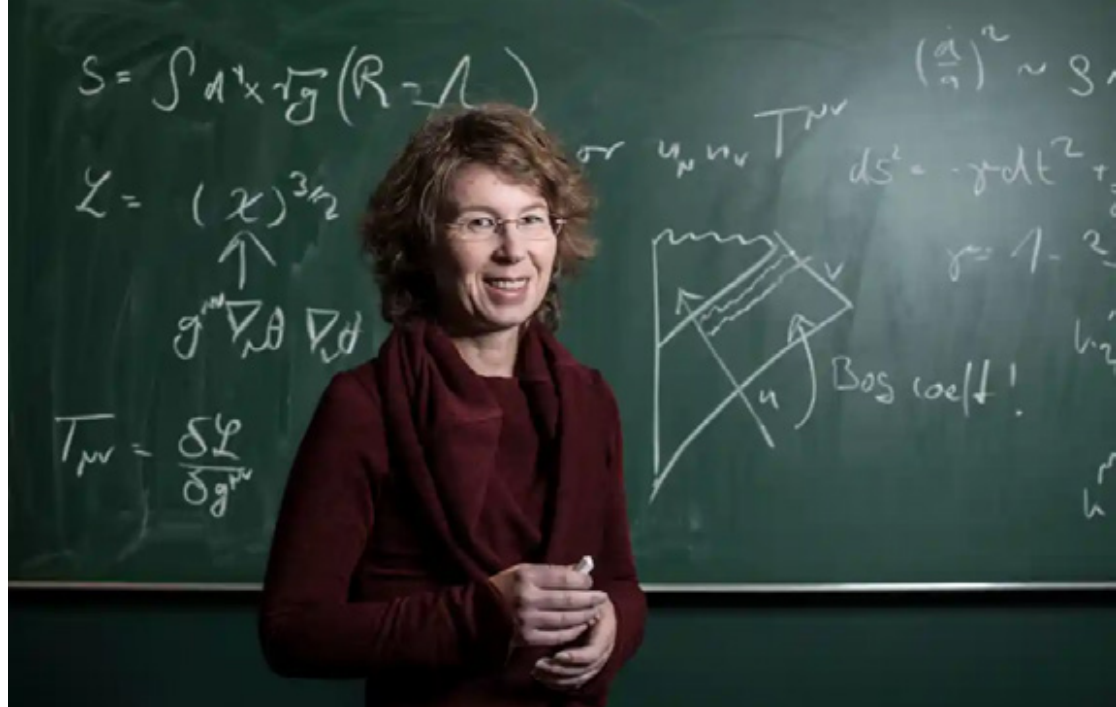
Further on divisibility, metaphysicians have for millennia argued whether matter is infinitely divisible or stops at indivisible elements (such as the atoms in the void of Democritus). Surely it must be one or the other. But it turns out neither is correct.

The more we dig into its details the fuzzier and less-well defined 'matter' becomes, until we get to unbounded lumps of various kinds of uncertainty. We can describe behaviour in this regime mathematically, but narrative descriptions are thin on the ground. Most scientists prefer instead to 'shut up and calculate'. Indeed, the ridiculousness of the proffered narratives made it taboo to create interpretations of quantum mechanics for several decades after WW II.

Virtual particles

And then there is what should be, but is not, the void itself. It turns out that instead of empty space, we have 'virtual particles' that really torture our everyday notions of presence, absence, cause, and effect.

Virtual particles pop out of empty space and disappear again, randomly and with no cause. And yet, they are how we explain solidity; why, for example, my hand rests on this table rather than going through it. The



The physicist Sabine Hossenfelder

electrons in the atoms of my hand exchange virtual photons with the electrons in the atoms of the table. Even weirder, virtual particles give matter most of the mass we feel when we attempt to move an object. Ever since the Higgs boson was discovered at CERN in 2012 and Peter Higgs won the Nobel Prize in 2013, we've been educated to understand that a particle's 'mass' is created because the particle interacts with the Higgs field; the Higgs field creates a 'drag' that resists the particle accelerating. But it turns out this is only a small fraction of the mass we experience. Most of the mass comes from a very strange interaction, as explained by the physicist Sabine Hossenfelder:

'A variety of virtual particles is continually popping into and out of existence around the quarks that make up the protons and neutrons, but it turns out that almost all of the action comes from virtual pions (composite particles made of quark/antiquark pairs); the pions form a condensate (just like the Higgs field does) and that pion condensate drags on the neutrons and the protons, and that's where the most of "mass" of the nucleus comes from - drag on the pion condensate not the Higgs condensate'. (<https://youtu.be/MyGIQ3RIKkU>)

So, that is the modern physics version of number, existence, location, solidity, extension, and mass - the foundations of what we intuitively consider 'physical'. It's very hard indeed to map out these modern physics explanations using Kantian notions of unity, plurality, reality, negation, cause-effect, and existence-nonexistence.

Realism: Are there things?

We are used to thinking that our 'categories of the understanding' (whether Kantian or not) are all that is required to understand everything at all scales of nature. We are therefore tempted to assume that anything outside of these categories cannot be real. But 'not

understandable by us' is not nearly the same as 'not real'. In their profound, philosophically precise but abominably written *Every Thing Must Go* James Ladyman and Don Ross argue modern physics allows that only patterns have material (as opposed to formal) reality:

'When we go on to deny that, strictly speaking, there are "things", we will mean to deny that in the material world as represented by the currently accepted scientific structures, individual objects have any distinctive status. Some real patterns, we will argue, behave like things, traditionally conceived, while others behave like traditional instances of events and processes. ... From the metaphysical point of view, what exist are just real patterns'. [p121]

Theirs is, of course, a minority view at this point. But I believe their emphasis on patterns has depth, and I hope to come back to it in a future talk on 'emergence'.

Sean Carroll / Philip Goff debate

I do not think anyone (not even Dan Dennett) seriously believes that 'mind' and 'consciousness' do not exist for us human beings. It is just that so far, we have not needed to invoke these ideas to explain the interactions observed in the experiments of fundamental physics. (Of course, in the 'special sciences' such as medicine, 'mind' is an important factor removed from experiments using cumbersome and expensive double-blind techniques.)

This exclusion of 'mind' from physics is not for want of open-mindedness. For example, Eugene Wigner (Physics Nobel Prize winner in 1963) hypothesised that consciousness plays a role in quantum mechanical 'wave function collapse', an idea now ruled out by experiment. Also, physicists are not backward about looking for any hint of inconsistency between theory



James Ladyman

and experiment - the current ‘crisis in cosmology’ being an exemplar case. But as to positing ‘mind’, it turns out that so far, ‘we have no need of that hypothesis’.

For me, the principal thrust of what we should no longer call ‘physicalism’ has to do with whether the processes of fundamental physics will give all the laws necessary to explain everything, including that we are conscious. Most physicists would likely agree with Sean Carroll when he asks: ‘Here are the fundamental equations of the Standard Model. Show me how to change these equations to account for consciousness’.

That is a tall order, particularly if no physicist believes it is worth attempting such a thing. But I can think of two lines of research that might overturn the assumption that ‘mind’ makes no difference.

First, we know that ‘mind’ is a fact of life for human beings, so it could be that only at the levels of complexity of a human being does ‘mind’ make a noticeable difference. Analogously, observations at the scale of our solar system show none of the effects that need to be explained by postulating ‘dark matter’ and ‘dark energy’.

Indeed, various philosophers reckon that the ‘mind’, as opposed to the ‘brain’ does things that are ‘not computable’. [See SEP entry on *The Computational Theory of Mind*]

Roger Penrose (Physics Nobel Prize 2020) points out in *The Emperor’s New Mind* that all our physical laws are computable excepting only a limited segment of quantum mechanics, implying that we have evolved to use some feature of quantum mechanics that modern physics has not yet understood as manifesting ‘mind’.

This debate is still in mid-flow. However, a great deal



Philosopher Philip Goff

of research is being done on the physics and chemistry of the brain and their connection with conscious experience; it seems like we will get to the right kind of observations sooner or later to settle this aspect of the question.

Second, it is possible that there will eventually be no other way to explain why the universe appears as it does than to posit ‘mind’ as a factor.

In his recent book *Why? The Purpose of the Universe*, the philosopher Philip Goff argues that the universe is driven by teleological causation (a final cause or intention) to look as it does. He argues that cosmopsychism provides an explanation for the ‘fine tuning’ of what look to be contingent values for universal constants. It seems that if those constants were even slightly different than they are, no life, intelligence, or self-awareness would be possible.

Of course, physicists are working hard to show those fundamental constants to be necessary, rather than contingent. If they succeed, Goff’s argument will fail. But his point is that we must work with physics the way it is now, not with how we hope it might turn out in the future. Goff argues this cosmic consciousness is not ‘God’ in the religious sense.

The counter-intuitive concepts of quantum mechanics have now been accepted by most physicist, but only after decades of work by some of the smartest people in the world intent on defeating them. So, I see a long road ahead before Goff’s idea gains traction, if indeed it ever does.

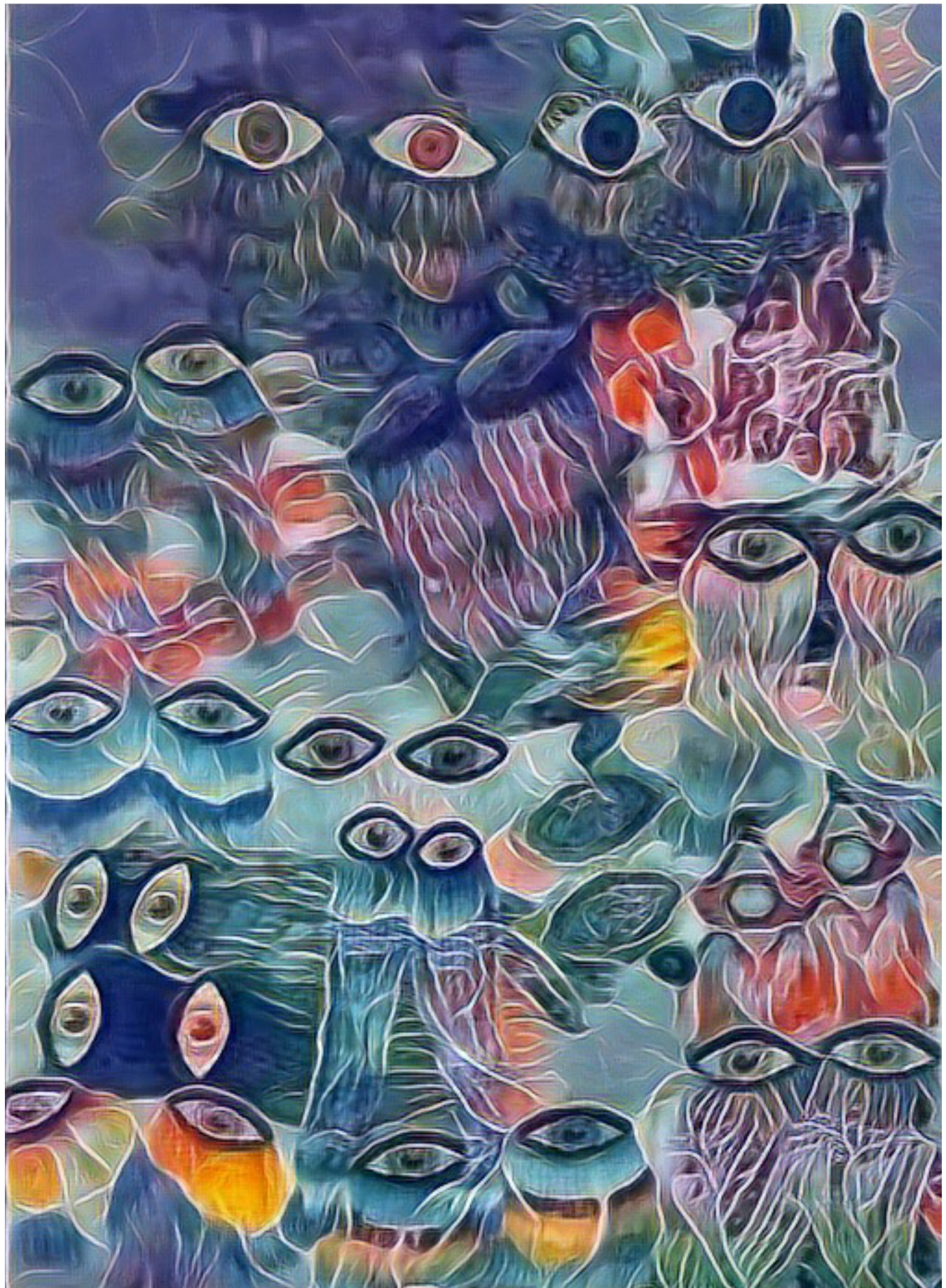
However the debate proceeds, I believe ‘physical’, useful concept though it may be in everyday life, is simply out of date and misleading when we are thinking of fundamental matters.

The Wisdom of Ben Sira (*Ecclesiasticus*)

**In every hidden corner, creatures emerge,
unseen, yet known, by the eye that observes.
In vast realms of darkness and infinite space,
all things lay bare, mindful of its embrace.**

**Though our words, thoughts, and deeds are in shade,
the all-seeing eye, by sun, moon, and stars obeyed,
penetrates the depths of each human heart,
to judge us on virtue, before we depart.**

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Beyond the Pleasure-Principle

Something different is disclosed in the drunkenness of passion: the landscape of the body... These landscapes are traversed by paths which lead sexuality into the world of the inorganic. Fashion itself is only another medium enticing it still more deeply into the universe of matter.

Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The cult of the commodity presses such fetishism into its service.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

The poets were onto it long before Freud,
The love-death thing, the *Liebestod* conceit.
From Petrarch down they relished bitter-sweet
Ideas of love that told us 'once enjoyed,
Those pleasures, they remind us of the void
That lies in wait, or how our thought to cheat
Death's cold embrace through love's rekindling heat
Must end with vital spirits self-destroyed'.
They all – Villon to Shakespeare, Lovelace, Donne,
Marvell and later poets in that line –
Turned 'die' or 'little death' into a pun-
Like quip, a racy catchword to combine
Remembered or imagined joys with un-
Unabashed reminders of the death's-head sign.

Freud took it further, stressed how close the tie
Of love and death, and told us – in 'Beyond
The Pleasure-Principle' – just how that bond
Of drives or psychic forces that must lie,
You'd think, at opposite extremes, may tie
Our logic up in knots because, *au fond*,
Those primal drives in no way correspond
To ego's protest that the one word 'die'
Not serve for both. Think rather, he advised,
How closely they're entwined, the primal deed
Of life by lovestruck poets duly prized
Above all others, and the fate decreed
For living flesh by what – as he surmised –
Prepared it for the worms it soon must feed.

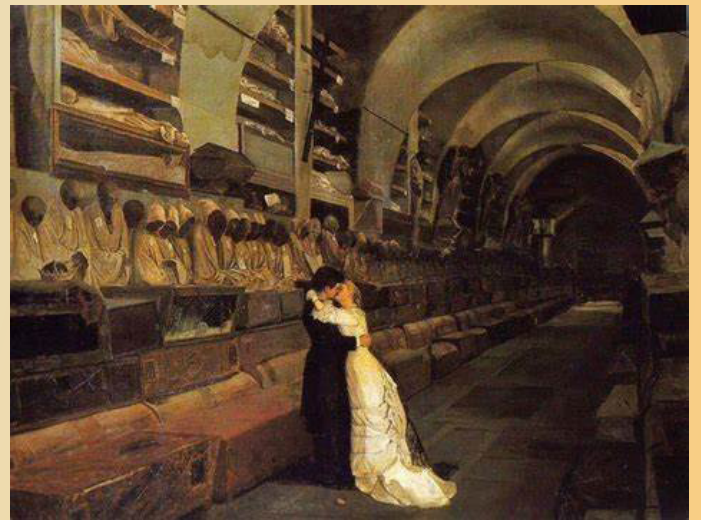


CHRIS NORRIS

And further still he drove it, that idea
 So alien to the eudaimonic sense
 Of life and love that calls in self-defence
 Whatever back-up from the ego-sphere
 May give it some short-lived distractive steer
 Around the ego-censored truth: that whence
 We came, shall we return; that 'the expense
 Of spirit is a waste of shame', though we're
 Too well-deceived to know. The death-drive haunts
 Our love-lives, sounds uncannily in each
 Last gasp of passion stilled, and duly taunts
 Those who'd take lightly what it has to teach
 With the decisive mortal denouements
 That put immortal pleasures out of reach.



For even while the lover lives and burns
 With passion yet unslaked, that fierce desire
 Pervades their flesh with a consuming fire
 That frets it to the bone and thus returns
 It sooner to the state for which it yearns,
 That inorganic state where pores transpire
 Not with the moisture that love's heats require
 But with the damp that funerary urns
 Can't long keep in or out. That's why the passion
 For other things, like shifting styles of dress,
 May strike the viewer as dead matter's ration
 Of hybrid substitutes that coalesce
 With living flesh until the latest fashion
 Becomes the last for earth to repossess.



That sexuality's our strongest clue
 To thanatos and its incessant drive
 For death, oblivion, all that man alive
 So often seeks to place beneath taboo –
 That's Freud's dark tale, and one that we might do
 Best sometimes to recall, not further strive
 Against its strict refusal to deprive
 Our bliss-deluded kind of what's their true
 Since fleshly lot in life. Then we might trace
 Those paths by which the death-drive came to leave
 Its imprint everywhere in psychic space,
 Determine in advance what we conceive
 As 'life' and 'death', and so ensure we base
 Life-choices on a death-drive none should grieve.



Sophia – 30x30 cm multimedia bas-relief part of the *In Varietate Concordia* exhibition (2023)

This bas-relief is entitled ‘SOPHIA’ – a Greek word that the Romans took up and which represents the wisdom of all those who came before us - aspiring to build a unified world.

Will Sophia Save us all?

Dr. ALAN **XUEREB**

Sophia (σοφία) (mostly translated from Greek as ‘wisdom’) is a fundamental notion in Hellenistic philosophy and religion, Platonism, Gnosticism and Christian theology. Originally carrying a meaning of ‘cleverness, skill’, the later meaning of the term, close to the meaning of *phronesis* (‘wisdom, intelligence’), was significantly shaped by the term *philosophía* (‘love of wisdom’) as used by Plato, although the term was probably coined by Pythagoras (c. 570 – 495 BCE). These words share the same Proto-Indo-European root as the Latin

verb *sapere* (literally ‘to taste; discern’), hence in Latin *sophia* became *sapientia*.

As philosophy Professor Jason Baehr puts it, *sophia* may be conceived of as an intellectual virtue, whilst the Greek meaning offers a plurality of moral and epistemic merits. Baehr says that contemporary philosophers have had little to say about *sophia* or wisdom in general. He carries on by saying that in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle marks a distinction between moral virtues or

virtues of character, on the one hand, and intellectual virtues, on the other. The latter include *techne* ('skill'), *phronesis* ('practical wisdom'), *nous* ('intellect'), *episteme* ('scientific knowledge'), and *sophia* ('wisdom'). According to Aristotle, *sophia* is a combination of *nous* and *episteme*. *Nous* involves a rational or intuitive grasp of necessary first principles. *Episteme* involves a grasp of truths that can be derived from these principles. Thus *sophia* 'involves a grasp of certain fundamental metaphysical truths and of various truths that follow from them'.

Moreover Baehr quotes David Conway's following passage:

'[I]n so far as the *pursuit* of something implies that the object being pursued has not yet been grasped by its pursuer, anyone engaged in pursuing wisdom must be presumed to lack it. Hence, the pursuit of truth, even that pursued for its own sake, cannot be what wisdom consists in. In fact, Aristotle equates the intellectual virtue of theoretical wisdom [*sophia*] with the *possession* of knowledge of certain truths that had been pursued for its own sake" (Conway: 2000. *The Rediscovery of Wisdom*).

Baehr appears to favour this interpretation of *sophia*. He concludes that while *sophia* is an ancient Greek notion its relevance is hardly limited to ancient theories of knowledge and epistemic well-being. On the contrary, he makes the point that the very discipline of philosophy 'is poised for a return' to *sophia*.

Some consider that *sophia* as wisdom symbolises the holy spirit or the more feminine aspect of God. In this bas-relief I have tried to portray *sophia* as a tool to fight ignorance, untruth, fake news. Because I strongly believe that only knowledge, a pure search for the truth can liberate us all from many of the ailments our society suffers from. That is why I considered it worthy of being part of the ensemble of bas-reliefs forming part of my exhibition last year. It portrays a female warrior (let us call her Sophia) taking on a gargantuan dragon who is engulfing her menacingly; a bit like what fake news does to us every day. Will she defeat the dragon of untruthfulness? This is the Sophia's call to all of us, but perhaps particularly to philosophers who have a duty to search for ultimate truths.

I hope you all had a blessed and peaceful Easter!

The *Wednesday*

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The Bookshop Was Closed

The bookshop closed, that I did not expect,
Plato and Heidegger would have to wait,
Their wisdom be revealed another date:
Writing preserves their gifts of intellect.

It would be good to see them both direct
And put them to the test with strong debate,
But they are dead and I have come too late
To hear how their voices took effect.

A reader not a hearer I remain,
But Derrida thought it better so to be,
The spoken word makes matters much too plain.

Their silent pages cannot answer back,
Their meaning is an endless task to track,
As it's deferred now to infinity.

Edward Greenwood



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