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Editorial

Philosophy and the Feminine

Philosophy, theology and mysticism all claim the feminine on their side. From the early days of philosophy, Socrates told us that he learned his theory of love from a woman he named as Diotima. Love in her understanding is neither fully beautiful nor fully good. It goes in degrees, from the sensual to the intellectual and leads to wisdom. It does reach such a final spiritual beauty that is without equal - the eternal beauty. Dante symbolised this journey in love in two images, the 'gentle lady' (in The New Life) and Beatrice (in The Divine Comedy). The gentle lady is philosophy that plays a consolatory role, and is later identified with Beatrice, his beloved, as a guide through Paradiso. Boethius in his Consolation of Philosophy, represented philosophy as a female in a consoling role. This is the same role Dante attributed to the gentle lady after the death of Beatrice. It is interesting that the Arabic language, which is gendered, takes philosophy to be feminine.

There has been recently a proliferation of writing on female philosophers in history, as well as their contributions to philosophy in general and in certain periods or fields, raising the issue of women practitioners in philosophy generally. The obvious conclusion is that women have made a space for themselves in philosophy from the early days of philosophy. For example, it was reported that Plato admitted two women to his academy. Modern philosophy records that Elisabeth of Bohemia – nicknamed 'La Grecque' by her family for her love of philosophy – found a willing interlocutor in René Descartes. The nineteenth century Anglo-Irish writer, philosopher, religious thinker and social reformer Frances Mary Cobbe corresponded with Darwin and convinced him that he should read Kant's Metaphysics of Morals. In Cobbe's first book An Essay on Intuitive Morals, she combined Kantian ethics, theism, and intuitionism. She had encountered Kant in the early 1850s, fell under his influence and rejected eudaimonism and utilitarianism. In fact, the same century provides ample examples of women who were interested in philosophy, from Caroline Schlegel to Mary Wollstonecraft. It has also been reported that when Schelling delivered his lectures on Mythology, there was a strong presence of women in the lecture hall. However, with the expansion of education, and almost universal access to higher education, women's participation in philosophy became a fact of everyday life. The Wednesday meetings are good examples of their active role intellectually and philosophically.

There has been extensive research into female contributors to philosophy in modern times. A conference was held before the end of last month at Sydney university on 'Women and spiritual equality in the history of philosophy', organised by Dalia Nassar and others. Nassar also published widely on the topic and edited, with Kristin Gjesdal, the Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Women in Philosophy in the German Tradition which highlighted the work of a long list of women philosophers. Two years ago, I was in a reading group that analysed the work of one of them, the German poet and philosopher Karoline von Günderrode. I was amazed by her contribution to philosophy and poetry, although it is in a fragmentary style. She could have become a great philosopher if she had not died early, after a tragic love story. A more recent contribution of women philosophers was highlighted by publications on the Oxford philosophers Anscombe, Midgley, Foot and Murdoch. There was also a series of lectures on them organised by the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

Nevertheless, many contemporary women philosophers have complaints about the academic position of women in philosophy, from harassment to a lack of appreciation. This may lead to the accusation of victim mentality. But female philosophers have every right to bring any injustice done to them to the attention of wider public (see the review article by Sophie Smith in the London Review of Books, 25th April 2024 and Letters in subsequent issues).

Female philosopher have contributed substantially to the study of history of philosophy, ethics, and epistemology. They have looked at it from a critical point of view, as in the work of Merinda Fricker in her Epistemic Injustice. This is done by taking into consideration the social dimension of philosophical questions, rather than discussing them in abstraction.

The crucial point is that the contribution of female philosophers should not be labelled as a special kind of Feminist studies, or looked at from a patronising point of view, but must be considered as an essential part of philosophy that goes to its heart, and redirects its concern without necessarily falling into what has been called 'soft philosophy', such as gender, race and critical theory. The presence of female philosophers in the academic arena, including public lectures and conferences, is a good sign of progress, and must be welcomed by the philosophy community at large.

The Editor

Women and Epistemologies

The question of women in philosophy was debated recently in our Wednesday meeting. The paper below covers some aspects of the debate.

KATHLEEN KERR-KOCH

A famous quotation from Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History' perfectly captures the movement between epistemology and 'epistemologies' that this paper attempts to read:

> *Mein Flügel ist zum Schwung bereit,*
> *ich kehrte gern zurück,*
> *denn blieb ich auch lebendige Zeit,*
> *ich hätte wenig Glück.*
> *(My wing is ready for flight,/ I would like to turn back./ If I stayed timeless time,/ I would have little luck.)*
>
> *A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth open, his wings spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin).*

I

In the introduction to her book *Words of Power: A Feminist Critique of the History of Logic*, Andrea Nye criticises the following claim:

Andrea Nye

Bathsua Makin

> The logician does not speak; he does not tell the truth; he exhibits it. All vestiges of his speaking voice are transcended, all references to his situation, to his sex, his place in time or space. Logic is the perfect transparency of a language which does not need to be read (Nye).

She goes to say that,

> Logic is a human invention, although logicians may deny it, and it must speak *of* something, speak of ambitions, fears, hopes, disappointments, despairs. Logic must refer to the objects of a common world. Not only must it speak *of* something, but it must speak *to* someone and thereby institute the relationships in which communication is possible. The pretence that logic does not speak and cannot be read is only one such institution, an institution whose pretension to absolute truth reduces the respondent, reader, listener to assent, or even better, to silence. (Nye)

Nye's readings of Classical Logic, Medieval Logic and Frege lead her to the conclusion that the institution of Logic cannot be contained by an umbrella theory because it is subject to the same interactive relations, materially and historically specific, of all communicative acts. Hence '[T] here is no one Logic', there are many logics. Whatever the relationship between Logic and Epistemology (and this is a matter of debate), it stands to reason that if the former is pluralised, then so must be the latter.

Identifying as a philosopher and a woman who unapologetically dares to *read* as a disinterested scholar, Nye considers herself a woman capable of abstract thought, even despite being embedded in the emotional and material commitments that accompany family life. But, for her, immersion in the mundane world of practical needs does not preclude aspiration to a better life for all. The two can operate in tandem; she claims that 'involvement and commitment can lead to an understanding that logical analysis bound to consistency and univocality cannot'.

Janet Kourany

Alessandra Tanesini

D.W. Hamlyn in his entry for *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* called 'History of Epistemology' says this:

> The epistemologist…is concerned not with whether or how we can be said to know some truth, but whether we are justified in claiming knowledge of some whole class of truths, or, indeed, whether knowledge is possible at all (Hamlyn).

So, from this perspective, the epistemologist appears to occupy a less material or contextual and a more universalist position in thinking, which allows him (Nye notes that logicians are primarily male) to take up the role of mediator and judge determining what can be known, outside the potentially distortive machinations of life, language and a complex and messy material world, if the collection of originary or testimonial truths are put forward as evidence. Corroborating this, the *Preface* to *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology* indicates the way in which epistemology has evolved into an institutionally powerful force:

> Epistemology has always been one of the most central and important areas of philosophy, one which overlaps and intersects with all the different regions of our ancient discipline. More recently, however, epistemology has gone from being a solid mainstay of the philosophical landscape to being right at the forefront of contemporary debate. (Pritchard)

Given the central place of epistemology, it is important, more than ever, to register women's place in the development of this landscape. Although it is now generally recognised that women have participated in philosophical debates and discussions concerning questions of epistemology since ancient times, the view that women are part of a messy, material reality, one that had to be separated from the crucial business of establishing truth claims, was entrenched very early. So entrenched had this view become that in 1673 Bathsua Makin was impelled to write *An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen, in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues, with an Answer to the Objections against this way of Education.* The treatise opened with,

> Custom, when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of Nature itself. The Barbarous custom to breed Women low, is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far, that it is verily believed (especially amongst a sort of debauched Sots) that Women are not endued with such Reason, as Men; nor capable of improvement by Education, as they are. It is looked upon as a monstrous thing; to pretend the contrary. A Learned Woman is thought to be a Comet, that bodes Mischief, when ever it appears. To offer to the World the liberal Education

> of Women is to deface the Image of God in Man, it will make Women so high, and men so low, like Fire in the House-top, it will set the whole world in a Flame.

Evidence of this deliberate marginalisation of women can be found throughout the history of philosophy. For example, Diogenes Laertius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (3rd Century AD), which is still used as the main source of the history of Greek philosophy, excludes women such as Themistoclea (Pythagorean of the 6th century BCE), and Aspasia (a teacher and rhetorician from the 5th century BCE). He does mention Arete of Cyrene (the 4th century BCE Cyrenaic philosopher) but not the 4th century BCE Hippachia of Maoneia who was a Cynic. He mentions Nicarete of Megara who was from the 4th century BCE Megarian school of philosophy, but excludes Ptolemais of Cyrene who wrote *Pythagorean Principles of Music* sometime in the 3rd century BCE, which dealt with the precise roles of reason and sensory experience in studying music. It can be argued that this absence of women thinkers in such an important text has contributed to what Eileen O'Neill calls the subsequent 'disappearing ink' which became the fate of the philosophical writings by women. A particularly active period of women's participation in philosophical debate and discussion was the 17th century when their philosophical writings were circulated and translated. However, as Janet Kourany has argued, these activities were written out of the history of philosophy in the nineteenth century.

But since that time much research has been conducted by women philosophers: from the 1970s writers have been addressing this absence. The four-volume series, for example, called *A History of Women Philosophers* edited by M.E. Waithe, includes *Ancient Women Philosophers* (Volume 1, 600 BCE – 500 A.D.), *Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment Women Philosophers* (Volume 2, A.D. 500-1600), *Modern Women Philosophers* (Volume 3 1600-1900), and *Contemporary Women Philosophers* (Volume 4, 1900- Today). Most contemporary women philosophers agree that the disappearance of women writers from what subsequently became the normative version of philosophical history had a distortive affect.

II

Given the adjudicating role of epistemology within the various branches of philosophy, and the exclusion of women from philosophical history, it should be expected that many modern women philosophers would subject it to rigorous critique. Miranda Fricker performs one such critique in her *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007). In this she argues that, just as ethics was at one point revivified by a greater attention to lived experience, epistemology is now 'gradually being broadened and enlivened…by various efforts to cultivate a closer relationship to actual epistemic practices' (Fricker). In introducing an element of lived experience into the question of knowledge she considers something that she calls 'epistemic injustice', that is, the form of injustice that interferes with or prevents people's ability to identify truth in a given situation (this might involve social marginalisation and hence disadvantage, the prevention of speaking freely or silencing, misrepresentation, undervaluing of standing in communicative practices or unwarranted distrust) and the potential consequences of this for the judgement of truth claims. She identifies two forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice, where prejudice undermines the level of credibility of a speaker's word (something she names ***identity-prejudicial-credibility deficit*** – as when a person is not believed by the police because he or she is black), and hermeneutical injustice which occurs when collective interpretive resources are lacking and social experiences are not understood properly (something she calls hermeneutical marginalisation or ***situated hermeneutical inequality*** - where the social experiences of members of a group are not understood because they are inadequately conceptualised). She claims that

> Epistemology as it has traditionally been pursued has been impoverished by the lack of any theoretical framework conducive to revealing the ethical and political aspects of our epistemic conduct. (Fricker)

Another related term in this regard is 'epistemic violence' which Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak uses in her 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak', (Spivak) which was written ten years before

Miranda Fricker first coined the term 'epistemic injustice'. In Spivak's essay, the idea of the 'subaltern', first used by Antonio Gramsci to describe the exclusion of colonial populations from the metropolitan centre and the hierarchy of power, is developed in relation to the problem of the elimination of a platform for a contribution to decision-making and the silencing of colonised voices, especially gendered voices.

Although epistemology has been shown to be lacking theoretical precision with respect to ethics and politics and indeed representation itself, it continues to exert pedagogic and institutional power. The character of this institutional power is reflected in the structure of the *Routledge Companion*, referenced earlier. This work divides into ten parts, each part dealing with a different dimension of the discipline. The final part, 'Metaepistemological Issues', contains seven sections which are considered tangential to mainstream issues: the last entry is 'Feminist Epistemology' written by Alessandra Tanesini, which concisely summarises what she considers a problematic facing women philosophers.

Tanesini starts her article with this:

> One of the generally unquestioned assumptions of modern epistemology is that knowledge knows no gender. More specifically, it has been typically presumed that the gender of the knower *is* and *should be* irrelevant to the philosophical study of knowledge (Tanasini).

In the first section of the article Tanesini makes the claim that after the epistemic hierarchy put forward in Roderick Chisholme's *Theory of Knowledge,* propositional knowledge over practical knowledge has become privileged in textbooks of epistemology. Corresponding to this is the marginalisation or exclusion of certain subjective states, such as desires and emotions, that might contribute positively to the justification of belief. Rather, these states are thought to prevent or intervene in the proper process of determining justification. She goes on to argue that, on the one hand, this focus follows the trajectory of Western philosophy; on the other hand, this focus is itself a departure from the epistemological theories prevalent in the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. These periods concentrated on virtue philosophy, that is the intellectual vices and virtues of knowers and how the 'epistemologically virtuous character' might be cultivated. This departure from older forms of epistemological theorisation is, in her view, significant, as it removes what was the other more gendered discourse from contributing to thinking. Analytical philosophy replaces the gendered terms derived from virtue philosophy with a hierarchical system privileging propositional knowledge over practical knowledge, the effect of which is to delegitimise and devalue the experiences and forms of knowledge of marginalised actors, women being just one example.

Genevieve Lloyd's *The Man of Reason: Male and Female in Western Philosophy* (1984, second edition 1993), which Tanesini also cites, is a good place to start exploring the question of 'sexless knowledge'. Lloyd also refutes this idea, claiming that it is illusory. What she is primarily interested in are the operations of metaphor in the philosophical depiction of what she calls the male-female distinction, and in particular the metaphorical 'maleness' of reason. By 'metaphorical', she is clear, she does not mean 'the quaint, peripheral, literary dimension of philosophical writing'.

> The metaphor of maleness is deeply embedded in philosophical articulations of ideas and ideals of reason. It had been constitutive of ways of thinking which have deep repercussions in ways of thinking of ourselves as male or female. Metaphorical though it may be, maleness has been no mere embellishment of reason (Lloyd).

So the 'maleness of reason' is not about sex or gender, nor is it about men and women; rather the proper subjects of philosophical maleness are concepts and principles: 'This is a maleness which belongs to the operation of symbols'. On this reading, the symbolic configuration of the soul is 'sexless'. But this symbolic configuration 'readily coexists in the play of symbols with the maleness of its principal trait, rationality'. By contrast women are customarily associated with the mysterious and dark powers of Nature.

Miranda Fricker

Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak

Lloyd goes on to discuss philosophers who have played key roles in the symbolic construction of the sexless, rational soul: Plato, Philo, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Bacon, Rousseau, Kant and Hegel, to name a few. In the *Preface* to the second edition, she says that she regrets not having included Spinoza in this list, but interestingly says nothing about not having included Aristotle. What she does note is that Cartesian dualism plays a central role in entrenching the centrality of rational agency, despite Descartes' professed egalitarianism.

Notwithstanding the fact that it can be shown that women have made contributions to the history of philosophy extending as far back as the Greeks, still there are many marks of an institutional sidelining of women thinkers: in Plato's *Menexenus* we find for example, 'the woman in her conception and generation is but the imitation of the earth, and not the earth of the woman'. In the 6th century BCE the Pythagoreans established a table of oppositions which distinguished between clear, active, determinate and form bearing thinking, associated with maleness, and vague, passive, formless and indeterminate thinking, associated with femaleness, valued as superior/inferior respectively; and Saint Augustine (354-439 CE) believed that male-female relations are properly understood as the dominance and subordination found precisely in human nature. Descartes' modern take on this belief was to theorise a dualism, a distinction between mind and body which could facilitate a structure where rational functions of the mind could be cleanly separated from the somewhat messy, visceral and emotional aspects of the body. In his *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (1701), written not in Latin but in the vernacular, he sought to provide the conditions upon which men (and especially women) could elevate their minds by learning and using the rules for rational thought. Of course, the consequence of this bifurcation was to further entrench rationality as the measure of epistemological truth, thus marginalising the importance of contexts and bodily experience in that measure. He says in *The Passions of the Soul* (1649) that we do not properly distinguish (the soul's) functions from those of the body, to which alone we must attribute everything which can be observed in us that is opposed to our reason. By the 17th century, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) came to conceive of knowledge as (male) control and power over (female) Nature, power being acquired using inductive reasoning. At the time of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Nature (as female) is removed completely from the pursuit of total understanding: he says, 'Women are educated – who knows how? As it were by breathing in ideas, by living rather than acquiring knowledge. The status of manhood, on the other hand, is attained only by the stress of thought and much technical exertion'. So as these examples illustrate, there

is an argument to be put forward, and indeed one that has been developed extensively for at least 5 decades by women philosophers, that a certain agnotology, or a culturally induced ignorance, operating actively or passively, pervading much of the history of epistemology.

Women philosopher's relationship to epistemology has therefore been complex. In their introduction to *Feminist Epistemologies* (1993), Linda Alcoff and Elisabeth Potter argue that 'feminist epistemology' is an oxymoron, an intense and perpetual conflict between the concrete and contextual and the universal. One could also say that 'feminisms' is a name given to alternative (including subaltern) experiences that are necessarily pluralised. This, of course, runs against the grain of the mainstream 'proper' philosophy, which, in the pursuit of a justificatory, *a priori*, and unchallengeable standard of knowledge, deliberately - and ostensibly necessarily - disregards contexts. This bracketing of contexts has led to skepticism about the claim that it is possible to produce a universalising theory that can encompasses the nature and also the limits of knowledge.

So, because women's relation to mainstream epistemology has been complex, it has been for the most part responsive to emergent critical strategies that might penetrate the institutional bastion of epistemology and attempt to account for alternative contexts. Some of these critical strategies are more persuasive than others. However, standpoint epistemology, which also emerged in the 70s, strongly challenges the so-called disengaged operations governing the pursuit of knowledge, operations that seek to contain the influences of the sensuous, visceral, embedded character of experience (and indeed rationality itself), and transcend contingencies and hence the conditioning effects of historically produced circumstances.

Sandra Harding, in her book *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge*? (1991) claims that conventional epistemology asks the following questions:

> Who can be subjects, agents of socially legitimate knowledge? (Only men in the dominant races and classes?). What kinds of tests must beliefs pass to be legitimated as knowledge? (Only tests against the dominant group's experiences and observations? Only tests against what men in the ruling groups tend to think of as reliable experience and observation?) What kinds of things can be known? Can 'historical truth', socially situated truths, count as knowledge? Should all such situated knowledges be regarded as equally plausible or valid? What is the nature of objectivity? Does it require 'point-of-viewlessness'? How can we distinguish between what we want the world to be and how it is if objectivity does not require value-neutrality? What is the appropriate relationship between the researcher and her or his research subjects? Must the researcher be disinterested, dispassionate, and socially invisible to the subject? What should be the purposes of the pursuit of knowledge? Can there be 'disinterested knowledge' in a society that is deeply stratified by gender, race, and class? (Harding)

We can see from these questions that Harding does not want to give up on the question of the pursuit of objective knowledge altogether; in other words, she does not want to capitulate to a complete relativism, but is interested in introducing contexts, the situatedness of the experiences of real people as these contribute to knowledge. But from this perspective, even the best beliefs of a culture are socially situated. The valuing and foregrounding of social-situatedness allows for descriptions that are more accurate and theoretical formulations that are more precise. Harding calls standpoint a 'justificatory approach' and likens its operation to Hegel's view of the relationship between the master and the slave as explicated in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*: in struggling for recognition, two consciousnesses engage in a dialectical interaction, a life and death struggle, which leads to one becoming dominant, the master, and the other submissive, the slave. The subsequent relationship is one of dependency: the master acquires recognition, but is nevertheless dependent on the slave for recognition. The slave, on the other hand, through labour, transforms the world and in doing so acquires self-awareness and a deep knowledge of freedom. This insight feeds into the proletarian standpoint as articulated

Genevieve Lloyd

Sandra Harding

by Marx, Engels and György Lukács: 'human activity' or 'material life' not only structures but sets limits on understanding what we do, shapes and constrains what we can know.

The question that arises, as Harding rightly realises, is 'why is the standpoint of women - or of feminism' and presumably the proletariat and for that matter the subaltern, 'less partial and distorted than the picture and social relations that emerges from conventional research?' Many reasons are identified, none of which rely on the biological differences between men and women: the activities that men and women engage in are different, but the activities that women are engaged in are undervalued as compared to those of men. However, this difference allows for the possibility of using women's lives (or those of the proletariat or the subaltern) as grounds for the critique of the dominant order and the opportunity to decrease distortions about the relationships to nature and the social order (for women and all marginalised actors). This makes women and marginalised actors significant 'others or strangers' whose distance from the mainstream culture makes them valuable in contributing to the redesigning of not only mainstream (male) culture, but to a greater understanding of what constitutes knowledge.

III

Harding's reading of the standpoint position, whether proletarian or feminist certainly presents one possibility for addressing and working to utilise sexual difference. However, though it provides a platform for critique, it does keep in place a subjectivist epistemology which is problematical for some woman philosophers.

One of the most radical critiques of epistemology for women has come through the influence of deconstruction. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of Derrida's translators, in her essay 'Feminism and Deconstruction, Again', describes submitting the texts of epistemology to the critical activity of a specific kind of reading, an activity that is different from conventional reading for a narrative which might contain or point towards closure:

> 'If one looks at the deconstructive morphology (rather than simply reading it as the narrative of the decentred subject), then one is obliged to notice that deconstruction has always been about the limits of epistemology. It sees the ontological impetus as a program implicated in the writing of the name of Man'. (G. C. Spivak)

In recognising this, she also points out that deconstruction cannot provide a platform for (feminist) politics, though it can 'make founded political programs more useful by making their in-built problems more visible'. Her *modus operandi* is therefore, not to fully embrace deconstruction, 'but to actively transgress it without giving it up':

> [D]econstruction does not aim at *praxis* or

> theoretical practice but lives in the persistent crisis or unease of the moment of *tékhnē* or crafting. Feminism has a special situation here because, among the many names that Derrida gives to the problem/solution of founded programs, one is 'woman'.

The advice she advances is that feminism should keep 'the critical intimacy of deconstruction' but give up the name ('woman' or 'writing'). This is a politics of 'reading', one in which the potential misappropriation of a philosophical text can be identified from within the text. This involves a necessary complicity with the text which affords a 'negotiation with the structures of violence'.

> It is in the spirit of negotiation that I propose to give assent to Derrida's text about woman as a name for the nontruth of truth, upon the broader terrain of negotiation with other established structures, daily practiced but often disavowed, like the Law, institutional education, and ultimately capitalism. Negotiation, not collaboration; producing a new politics through critical intimacy. (G. C. Spivak)

So, this type of reading is sensitive to concept-metaphors ('woman' is a concept-metaphor, nevertheless, a trace, one that is displaced and is effaced in writing which is itself under erasure in writing) at play in institutional structures.

Spivak's thinking about the concept-metaphor, especially what she identifies as the gendered-subaltern concept metaphor, is very likely responsive to Derrida's essay 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy' published in *Margins of Philosophy* (1972, 1982) which consists of a collection of essays that challenge philosophical reason with identification and rigorous critique of aporias, blind-spots and antimonies in texts. This essay addresses the workings of metaphor in philosophical discourse: it pivots around Anatolie France's dialogue 'Ariste and Polypile (Aristos and Polyphylos)' found in *The Garden of Epicurus* (1920) which explores the question of Metaphysics. Derrida wrangles with the dialogue in analysing the relationship between Metaphysics and metaphor: is Metaphysics, in its search for the 'absolute', able to deliver us from metaphor in the name of reason? In the 'Exergue' to the essay, Derrida makes this assertion:

> Metaphor in the text of Philosophy. Certain that we understand each word of this phrase, rushing to understand - to inscribe a figure in the volume capable of philosophy, we might prepare to treat a particular question: is there metaphor in the text of philosophy? In what form? To what extent? Is it essential? Accidental? etc. Our certainty soon vanishes: metaphor seems to involve the use of philosophical language in its entirety, nothing less than the use of so-called natural language *in* philosophical discourse, that is, the usage of natural language *as* philosophical language. (Derrida)

The answer to the question, in short, from a Derridean perspective, is that it is impossible. Although Derrida would broadly agree with Genevieve Lloyd's thesis mentioned earlier, he reads a condition in which metaphysicians find themselves perpetually trapped in the allegorical machinations of metaphor. This reading departs radically from that of Lloyd. For her, the metaphor of maleness is not a mere add-on, something that might be eliminated without substantive distortion to philosophical discourse itself, but something that is constitutive of reason and as such has central significance in the construction of gendered subjectivities. For Lloyd, the metaphor of maleness isn't a mere add-on, something that might be eliminated without substantive distortion to philosophical discourse itself, but something that is constitutive of reason and as such has central significance in the construction of gendered subjectivities.

Another thinker who was inspired by Jacques Derrida (as well as Judith Butler, Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin) and seeks to negotiate (though not collaborate) with his reading, is Karen Barad, whose training was not politics, social science, literature or philosophy but theoretical particle physics and quantum field theory which she, nevertheless, applies to the study of inequalities, ethics, literature and more through the lens of what she calls agential realism. But she takes as her starting point the quantum physics of Neils Bohr. In her book *Meeting the Universe*

Karen Barad

Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning, she starts by lamenting the fact that language, culture and discourse all seem to matter more than matter itself; they are attributed both agency and historicity. Matter, on the other hand, is configured as passive, immutable, its potential for change derivative of language and culture. She opposes a performative understanding of discursive practices to a representational belief in the power of words to represent preexisting things, reflection as against a notion of performativity where activities of the mind – understanding, thinking, observing and theorising – occur as practices engaged with the world as part of the world. With a reflective version of materiality and signification, Man is centre, the unifying force, the nucleus separated and distanced from a material world. Anthropocentric metaphysics control patterns of thought, and like Derrida, Barad challenges conventional realism and constructivism. Performativity at work does not turn everything, material bodies included, into words, thus determining what is real. She posits the primary ontological unit as not objects but phenomena (which she defines as relational, 'ontologically primitive relations-relations without preexisting relata'): '*phenomena are the ontological inseparability/ entanglement of interacting 'agencies"* (Barad). Phenomena do not interact, but enter agential intra-actions. Phenomena acquire determinacies through intra-actions, becoming concepts (material articulations of the world). Thus, the notion of intra-action replaces a traditional notion of causality, with phenomena being 'differential patterns of patterning' or 'diffraction patterns'. Phenomena are constitutive of reality: reality consists not of things – in - themselves or things – behind - phenomena, but of things – in - phenomena.

> The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialisation in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies. This ongoing flow of agency through which causal structures are stabilised and destabilised does not take place in space and time but happens in the making of spacetime itself. (Barad)

For Badar, agential realism is an epistemological, ontological and ethical framework which posits the integral relationship between the three.

Final Remark

As I have tried to show in this paper, 'woman' has always been implicated, in one way or another, in the development of epistemologies, the most powerful of which have been built in the name of some form of logical truth. Philosophical history bears the traces of the suppression of female voices in the striving for a unitary meaning. Over the centuries women philosophers, but mainly contemporary women philosophers, have countered the steadfast belief that knowledge is, or can be, a single or uniform entity, and that the situated exclusions (including the way that language is theorised) must contribute to an understanding, not of a rational and universal World Spirit or the laws which underpin the production of forms of thought, but the pursuit of a good life for all. It can be argued that without logical, or even forensic, argument, there can be no guaranteed outcomes, whether in epistemology or in the law. It can also be argued that logically formalised systems do not necessarily lead to appropriate outcomes: 'Dummett excluded Frege's fascism because it was irrelevant to logical truth' (Nye). The last word goes to Walter Benjamin: 'It is never reason that decides on the justification of means and the justness of ends, fate-imposed violence decides on the former, and God on the latter'.

Perception

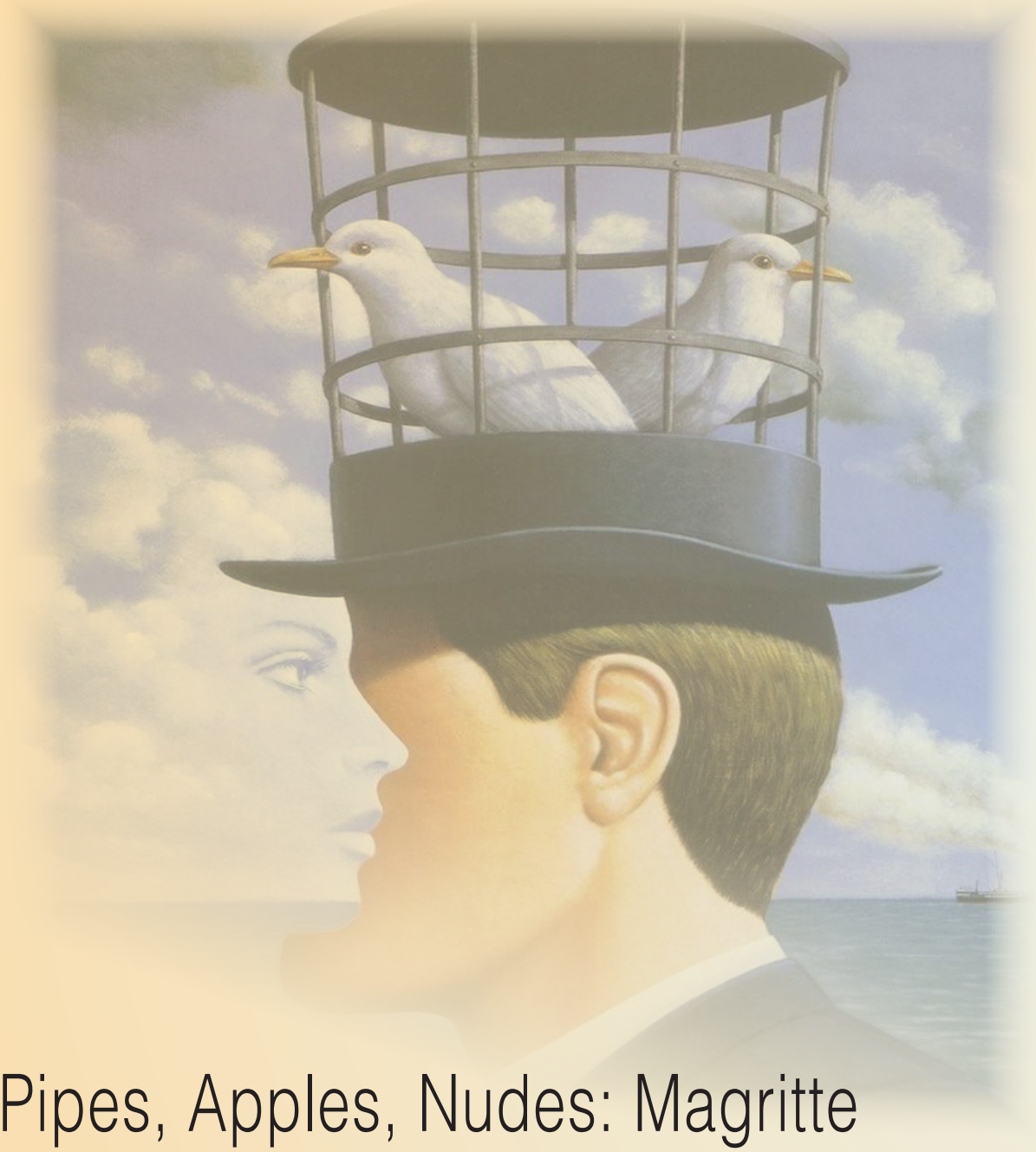
Two train tracks run, their paths forever far,
Each rail and tie laid firm with thoughts of fate.
They stretch away beneath the watching star,
Yet never share a kiss, nor dare to mate.

Above, the sky reaches with colours bright,
It mingles soft with waves kissed by the shore,
A dance that tricks the eyes in fading light,
Where land and sky together dream for more.

But what we see is not as it appears,
As trains chase ends, they'll never quite embrace,
Our minds, like mirrors, clouded by our fears,
Reflect a world that wears an unreal face.

In every view, the truth may slip and slide,
For distance may keep love and the heart tied.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Pipes, Apples, Nudes: Magritte

CHRIS **NORRIS**

(These poems – five extended villanelles – are based largely on biographical details from *Magritte: a life* by Alex Danchev, London: Profile Books, 2021.)

René Magritte

1

One mystery alone: that world out there.
Pipes, apples, nudes, that's all that meets my eye.
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

I've kinks enough for critics to lay bare,
Like window-shards with fragments of the sky.
One mystery alone: that world out there.

I've joys, fears, terrors, horror-shows to spare,
A list the shrinks may work through by and by.
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

He's faceless, bowler-hatted; in the air
She floats, a naked wraith; they signify
One mystery alone: that world out there.

My mother drowned herself, yet if they dare
Say 'Ah, that's it!' my work gives them the lie:
Just let those objects claim their proper share.

So willingly they fall into his snare,
The Viennese quack-doctor who'd deny
One mystery alone: that world out there.

Ask her, love of my life, Georgette Berger,
'Qu'importe ses cauchemars?', and she'll reply
'Just let those objects claim their proper share'.

She knows me best, knows how, and when, and where
The demons congregate, and half-knows why.
One mystery alone: that world out there.

For I've come through with nothing to declare
Bar certain scenes where viewers may descry
Those objects as they claim their proper share.
One mystery alone: that world out there.

2

It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.
Stay world-fixated, keep the ghouls at bay!
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

The critics have me tagged: 'René Magritte,
Surrealist', but who cares what that lot say?
It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

Tell them they've got me wrong, Georgette my sweet;
These paintings scatter ghouls like break of day!
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

Those Freudians romp in psyche's winding-sheet
As art expires beneath the death-drive's sway.
It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

My pipe with riddling caption: 'nice conceit',
That scoundrel Dali said, 'so *recherché*!'.
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

But I'll not follow on where those effete
Surrealists purport to show the way:
It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

A dream of childhood: chest locked fast to cheat
The night-time wish that its stored treasures may
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet.

Then there's the crashed hot-air balloon whose heat
I feel again each time those scenes replay.
It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

Georgette has things of mine laid out to greet
Me back from that small-hour *auto-da-fé*.
See phantoms fade as dream and object meet;
It's things, not symbols, cover my retreat.

Georgette Berger and Magritte

3

A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.
They thumb their nose who've thumbs in many pies.
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak.

My father gambled, drank, sold porn; I'd seek
Maman for comfort till they closed her eyes.
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

They're lily-livered, his surrealist clique,
Just tame court-jesters, out to take the rise.
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak

Yet not, you'll note, at all the one to pique
Their taste for graphic puns in saucy guise:
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

You'd think their lives were tough, their childhoods bleak,
A mother drowned the scene they fantasise.
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak.

The 'genius' Dali's just a bogus freak
Who hawks his frissons to whoever buys.
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

Yet I should talk who watched them take a leak
Through bathroom-doors ajar, the voyeur's prize.
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak.

Stick your psychology: it's the mystique
My things create that cuts grief down to size.
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

First principle: let object and technique
Fight demons off before they mobilize!
Of low-life matters I'm the one to speak;
A bourgeois trait, that screw-the-bourgeois streak.

4

Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?
A hell-bent father, mother's suicide:
What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

'The Cherokees' they called us, urchin crew
Of sibling males, maniacally allied.
Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?

Let's say upbringing and genetic brew
Had equal shares when Jekyll turned to Hyde.
What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

We'd do the worst that juveniles could do,
Kill animals for sport, laugh as they died:
Greek drama stuff, yet mightn't it be true?

My art alone, the things I sketched or drew,
Gave me an object-world to take in stride.
What chance I'd skip the psychic payment due?

Don't let those Freudian ghouls bamboozle you,
Persuade you all the action's deep inside.
Greek drama stuff – what if it's just not true?

For me, the world of objects grew and grew
Till their strange antics turned the lethal tide:
Some chance I'd skip the psychic payment due.

My message to him: Salvador, your few
Successes are the paintings that confide:
'Greek drama stuff – what if it's just not true?'.

Take it from me: it's objects pull you through,
Not fears inbred and thereby multiplied.
Some chance I'll slip the psychic payment due;
Greek drama stuff – what if it's just not true?

5

'He painted them away': that's what she said,
My Georgette, when they asked what kept me sane.
It's painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

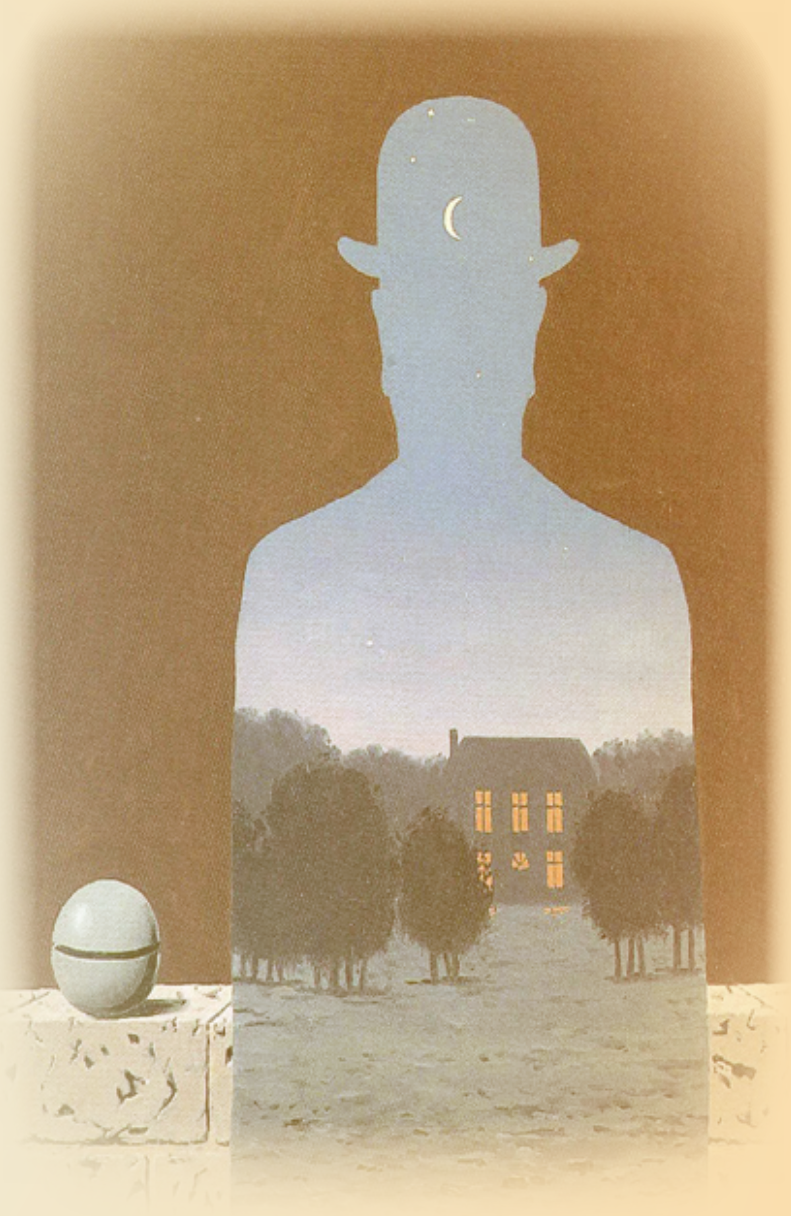
The charred balloon, the chest beside my bed,
Their outlines haunt my brushstrokes, not my brain:
'He painted them away': that's what she said.

I fear you've all been grievously misled,
My friends, by critics' failure to explain
It's painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

They'd have those incongruities best read
As paroxysms of a soul in pain.
'He painted them away': that's what she said.

If I mislaid the torment and the dread
Those fools would call the horrors up again.
It's painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

Without it they'd conspire to strike me dead,
All other life-protectors tried in vain.
'He painted them away': that's what she said.



Explain that to the Dali bunch, well-bred
As zoo gorillas rattling their chain:
It's painting keeps the ghouls outside my head.

Let them read Freud: those inhibitions shed
May see them dubbed the bourgeois New Urbane.
'He painted them away': that's what she said

And what she knew way back before we wed,
School sweethearts, she who'd never once complain:
It's painting keeps the ghouls outside my head;
'He painted them away': that's what she said.

An AI Van Goghian representation of *The Lord of the Rings*

Power, Corruption, and the Platonic Ideal

This article makes a comparative analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Plato's philosopher-kings.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* offers a rich exploration of the corrupting influence of power, providing a narrative through which we might examine philosophical concerns over governance, morality, and the potential for corruption. At its heart, the trilogy suggests that the pursuit and possession of power invariably lead to moral decay, a theme Tolkien illustrates through the journeys of his characters and the potent symbolism of the One Ring. This perspective invites comparison with Plato's vision of philosopher-kings, a ruling class whose wisdom and virtue would, according to Platonic theory, prevent them from abusing power. By contrasting Tolkien's view of power with the Platonic ideal, we gain insight into competing perspectives on the nature of authority and the dangers inherent to governance, ultimately reflecting on modern democratic principles as a potential resolution to the problem of power.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien repeatedly demonstrates how power, rather than enhancing virtue, corrupts those who wield it. The One Ring, a powerful object created by Sauron, acts as a corruptive force that amplifies the latent desires and weaknesses of those who come into contact with it. Characters such as Saruman, Denethor, and even Frodo are drawn toward destructive paths by the allure of power, revealing Tolkien's skepticism regarding the human capacity to resist temptation. Saruman's transformation from wise wizard to servant of Sauron exemplifies this, as his desire for control leads him to compromise his moral values and ultimately causes his downfall. Denethor, too, is shown to be a tragic figure whose pursuit of authority blinds him to the needs of his people, while Frodo, though virtuous, struggles to relinquish the ring's hold even at the climactic moment of its destruction. Through these characters, Tolkien illustrates his view that few, if any, are immune to power's corrosive effects.

This theme aligns with the broader narrative of the One Ring itself, which, as an instrument of ultimate control, symbolizes the fundamental corruptibility of power. Even noble figures like Gandalf and Galadriel, who consciously refuse the ring, acknowledge that they too would fall prey to its influence. Gandalf, for example, admits that wielding the ring would transform him into a tyrant, despite his intentions. This admission reinforces Tolkien's argument that the desire for power, regardless of one's moral standing or wisdom, can subvert virtue and erode the ethical foundations necessary for a just society. In Tolkien's view, the root of evil lies in the domination of others, an insight that casts doubt on the feasibility of any hierarchy that grants unchecked authority, no matter how virtuous the leader.

Plato's Kings

In contrast, Plato's notion of philosopher-kings offers a more optimistic view of governance and human nature. In *The Republic*, Plato suggests that philosophers, due to their commitment to wisdom and truth, would be uniquely capable of wielding power responsibly. For Plato, the ideal ruler understands the Forms, particularly the Form of the Good, and therefore governs in a manner that promotes justice and the common good. This ruler, motivated by knowledge rather than personal ambition, is envisioned as incorruptible, as their commitment to virtue prevents them from using power for selfish purposes. Plato's philosopher-king is, thus, an idealized figure who remains untainted by power because they seek it not for dominance but as a means of guiding society toward the good.

Tolkien's perspective, however, contrasts sharply with Plato's ideal. In Tolkien's world, even the wise and virtuous cannot escape power's corrupting influence, a view embodied in

characters like Gandalf, who rejects the ring despite his considerable moral grounding. Tolkien implies that wisdom alone cannot protect individuals from the dangers of power, and that the mere act of seeking or possessing authority invites corruption. Rather than a select few who can wield power responsibly, Tolkien suggests that all are vulnerable to its detrimental effects. As a result, Tolkien appears skeptical of the notion that any individual, no matter how well-intentioned or knowledgeable, can exercise absolute power without falling prey to its corrosive nature.

The Elves, though nearly immune to the temptations of power, present a notable exception in Tolkien's narrative. Depicted as an ancient, wise, and largely incorruptible race, the Elves serve as a counterpoint to the flawed nature of human ambition. However, even they are not entirely free from the desire to influence the world. The Three Rings of the Elves, designed to preserve beauty and protect their realms, reflect a longing to control the passage of time and stave off decay. While this desire appears noble, it illustrates Tolkien's cautionary message: even acts of preservation or protection, when rooted in a reluctance to let go, can lead to unintended consequences. Tolkien's portrayal of the Elves ultimately reinforces his broader critique of power, suggesting that even the most restrained attempts to wield it are fraught with moral hazards.

In this light, Tolkien's work can be interpreted as a rejection of the Platonic ideal that wisdom alone can safeguard against the dangers of power. Where Plato believes that true wisdom immunizes the philosopher-king against corruption, Tolkien posits that wisdom may be insufficient to shield even the noblest individuals from power's influence. This divergence reflects a central theme in *The Lord of the Rings*: that evil, embodied in Sauron, is not simply an external force but a latent potential within any who seek dominion over others, regardless of their intentions. For Tolkien, true peace and virtue may lie not in the wise wielding of power, as Plato suggests, but in the complete renunciation of such power, as exemplified by Frodo's final choice to destroy the ring.

Tolkien's narrative thus raises a fundamental question about governance and human society: can humanity build a society free from the corrupting hierarchies of power? In Middle-earth, the answer is ambiguous. However, the destruction of the One Ring implies that Tolkien saw the relinquishment of power as the only viable path to transcend humanity's darker tendencies. This view may indirectly affirm the principles of democracy, which, though imperfect and often flawed, aims to limit the risks of power through broad distribution, universal suffrage, and checks and balances. Unlike Plato's philosopher-kings, who would govern without constraint, democratic systems distribute authority to prevent any single individual or group from gaining absolute control. While democracy may lack the idealism of Plato's vision, it provides a practical mechanism to temper power's risks, ensuring no one person or group wields unchecked authority.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tolkien's heroes find redemption not in the exercise of power but in the rejection of it, choosing instead to live in a world free from the tyranny of domination. While Plato's philosopher-kings might rule justly, *The Lord of the Rings* suggests that true peace is achieved only by casting power itself into the fires of Mount Doom. In this way, Tolkien offers a vision of governance that values shared stewardship over authoritarian rule, resonating with democratic principles that, despite their messiness, provide our best defense against the dangers that Tolkien so profoundly warns against.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New year!

The ***Wednesday***

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Aword To The Wise

‘Do minds crave peace or passion?’ there’s a choice
To baffle the reflective mind.
And few the passionate who heed wisdom’s voice
Is what the wise soon find.

The wise have their reward, but soon perceive
Wisdom brings melancholy,
And yet the wise cannot rejoice, but grieve
At headstrong passion’s folly!

Edward Greenwood