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The Wednesday

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Editorial

Philosophers in the Classroom

For a long time I have thought of writing about famous philosophers delivering their lectures in the classroom. I think I mentioned once how a student of Hegel, for example, reported that Hegel said a long sentence, walked to the window, stated it again and then said it a third time, while coughing. Perhaps, Hegel was struggling with the thought. What he was saying was new, original and difficult. His process might have been boring for students and readers who are eager to get the result but not patient enough to follow the argument.

This last point became the target of Fichte's teaching method. He was teaching prior to Hegel when he made his breakthrough with his lecture *The Science of Knowledge (Wissenschaftslehre)*. Despite being extremely difficult, the lectures brought him fame and dominance. His ideas of the Absolute 'I', action and striving influenced the young generation, including Schelling, who then either revolted against him or modified his view. For his part, Fichte kept repeating and modifying his lectures to convince the public of their validity and importance. All these *New* attempts are ways of getting the public to engage with the lecture, but the reason why there were many attempts, from his initial course 1794 to 1804 is that he was trying new, original and difficult thought. But the works of his disciples, Schelling and Hegel, made these difficulties part of the philosophical atmosphere of the time and could be read nowadays in this spirit.

Fichte always instructed his students and his readers to pay maximum attention to the thoughts he expressed, advising complete attention that does not admit of degrees. If your attention wavers, you may understand part of the argument but not the whole - the whole truth. A student by the name of Hendrik Steffens, who attended Fichte's seminars during the winter semester of 1798/1799 reported: 'I cannot deny that I was awed by my first glimpse of this short, stocky man with a sharp, commanding tongue. Even his manner of speaking was sharp. Well aware of his listeners' weaknesses, he tried in every way to make himself understood by them. He made every effort to provide proofs for everything he said; but his speech was still commanding, as if he wanted to dispel any possible doubts by means of an unconditional order'. This is obvious to anyone who reads Fichte today. Moreover, Fichte demands the active participation of the listener or reader in his thought process.

Steffens continues: '"Gentlemen", he would say, "collect your thoughts and enter into yourselves. We are not at all concerned now with anything external, but only with ourselves ... Then Fichte would continue: "Gentlemen, think about the wall ... And as I saw, they really did think about the wall, and everyone seemed able to do so with success. "Have you thought about the wall?" Fichte would ask. "Now, gentlemen, think about whoever it was that had that thought about the wall"'. Steffens commented on his experience of the lecture: 'Fichte's delivery was excellent: precise and clear. I was completely swept away by the topic, and I had to admit that I had never before heard a lecture like that one'.

In his small, but very interesting book *The Vocation of Man* - see the excellent article by William Bishop in this issue - Fichte makes similar demands on his reader. The book was written while Fichte was between jobs after leaving Jena. He writes in the introduction: 'I still need to remind a few readers that the "I" who speaks in the book is by no means the author. Rather, the author wishes that the reader may come to see himself in this "I"; that the reader may not simply relate to what is said here as he would to history, but rather that while reading he will actually converse with himself, deliberate back and forth, deducing conclusions, make decisions like his representative in the book, and through his own work and reflections, purely out of his resources, develop and build within himself the philosophical disposition that is presented to him in this book as a picture'.

These are great lessons from a great teacher and philosopher. It must have been thrilling to listen to Fichte, or any of the great philosophers directly, and to be able to follow their arguments, especially as their thoughts were unfoldingfor the first time. I hope that we are doing this every Wednesday in our humble meeting, especially when many members have original views and theories.

The Editor

The Vocation Of Man

By relating reason to faith, coupled with knowledge of the self and the cosmos, Fichte determines the appropriate vocation for Man where heart's Reason moves Will to act morally in the world.

WILLIAM BISHOP

While a sage such as Confucius, and other ancient philosophers, lived wisely in harmony with what they considered to be the order of the universe and its laws, others achieved a similar harmony by living in accord with the religious culture they were born into. This situation continued largely until the 'Enlightenment' in Europe when Reason was applied to challenge faith. Johann Gottlieb Fichte lived at the time when this challenge was becoming an existential issue. Immanuel Kant rose to prominence at the time employing reason to comprehend and mediate in the situation, and then Fichte responded to the disquiet that Reason had brought to the established era of religious faith. His publication *The Vocation of Man,* in 1800, was a measured and heartfelt response, employing reason to counter-intuitively reveal its limits.

The Vocation of Man is an unusual work of philosophy. It is addressed to the general reader and deliberately written in non-technical language. As the foreword says: 'This book is intended to attract and animate the reader, and to elevate him, from the world of the senses into a region beyond it… the "I" who speaks in this book is not the author himself; it is the author's wish that the reader will himself assume this character'.

Fichte wanted the reader to engage with the dialogue and mode of thought it presents. The three sections of the book: '*Doubt, Knowledge, Faith'*, take the reader through a journey in mood and thought. Although Fichte wanted independently to think things through for himself, the influence of Kant is apparent, as are resonances with Descartes' doubt and the God of Spinoza's *Ethics*. Fichte wanted to share his experience as an autonomous free spirit: 'Our philosophy becomes the history of our own heart and life; and according to what we ourselves are do we conceive man and his vocation'.

What am I?

The opening question is: What am I myself, and what is my vocation? It continues: 'Like the plant, I am a particular mode or manifestation of the formative power; like the animal, a particular mode or manifestation of the power of motion; and besides these I am a particular mode or manifestation of the thinking power. In man, as Nature's highest masterpiece, she turns inward, that she may perceive and contemplate herself. It is as though Nature reproduces herself in man and, from mere existence, becomes existence and consciousness in one. I am myself the knower, and am one with that which knows. I am subject and object and this subject objectivity, this return of knowledge upon itself, is what I mean by the term I'.

The nature of the 'I' as an intelligence therefore consists in the identity of subject and object. The 'I' separates object and subject; knowledge as objective presents as subjective. 'You yourself are the thing. You are presented before yourself and projected out of yourself'. Intuition here is immediate perception: 'My seeing is what I see; my consciousness is what I am conscious of… There is an outer intuition… this intuition of an outer world is *the thing*, there is no other'. The object is inferred by reason although an illusory aspect of the external world is conveyed: 'All knowledge is only pictures, representations… but knowledge is not reality – just because it is knowledge'.

Initially in a state of doubt, Fichte concludes that knowledge of *reality* is not possible because the conception of an external world is merely the projection of an internal modification within consciousness. Reason leads Fichte to conclude that there is only one 'thing-in-itself' and that is the whole, and particular things are parts within

the whole. The author accepts that man is finite so therefore all self-generated knowledge can only be partial and uncertain. Reason must therefore lead beyond itself to faith, since knowledge itself is based on faith in reason. Faith may therefore apprehend a more complete picture of reality. Here Fichte's foundational idea is that the ultimate source of Being is *Reason as the Principle of Reality*.

Fichte's initial thoughts lead him to conclude that Man is a manifestation, determined by the whole system of the universe, of a power of Nature that is determined by itself alone. This conclusion horrifies him however because, as part of Nature, Man is subject to its cause-and-effect determinism and so Man would lack freedom. Fichte therefore starts again from a different point: 'What I had desired was this: that I myself, that of which I am conscious as my own being and person, but which in this system appears as only the manifestation of a higher existence, that this 'I' would be independent, would be something which exists no longer by another or through another, but of myself, and, as such, would be the final root of all my own determinations. The rank which in this system is assumed by an original power of Nature I would myself assume'.

By observing change and considering origins, Fichte is compelled to assume an *active power* peculiar to the object and constituting its essential nature. He concludes that such an *active principle* exists in itself alone and nothing beyond itself. He surmises that while man is a product of Nature and nature provides an external world in which to act, intellect and reason have another source and are not subject to Nature. In this sense Man is infused by two qualitatively different worlds or states of being: 'I do not exist for Nature, but Nature exists for me… If she destroys me she must animate me anew; for it is only my Higher Life, unfolding itself in her before which my present life can disappear; and what mortals call death is the visible appearance of this second life.'

Dialogue with the Author

In the section on knowledge, a spirit enters into dialogue with the author: 'Your vocation is not merely to know, but to act according to your

Fichte

knowledge… your action, and your action alone, determines your worth'. Fichte has faith in *will* and in moral consciousness for apprehending reality. He replies to the spirit: 'If the *will* is steadily and honestly directed towards the good, then the understanding will of itself apprehend the true… Conscience alone is the root of all truth… I myself, by my act alone, determine my whole mode of thought… There is one point toward which I have unceasingly to direct my attention – namely what I ought to do and how I may best fulfil the obligation… The voice of my conscience announces to me precisely what I ought to do'.

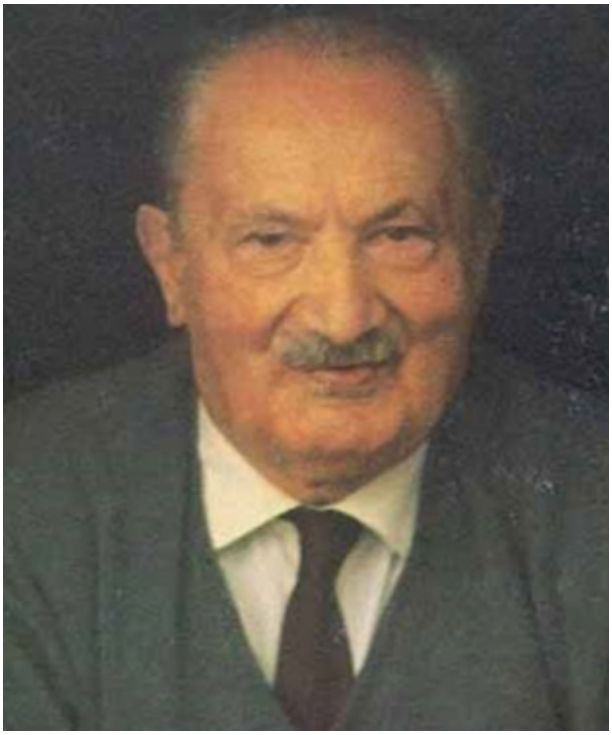
For the author, the true human vocation is to obey conscience, and this moral consciousness includes respect for the freedom of others to determine their own lives. In spite of earthly conflict, Fichte

Virtual reality

envisages a distant future for humanity: 'It is the vocation of our species to unite itself in one single body, all the parts of which shall be thoroughly known to each other, and all possessed of similar culture'. He entertains the idea of a universal commonwealth with laws for the security and equality of all individuals: 'Here, where the petty, narrow self of mere individual personality is lost in the comprehensive unity of the social constitution, each man truly loves every other as himself – as a member of this greater self. This is the purpose of earthly life, which Reason sets before us'.

This might well apply to the earthly world of cause and effect but Fichte goes on to question its adequacy in terms of everlasting meaning and satisfaction. Taking up Kant's insight in *Critique of Practical Reason* and thinking from the perspective of moral consciousness, Fichte arrives at the conviction of faith in a 'supersensual' (or spiritual) world: 'I will know with the same certainty with which I am assured that the ground will support me when I tread on it'. He infers that moral duty calls for a 'real world', and such action cannot *take effect* in a world of sense that is merely a system of pictures. So, Fichte gains the *certainty* of *faith* in a 'supersensual' eternal world, while regarding himself as an autonomous, though finite *will* supported by reason and moral conscience. He articulates his form of monism: 'That which we call heaven does not lie beyond the grave; it is here diffused around us, and its light arises in every pure heart. My will is mine, and it is the only thing that is wholly mine and entirely dependent on myself; and through it I have already become a citizen of the realm of freedom and of pure spiritual activity… I stand in the centre of two entirely opposite worlds: a visible world in which action is the only moving power; and an invisible and absolutely incomprehensible world in which *will* is the ruling principle. These two orders – the purely spiritual and the sensuous, the latter consisting possibly of an innumerable series of particular lives – have existed for me since the first moment of the development of an *active reason* within me… Man is not a product of the world of sense, and the end of his existence cannot be attained in it. His vocation transcends time and space… his vocation is a lofty one, he must be able to raise his thoughts above the limitations of sense'. For Fichte God is the foundation for the moral order of the world and each of us exists 'only in God and through God'. He concedes that this is difficult to grasp intellectually but it relates to the

Kant



Heidegger

moral consciousness rather than the understanding - hence the need for faith.

In spite of a discernible preaching tone entering the final section on Faith, Fichte assures the reader that he respects the will of others and appeals merely to reason. Indeed there is a stream of thinking arising from Nominalism and continuing through Hobbes onwards that entirely limits reason (or thinking) to the 'sensual world' in opposition to Fichte's ideal-realist approach to reality. The difference is that Fichte embraces the idea of the absolute and infinity. The directions taken by these paths of thinking, feeling and will differ considerably. In this respect the philosophy's plea to *know oneself* becomes relevant with its corollary of Man's Vocation; here lie consequences for the destiny of mankind.

Naturally the situation has moved on since Fichte's day, and we now face an attention economy determined to confine the mind, heart and soul within the delightful sense world, eclipsing Fichte's concern for raising one's thinking beyond the sensory world. Also apart from Nature, a new determinism has arisen where binary logic abstracted from Man and installed as operational principles in machines powered by electricity, efficiently engage the human mind and soul, conforming human thought to this logical category of thinking, at the expense of reflective thought and intuition. Additionally, linked to this technology is the illusory world of 'virtual reality'. Indeed, Martin Heidegger spoke of the jeopardy involved when logic was developed out of logos as an independent form of reason. Such logic with its calculative property suited to technology has largely eclipsed reflective thinking that, with its qualitative and meditative dimension, retains consciousness and remembrance of Being as the mysterious source and active principle upon which all existence depends.

If there is an ontological connection between the 'Mind of God' and the human Intellect, and creation is visible to the human mind according to the understanding that prevails in a civilization at any time, and also given continuing development of the conscious 'I' and the human soul with its ability to know, then Man's ontological status remains a live question. What is the essence of what it is to be human? For example, is there an ontological connection between a human being and eternal Being?

Hellas

Hellas, your gift of phrase
Makes me revere your works and days.
I envy even dryasdusts
(Insects at each column's base)
Not for the malicious thrusts
Disputatious scholars use,
But insofar as they can trace
Bright Apollo and each Muse.

Hellas, your gift of song
Makes me recall each painful wrong
As if it were occurring now.
Blind Oedipus, Jocasta blind,
Agamemnon's foolish vow,
Philoctetes fatal bow.
Antigone too proud to bow,
Ilium a heap of stones!

Edward Greenwood

Volume 17

Just been published

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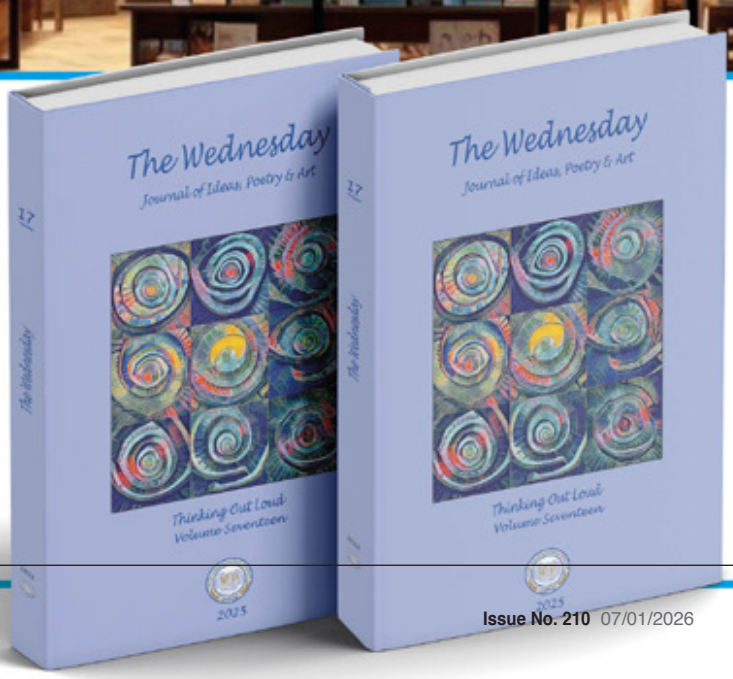


Locke's Leviathan

This essay will examine some key points from John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, ask how well his theory works in reality, and explore some larger implications of his work.

DAN MCARDLE

Imagine: you are in a foreign country, driving down the road. You see a police car behind you, so you pull over. The officer comes to your window and informs you that you were speeding. He advises that the law demands he must now seize your assets. He then points a gun at your head, and executes you point blank.

This seems outrageous: a clear abuse of power, abandonment of proportionality, and a fine example of a totalitarian state run amok. While we might collectively agree as to the veracity of these statements, the next question is harder to answer: why are they true?

In our scenario, we have a police officer, an agent of government, enforcing a law. But what exactly *is* government, and what *is a* law? To broadly define these terms, 'government' is the constitutional structure which maintains a governing body. In a monarchy, the structure would be the king or queen and their decrees, while in a democracy it would be electing representatives to make decisions. 'Laws', conversely, are the means by which government interacts with the governed.

Society before the State

The first step in examining government and law is to consider the state of society before either has emerged. If human beings exist with no formal laws, what happens? Thomas Hobbes, influenced by Thucydides, argued that we get chaos and war. John Locke has a very different take: according to him, the original state of nature is that of both perfect freedom and perfect equality. Every person is born with the same intrinsic rights derived from God: life, liberty, and property. We have a right to life because we exist, and a right to liberty because this is our natural state of existence. We also have a right to the results of our labor, thus termed property. When we plant and harvest crops, we have an innate ownership of those crops derived from the labor we put into their creation.

On the surface this seems straightforward, but perhaps Locke's view is too basic. It assumes we own the field where the crops are planted, and that nobody else has put labor into the process. There are also some assumptions about territorial claims. Like Plato in his *Republic* (and *Laws*), Locke seems to make the error of assuming that access to land is a given. He does address this issue to a degree, claiming that land is part of nature and thus belongs to all. But is this realistic? It makes one question whether these shortcomings could be why Thomas Jefferson famously changed 'property' to 'the pursuit of happiness' when he penned the Declaration of Independence, and whether these ideas may have influenced Karl Marx.

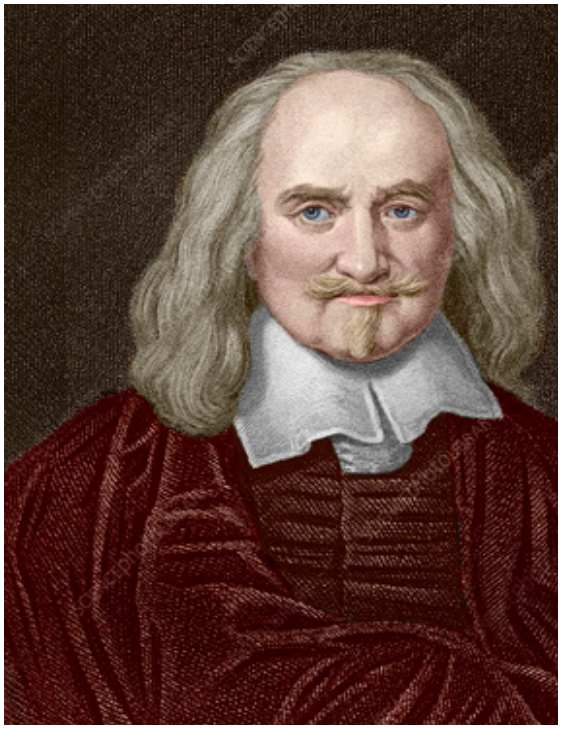
The State of Nature

Next, we come to the question of what it means to be in a state of nature. As Locke says in the second chapter of his *Treatise*, 'though this be a state of liberty, yet it is not a state of license'. And he continues: 'Every one, as he is bound to preserve himself, and not to quit his station willfully, so by the like reason, when his own preservation comes not into competition, ought he, as much as he can, to preserve the rest of mankind' (§6). In other words, in addition to protecting our own life and freedoms, when we are not under threat, we also have a duty to ensure that other people's life and freedoms are protected. It is only when these rights are violated that we enter into a state of war.

Locke's Disagreements with Hobbes

Again we find ourselves lifting the curtain. One of Locke's primary disagreements with Hobbes is on the base nature of man, and he presents a vision of peaceful harmony that can be disturbed by action. But nature itself exists in a state of war

Locke



Hobbes

and survival – animals are constantly in battles over territory and food. What separates us from animals, as Locke would likely agree, is reason. Is reason part of nature, or is there something supernatural, something divine about it? We can use reason to enter into agreements with others, and the suspension of reason, or the dissolution of agreements, creates the possibility of war. We also need reason to recognize that these rights exist. If reason is supernatural, then the state of nature and the state of war would be identical. If reason is inherent to our nature, then why is it so easily lost or forgotten?

When we make agreements with others, we form societies. For a healthy society to function, people must perform different roles, each of which contributes to the whole. If we produce goods beyond our needs for the benefit of society, we can exchange ownership of those goods for others. But how well do these ideas work in reality, and what happens when these agreements break down? Locke faces this when he introduces the notion of the commonwealth. Such a union, he argues, occurs when each individual, as 'a member of any commonwealth, has thereby quitted his power to punish offenses' against his own state of nature, and 'given a right to the commonwealth to employ his force' (§88). That is, while we maintain in nature the right to defend our life and our property, by entering into a common civil community, we cede these rights to what becomes the legislature.

The 'first and fundamental positive law' (§134). of government, according to Locke, is legislature. When individuals come together to form a commonwealth, ceding some of their rights to it, they must, in turn, decide on a set of laws to regulate themselves. The law itself is nothing more than a set of formal agreements as to how society should operate, crafted by the members of the society or their representatives.

It is curious that Locke identifies a legislature as fundamental because this has not been how governments have developed historically. The ancient Greeks invented democracy in contradistinction to the kingdoms which surrounded them. The Romans developed their Republic in rejection of their early days of kingships, and famously refused to call their leaders 'kings', even as the Senate slowly lost power to the emperors following Augustus. Locke gives an attempted history of governance, trying to justify his idea of

Leviathan

the supremacy of legislature, and quickly admits that the historical record is incomplete at best due to the relatively late invention of writing. To argue that legislature and not monarchy is what emerges naturally from a state of nature is patently false.

We should also note that how someone behaves in isolation or in a smaller circle of friends will be radically different from when they find themselves in front of a larger public. How often have we seen a friend change because 'the fame went to his head'? Fame cannot exist without an audience to capture it, and these natural tendencies which emerge from some individuals with exposure to fame can be tempered to a degree. Thus, in addition to offering up a representation of the will of the people, the legislation also serves as a bulwark, a topic we will address presently.

Though the aim of legislature is to decide upon ground rules, they are useless unless they can be enforced, which is why we need an executive. Every government has an executive, and the degree to which it is formalized determines its shape. When there is an explicitly stated power, such as a monarch or elected official like a president or prime minister, there will be clear defining boundaries, establishing the reach of said power and mechanisms to prevent interference with the legislature. Entitites like committees or anarchies which claim no executive, usually find such power flows more implicitly, either through tradition, violence, or charisma – it is also much harder to control.

Human Nature

This brings us to an ugly reality of human nature. Locke says that each person has inherent rights and power to enforce them, and when people relinquish some of their rights to a legislature for protection, the legislature gains them. It then follows that the entity which enforces the laws the legislature creates, must wield this power. If human nature is such that we may, given sufficient cause, enter into a state of war with one another, what is to prevent whoever holds this mass of power to use it in a way which, contrary to the will of the people, furthers their own power at the people's expense?

To illustrate this dilemma, picture a bull in a china shop. The fine china represents all the negotiations people have made with each other that allows

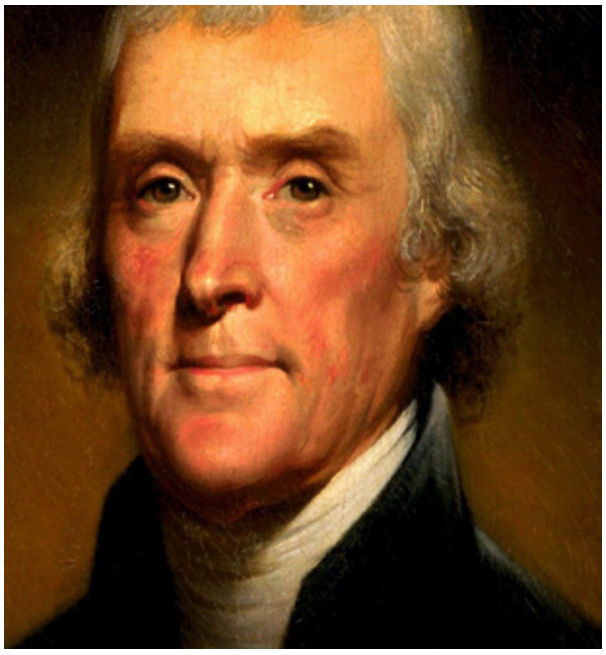
society to grow and prosper. The bull represents the executive: as each person cedes their individual rights and powers to the government, the bull becomes more dangerous, and it eventually must be restrained. Every law that legislature passes becomes a rope to hold the bull in place. There is a delicate balance here: we want the bull to be mobile enough to deter potential wrongdoers, but not to destroy the dishes so carefully arranged in our shop. If the restraints become too lax or frayed, the bull can escape and wreak havoc. If the restraints are too tight, then there is no real deterrent for criminals.

Is this 'bull' is a phenomenon of nature? If a legislature is never created, it seems that a monarchy would arise regardless. It would then follow that a legislature is not, as Locke argues, a natural step after the formation of society, but rather a formalization of social rules designed to protect society from the form of concentrated power that will always surface. From this view, government is a continuous battle between the individual powers as exercised through representation, and a concentration of those same powers into a single entity which must be controlled. In other words, the legislature acts with dual roles, both to enable the people, and to protect them from unmitigated tyranny.

Back to our opening story. It seems outrageous because we are used to the penalty being proportional to the crime. But why should that be the case? The answer is simple: when we give up our natural rights, in return we expect those rights *and* the well-being of society to be protected. When enforcement of the laws which ostensibly protect our rights deviates from ensuring the good of society, it becomes tyrannical in nature and breaks the contract which binds us to it. In other words, if our rights are violated by the very institution that we created to protect them, then the institution must be changed or dissolved.

Some Questions

One of the first questions we raised was about the purpose of government, and now we should turn to address the purpose of law. If we agree that power will always emerge, whether through personal charisma or through someone tasked with carrying out the decisions of a legislative body,



Thomas Jefferson

we are forced to revisit theories of human nature. Should we assume the best, and then endure life under a Caligula, Napoleon, Stalin, or Hitler? Or should we set up a safety net to protect ourselves and society from the harsh reality of what could be? If power will always find a way to control, and a group of people magnifies this power by ceding their innate enforcing rights to it, then, to survive, we must restrain it. In this view, the purpose of the law is to restrain government: after all, why should the penalty for speeding *not* be immediate death, if an omnipotent executive has decided it be so?

This scepticism of power is not new. Locke lived during tension between Parliament and the King, and in modern times, we see similar tensions in many countries. The American Bill of Rights restricts what government, rather than citizens, can do. When we vote, we expect that our interests will be maintained; when this does not happen, when the trust between the elected and electorate frays, a Pandora's box opens. If this social contract breaks, the entire government can dissolve, and all former members of the society return to a state of nature where their aim becomes survival of their life and property. All rights which people had ceded to the government return, and, as people no longer have any obligation of allegiance to a government, they are justified in taking whatever actions necessary to preserve their inherent rights.

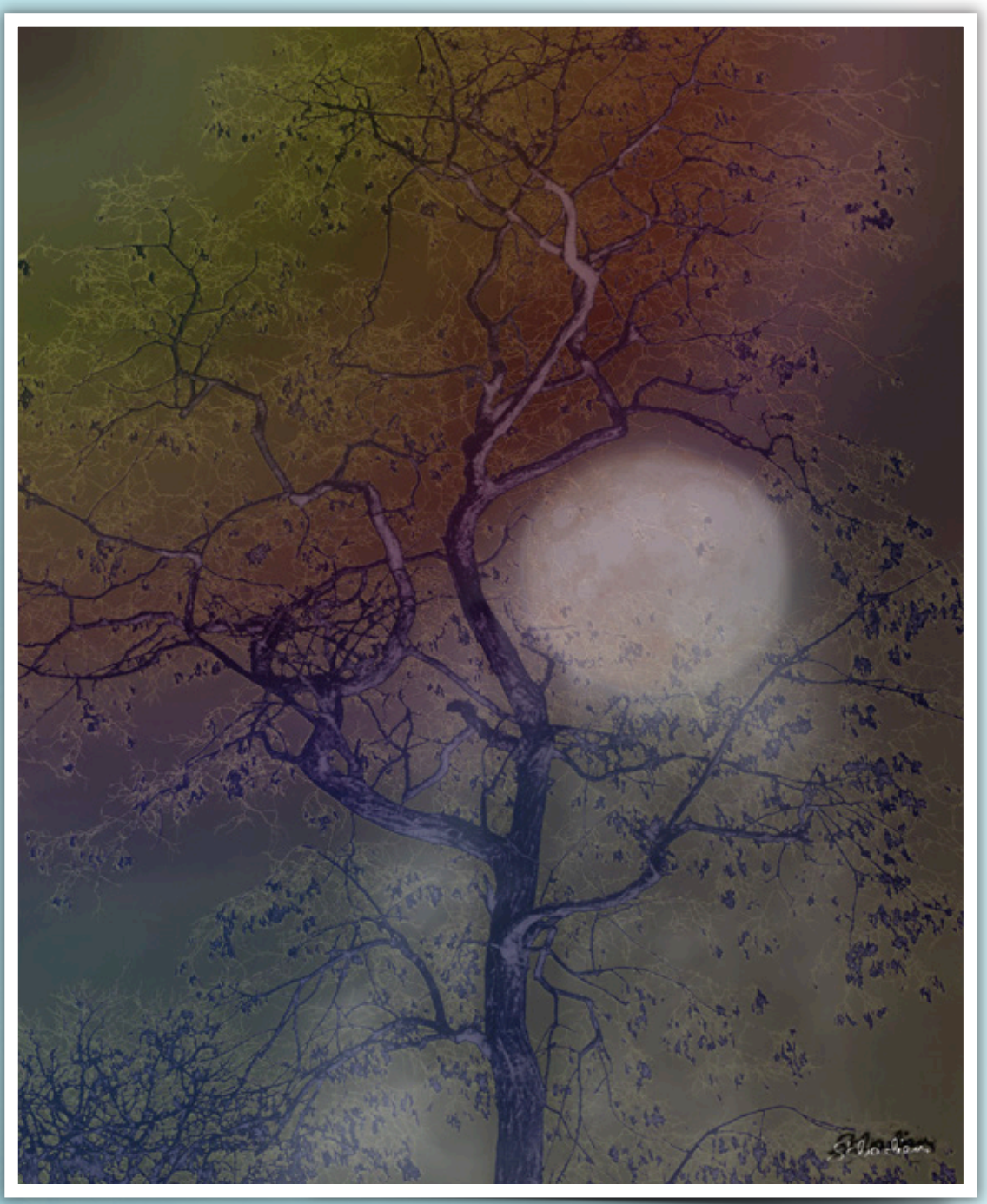
Two lovers look at the full moon

That night,
the moon shone beautifully,
casting its silver gaze
upon the world,
and I found myself entranced,
lost in the soft glow,
the air fragrant with secrets.

I looked down at the creek,
where ripples danced,
chains of light
linking the earth to the stars,
each shimmer a hint
of dreams yet to be spoken,
echoing the feelings
of our tender hearts.

We wore light silk clothes,
the fabric a gentle caress,
as if the night itself
wrapped us in its embrace,
and beneath the vastness of the sky,
the clouds sailed by,
changing shapes,
a canvas of myriad forms,
a playful dance of shadows
and luminous hope.

Are there any other lovers
as passionate as we,
gazing up at the same moon tonight?
Oh, surely there are many,
finding solace under its glow,
while critics might dissect the clouds,
analyzing their fleeting beauty,
or reveling in their soft parade.



But when a couple
looks up at the moon together,
I doubt the clouds are the subject -
By and by, the candle lights flickered,
then surrendered to the dark,
the moon sank gently,
a slow descent into the horizon,
and we slipped into the quiet of our bed,
the world outside fading,
our hearts still tethered,
beneath the soft glow of memory.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

The Clearing: On Light, Darkness, and the Space of Being

DR. ALAN XUEREB

Art is never a mere embellishment or diversion. It is one of the privileged ways in which truth comes to presence. As Heidegger reminds us in The Origin of the Work of Art, a work of art is not reducible to imitation or representation; it opens a world, it sets into motion a happening of truth (*aletheia*). The mixed media canvas under discussion here is my own work, and I approach it not as an object external to myself but as a site of reflection, a disclosure in which philosophical and artistic concerns converge.

At first sight, the canvas appears tumultuous, an eruption of colour and texture. Deep blues and purples mingle with flashes of green, yellow, and orange, while across the surface lighter tones of turquoise and white break through with striking intensity. Out of this apparent chaos, however, a compositional centre asserts itself: a vertical column of luminosity that cleaves the surrounding density. It is here, in this shaft of light, that Heidegger's notion of the clearing (*Lichtung*) becomes most apt.

Darkness and the Density of Existence

The darker regions of the canvas are not inert voids but richly textured zones of density. Pigment accumulates and interweaves, suggesting both depth and resistance. In this sense, the dark does not represent absence but rather the dimension of concealment through which beings are withheld from immediate grasp.

For Heidegger, Being is never fully transparent to consciousness. The world we inhabit in daily life is usually experienced as familiar and manipulable, as what he called ready–to–hand. Yet beneath this surface availability lies a deeper ground that is always partially hidden. The darkness of this work embodies that ground: it is the necessary concealment from which disclosure arises. Far from being a deficiency, concealment is intrinsic to the nature of Being.

The Clearing as Emergence

Against this density stands the vertical burst of light. Pale turquoise, violet, and white open a pathway upward, breaking through the surrounding obscurity. This compositional gesture is more than an aesthetic device; it enacts Heidegger's *Lichtung*, the clearing in which beings first appear as beings.

The clearing is not simply illumination in the literal sense. It is the open region, the horizon, that allows beings to emerge into presence. It is the precondition for any disclosure whatsoever. The painting stages this insight: the light does not abolish darkness, nor is it comprehensible apart from it. Only in their interplay does the event of disclosure occur. Were the canvas uniformly radiant, it would lose precisely the drama of emergence that constitutes its essence. Truth, Heidegger insists, is never the elimination of concealment but the strife between revealing and concealing.

Dwelling in the Clearing

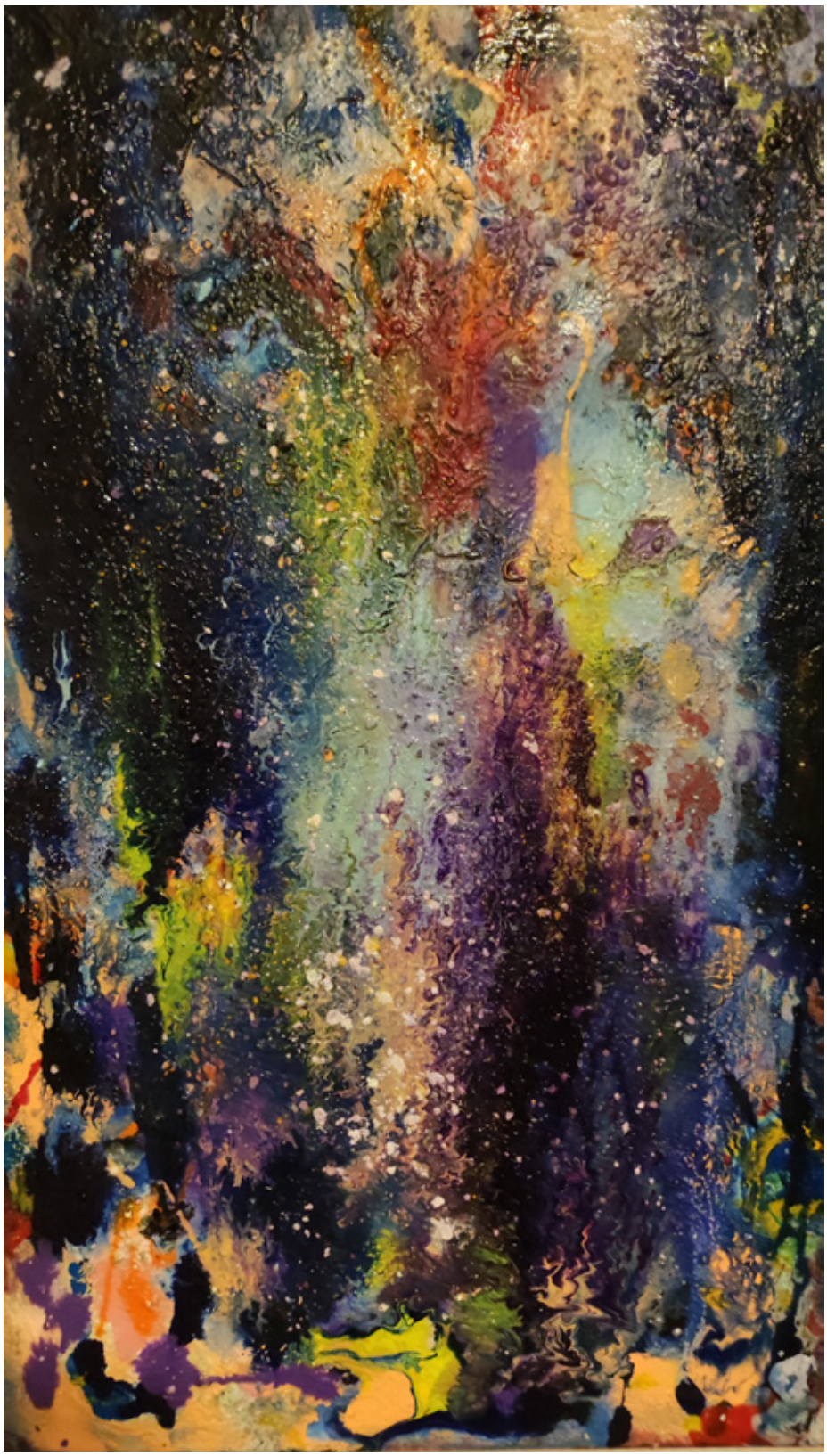
If the clearing is the open space of disclosure, what role belongs to the human being? Heidegger resists the notion that humanity is the master of Being. Instead, he describes human beings as the 'shepherds of Being' – those who dwell within the clearing and take responsibility for it. Dwelling here is not simply physical inhabitation but an attunement to openness.

The central luminosity of the canvas may thus be read as an invitation to dwell in the clearing. The spectator, drawn towards this axis, does not remain detached but becomes implicated in the work's disclosure. To stand before the canvas is already to inhabit its opening, to be addressed by the fragile unveiling it sustains. This dwelling is always precarious, for the clearing is never secured once and for all; it is threatened on every side by the encroachment of obscurity. Yet it is precisely this fragility that makes it precious.

Cosmic and Intimate Resonances

The work holds together two scales of meaning. On one level, it evokes the vastness of the cosmos: stellar nurseries, nebulae, or the birth of galaxies. On another level, it gestures towards the intimacy of the psyche: the turbulence of the unconscious, where unarticulated depths give rise to sudden insight and illumination.

Both dimensions converge in the same structure: emergence out of concealment, the dialectic of shadow



The Clearing - mixed media

and light, the opening of a world. Heidegger's clearing is not only a metaphysical notion but an existential one: it speaks of the finite human condition. To live authentically is to acknowledge the interplay of light and shadow, to accept that disclosure is always partial, yet nonetheless binding and real. The painting mirrors this condition.

The Work as World

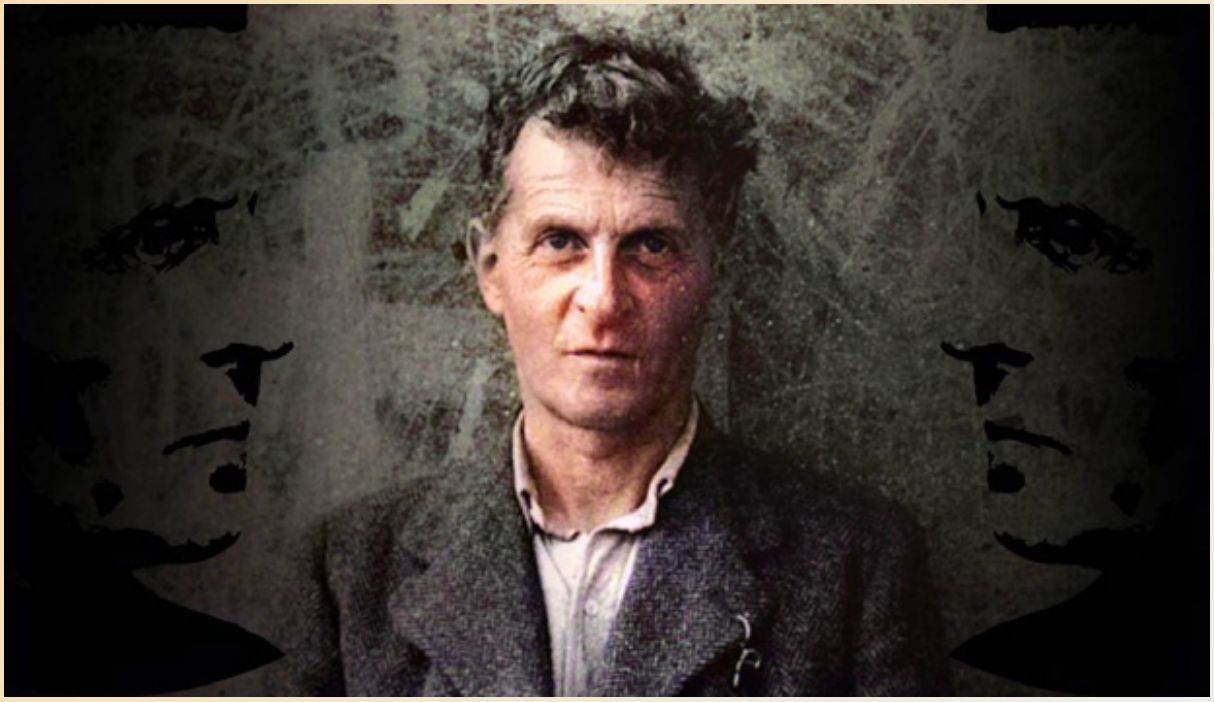
Heidegger argued that a genuine work of art establishes a world. It does not merely depict but brings forth. This canvas, though abstract, exemplifies such world-disclosure. It does not represent a determinate landscape or figure; instead, it stages the very event of world-opening, the strife of concealment and unconcealment in which Being shows itself.

As the creator of this work, I recognise that it is not mine in the sense of possession or mastery. Once complete, it belongs to the openness it enacts. The canvas stands as an occasion for disclosure, not as a private expression to be decoded. In this sense, the work exceeds its maker, and yet it also bears the trace of the hand and thought that brought it into being.

Naming the Work: The Clearing

For these reasons, I have titled the work 'The Clearing'. The name does not impose meaning but gestures towards the philosophical horizon that sustains it. It invites the viewer to consider the fragile openness in which beings emerge, to recognise the strife of light and darkness as essential, and to reflect on their own role as dwellers within this clearing.

'The Clearing' is not a conclusion but an opening. It points beyond itself, reminding us that truth is not possession but event, not clarity without remainder but the interplay of revealing and concealing. In creating this work, I sought to enact that interplay, to offer a space where Being might, however briefly, shine forth.



Wittgenstein

The limits of my language are the limits of my world.

CHRIS **NORRIS**

Round earth

Flat-earther to round-earther: ‘see my map!
Push words too far, you’ll drop right off the edge.
Those language-gamesters should just cut the crap,
Head home, and take the common-usage pledge’.

Round-earther: ‘choose projections fit to wrap
Around the Earth; then that risk you allege
Turns out a language-generated trap
In need of some good sense-supplying wedge’.

But, either way, there’s Ludwig keen to tell
Cartographers: ‘it’s language-games decide
World-boundaries, horizons, and where dwell
The dragons loosed when words are misapplied’.

So harken to him if you’d lift the spell
Of errant language-games or misapplied
Locutions that his word alone can quell –
And thus keep those flat-earthers well onside!

‘Super Moon’, New York, 6 November 2025.

Photographed by Virginia Khuri

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