The *Wednesday*

Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Resisting Epistemic Injustice

Philosophers normally discuss epistemic matters in relation to the existence of the external world and scepticism. There is also the epistemic credibility in any testimony; that is when pieces of information are exchanged in any social relation. The standard treatment of these issues is one of abstraction from social values, assumptions and prejudices. But the social sphere is full of unjust and unequal conscious and unconscious assumptions and prejudices.

There is now much more awareness that epistemic judgments are not innocent and that there are epistemic injustices applied to race and gender. This is important not only for certain sections of society in advanced countries, such as women and minorities, but also for liberating and empowering a large part of the world in the post-colonial era. It is not a matter of 'relativism' against 'universalism' but rather both coming together in the spirit of critique and sharper awareness of postulates and assumptions that were taken for granted in philosophy and knowledge generally.

The world has become so small and the old distances are shrinking, not only geographically but culturally, and we have a responsibility for getting to a level playing-field by challenging concepts and methods across the world to build a good future – one that looks forward to peace, co-operation and development and where philosophy can play a major role. At a time of increasing talk about post-truth and media bias, and with the targeting of certain identities, ethnic and religious, it becomes imperative to investigate the knowledge sphere and our daily communication to fight against past injustices and create a fair world.

It is not surprising that the philosophers and writers who come to talk about the subject are those with weak and unheard voices, such as women and former colonised countries and disadvantaged minorities. Recently (end of February), the university of Johannesburg organised a workshop on the topic under the title *Epistemic Injustice, Reasons, and Agency*. The key-note of the workshop was how to consider possibilities for enacting epistemic agency under conditions of oppression. The aim was to show how epistemic agents subject to oppression might resist, navigate, and/or side-step these obstacles.

The Johannesburg workshop is to be followed up by a full conference at Kent university in Canterbury (starting today) under the same title. The two universities collaborated in organising both events following an initiative from a group of leading academic feminists.

The University of Jena is also going to have its second *Jena Summer Symposium in Philosophy* on epistemic injustice, under the title *The Ethics of Knowing*. The symposium will take place at the end of July.

Recently our Wednesday member, Paul Cockburn, attended a course at Cambridge University on animal ethics. He reported back that 'the lecturer linked feminism to animal rights. The link is that the voice of the oppressed should be heard and acted on. You can extend that to the earth, our planet, and neo-colonialism. There is a clear link to injustice.' He also linked it to Lyotard's philosophy and the seeking of justice for those whose voices are not heard.

All this regenerates the spirit of critique and seeking alternatives. The credit for this activity in such a sensitive area of philosophy must be awarded to a group of feminist philosophers. It is feminism coming of age and moving beyond the oppression of women into the sphere of oppression in general. Their thoughts have resonance with a long line of male philosophers who fought for the rights of the oppressed, such as Foucault, Lyotard, Edward Said and others. It is the convergence of all areas of thought seeking freedom and justice, making a difference to the present and the future.

The Editor

Concepts and Reality

In the discussion on Wednesday 02/01/2019 another member suggested that the Forms posited by Plato, the Third Realm posited by Frege, and World 3 posited by Popper, might each be related to the realm of concepts. This series of three articles explores this idea of concepts through a view of language as the use of recognisable signs to express information by combining concepts.

CHRIS **SEDDON**

In this, the first article of this series of three on concepts, I quote three related notions from Plato, Frege, and Popper before proposing a pragmatic account of structures of meaning shared between language and intentional action. I suggest that it is possible and desirable not to smuggle claims of what types of things may be said to exist into a general understanding of what language is and show how this ontological neutrality applies also to the notion of a concept.

Historical Background

For Plato, the transitory world we perceive through our senses is a mere likeness of the world of perfect and eternal *Forms* which can only be apprehended by intelligent reasoning:

> 'TIMAEUS: We must in my opinion begin by distinguishing between that which always is and never becomes from that which is always becoming but never is. The one is apprehensible by intelligence with the aid of reasoning, being eternally the same, the other is the object of opinion and irrational sensation, coming to be and ceasing to be, but never fully real... Whenever, therefore, the maker of anything keeps his eye on the eternally unchanging and uses it as his pattern for the form and function of his product the result must be good; whenever he looks to something that has come to be and uses a model that has come to be, the result is not good. As for the world... If the world is beautiful and its maker good... it must have been constructed on the pattern of

what is apprehensible by reason and understanding and eternally unchanging; from which... it follows that the world is a likeness of something else...

> SOCRATES: Certainly, Timaeus; we must accept your principle in full.'
> (Plato *Timaeus* pages 27-29 translated by H. D. P. Lee.)

For Frege in *Thought: A Logical Investigation*, in addition to the outer world of shared reality and the inner world of private sensations there must also be a ***Third Realm*** of shared thought:

> 'Even an unphilosophical person soon finds it necessary to recognise an inner world distinct from the outer world, a world of sense-impressions... imagination... sensations... feelings... wishes... I want to collect all these... under the word 'idea'... ideas cannot be seen... every idea has only one bearer ... is a thought an idea? If the thought I express... can be recognised by others just as much as by me then it does not belong to the content of my consciousness; yet I can, nevertheless, recognize it to be true.... If someone takes thoughts to be ideas, what he then recognizes to be true is, on his view, the content of his consciousness and does not really concern other people at all... So, thoughts are neither things of the outer world nor ideas... A third realm must be recognised. Thus, the thought, for example, which we express in the Pythagorean theorem is timelessly true... independently of whether anyone takes it to be true.'

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Frege

Wittgenstein
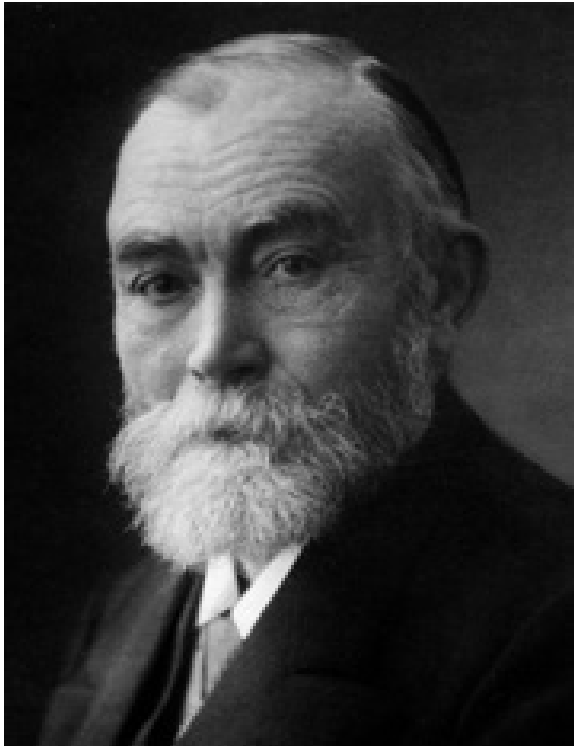
(Gottlob Frege *Thought: A Logical Investigation* in Beiträge zur Philosophie des Deutschen Idealismus 1918-1919.)

Popper appears to follow Frege in this respect, for in addition to World 1 of physical reality and World 2 of subjective experience he posits **World 3** of abstract objects:

> 'I will propose a view of the universe that recognizes at least three different but interacting sub-universes ... the world that consists of physical bodies ... "world 1" ... the mental or psychological world ... "world 2" ... [and] "world 3" ... the world of the products of the human mind, such as languages; ... myths; ... scientific theories, and mathematical constructions; ... symphonies; paintings... One can, if one wishes, say that the world 3 objects themselves are abstract objects, and that their physical embodiments or realizations are concrete objects.'
>
> (Karl Popper *Three Worlds,* section I, April 7, 1978.)

Instead of a metaphysical view of separate worlds or realms, I would like to suggest a pragmatic view of concepts as part of our social life.
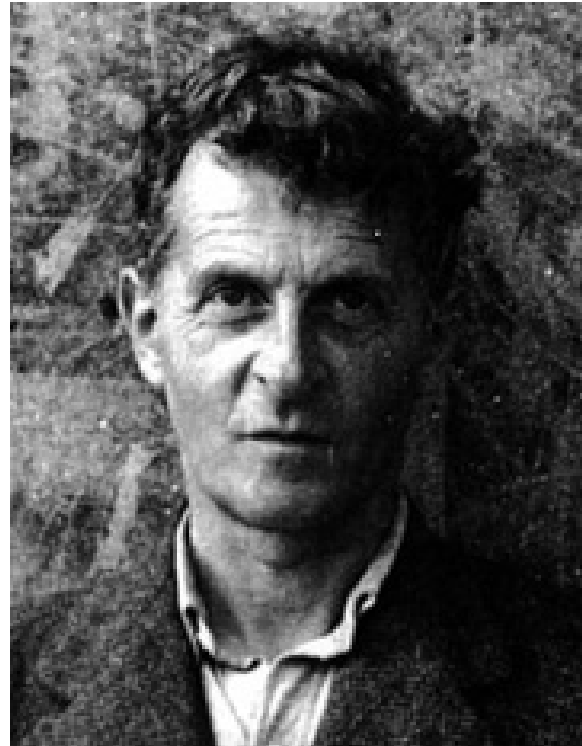
Language and reference

In my articles on *Mathematics and Philosophy* and *Wittgenstein: Religion and Nonsense* in *The Wednesday* issues 81 and 82 I considered a view of language with an intermediate layer of concepts between the recognisable signs of language and that to which language refers:

Language

> That *vocabulary* and *grammar* are **language** for a *person* means that the *vocabulary* comprises signs that the *person* associates with concepts, and the *grammar* comprises ways of combining signs that the *person* associates with ways of combining concepts to form references.

The definition is ontologically neutral, in the sense that it does not say what type of thing may be referenced. This neutrality avoids introducing unnecessary restrictions or unwarranted assumptions about what may or may not exist. However, it may help relate the definition to our natural language if one thinks of the process of conceptual combination as starting with pronouns referring to supposed objects, combining them in various ways, and ending with sentences referring to supposed situations.

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Philosophy

In his *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticised the assumptions of his earlier work *Tractatus Logic-Philosophicus*, pointing out that language fulfils many functions, not just the function of referring to situations (or facts). He concluded that there is no defining feature of what counts as language. My analysis agrees with his premise, but not his conclusion, suggesting instead that what distinguishes language from other social behaviour is that it fulfils its many functions by making such references.

Language and Action

The idea of language expressing concepts which combine to refer to situations also makes it easier to see a role for concepts apart from language. For example, a person's intentional actions might be explained in terms of their beliefs and desires, even if they have not or cannot express those beliefs in words. So, although concepts clearly relate to language, they are not just about language, but also about that kind of belief and desire which we infer as the causes of intentional action:

Intentional Action

    That the *action* of a *person* is **intentional** means that the *action* is the result of the *person*'s belief that certain situations exist and their desires that certain other situations exist,

In this sense I am thinking of our intentional actions as those which are founded on our beliefs and desires. Such beliefs and desires may or may not be expressed in language, but since we habitually express them in language, they have become influenced not only by the sort of creatures we are and the sort of worlds in which we live, but by the structure of our language. Therefore, although linguistic structures vary, it is of very general interest to consider some of the most basic and common elements of such structures.

Operational Language

The definition of language that I am considering suggests that not only do people associate signs with concepts, but they also associate ways of combining signs with ways of combining concepts. This definition is grammatically neutral in that it does not specify any particular way of combining signs or concepts, and indeed natural language illustrates many different types of combination. However, it is usually possible to provide equally valid alternative analyses of grammatical structures, and in particular much language can be analysed simply in terms of an *operational grammar* in which an *operator* is applied to *operands*. I shall use this simplification for the examples in the rest of this article:

Operational Language

    That *vocabulary* and *grammar* are **operational language** for a *person* means that the *vocabulary* comprises signs that the *person* associates with operational concepts, and the *grammar* is an operational grammar for that person.

Operational Concept

    That a *concept* is an **operational concept** means that the *concept* is either a reference, or a relation between any number of concepts as operands and any number of operational concepts.

Operational Grammar

    That a *way of combining signs* is an **operational grammar** for a *person* means that the *way of combining signs* identifies firstly, variable signs, which the *person* associates directly with operational concepts, and secondly, operational signs comprising an operator sign and operand signs, which they associate with the operational concepts related by the concepts they associate with the operator to the concepts they associate with the operands.

For example, the following is an operational analysis of a simple sentence:

```
operation: Chris loves Dolly
operand: Chris
operator: loves Dolly
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  operation: loves Dolly
operator: loves
operand: Dolly

Loves[ Dolly ][ Chris ]
```

Here I assume that I associate the signs "Chris" and "Dolly" in certain contexts with references to the appropriate objects and "loves" to a concept of love relating a lover to a beloved. The concept of love relates the concept of Dolly to the concept of loving Dolly, which in turn relates the concept of Chris to the concept of a situation in which Chris loves Dolly.

Non-Referential Concepts
Linking signs to themselves like " 'Chris' means Chris " is clearly not how definitions work in practice, but the above comments demonstrate that not every concept is a reference. Non-referential concepts are in this sense abstract - together with a form of combination they are merely ways of building references from other references.

Not every reference refers to something that actually exists - it might or not be the case that Chris loves Dolly and it might not even be the case that Dolly exists - in whatever sense I understand that sentence or that word. This is one reason why the meaning of a sign cannot be what it refers to, otherwise false sentences and references to imaginary objects would be meaningless.

Other analyses are possible, but turn out to be much more cumbersome, for example:

```
operation: Chris loves Dolly
operator: loves
arguments: Chris, Dolly

ordered operands: Chris, Dolly
operand: Chris
operand: Dolly
Loves( Chris, Dolly )
```

In this non-operational analysis the concept of

the ordered pair I associate with "Chris, Dolly" is merely an unfinished way of forming references from other references in the same way as the operator I associate with "loves Dolly" - neither of them in isolation has been combined with enough other concepts to form a reference.

This illustrates that it is important to distinguish between the existence of a referent and the existence of a concept. Referential concepts might succeed in the sense that a suitable referent exists, but concepts generally, even referential concepts, do not exist except as parts of a description.

When we talk about certain things, we make references which commit us to the existence of situations which might validate or invalidate what we want to say, but we are not necessarily making a commitment to the independent existence of those things. Natural grammar generally requires objects to be specified with nouns and so can obscure this fact, but even a slight increase in the level of abstraction illustrates it, as in the following analysis (of an example which sadly is not universally true):

```
operation: Love is mutual
operand: Love
operator: is mutual

Mutual[ Loves ]
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In this sentence, although the word "Love" appears only as an operand without operands of its own, it still expresses a relationship between a lover and a beloved, and we need to understand how it would relate appropriate operands in order to understand how the higher order concept of mutuality relates to it. This does not indicate that the word expresses a reference - it is just part of our description of certain situations. English grammar leads us to use nouns for objects, but logic does not require us to posit referents for them.

Altruism – Is it Possible?

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 17th April 2019

PAUL **COCKBURN**

David Burridge read a short paper on humanitarianism. We may want to be charitable, but what motivates people to act for the good of other people, sometimes at the expense of their own lives? Adam Smith thought that competitive markets and self-interested individuals would produce an economy which would be good for all. But nowadays things seem more complex in an economic sense, with too many people in British society now not being able to survive.

One of our members is a bereavement counselor, and he spoke of the fulfillment that he finds in this role. He now needs his clients! He finds the sharing of his common humanity with his clients, opening their souls to one another, is a life-enhancing privilege. We are altruistic and we can benefit one another, as Rousseau

Rousseau

thought. However, there is still the spectre of us being at war with one another, as perhaps Hobbes thought. In religious terms, there is the phenomena of kenosis, emptying yourself to help others. To some, however, religion involves obeying commands out of duty.

In fact, we as human beings are altruistic and selfish, and there is 'good' selfishness and 'good' altruism. We discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan, which deals with helping a foreigner, helping him as you would a neighbour. There is still an issue with the question 'who is your neighbour?' Peter Singer thinks that in terms of charitable giving we should give to poorer countries, because our money will have the greatest effect in terms of improving the lives of others. The alternative argument given by Roger Scruton is that the near at hand can have a greater call on us, the Good Samaritan was responding to a need which was right in front of him. (This issue has been discussed in greater length in Issue 30 of The *Wednesday* magazine).

Reason is a valuable tool when used in a utilitarian mode, but we also need empathy and emotion to form the basis of our humanitarian values.

Concepts

We usually think that philosophy is about concepts, but the Greek word 'philosophy' means 'lover of wisdom', and this relates to how we should live a good life. Perhaps we need to somehow get philosophical concepts to be integrated more with natural psychological and bodily structures and ideas. This would ensure our lived experience is not put to one side by philosophical concepts which are too abstract.

Pan-Consciousness Versus Consciousness

How often have we heard it said that 'consciousness is what it means to be human.' But perhaps before we agree or disagree, we should ask ourselves what we mean by 'consciousness'. If, like many people we look it up on Wikipedia, we are given the answer: 'the having of perceptions, thoughts and feelings; awareness' i.e. having sensory receptors, or the five senses of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell plus the ability to think. We know that most non-human animals are sentient. *The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness*, Cambridge, 2012 stated that:

> *'We declare the following: The absence of a neocortex does not appear to preclude an organism from experiencing affective states. Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviours. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.'*

So, perhaps there is a sliding scale of consciousness' throughout the living world. This could start with single cell organisms such as amoebae or, dare I suggest, the crystals that form from molten magma? If consciousness is in all living things and possibly in what are normally called non-living rocks, then the whole of the natural world is, to some degree, sentient.

We now come to the argument I would like to propose that we live in a pan-conscious world. I would argue for a united world of nature with human beings as one part of nature, not a special life form gifted or designed to be superior to all others.

Conversely, those who protest at such an idea and believe that humans alone have thoughts and feelings, would consequently see *homo sapiens* as all-powerful and at liberty to wholeheartedly exploit the living world for its own benefit. This is the philosophical belief behind both large-scale international mining and development organisations and much of the farming industry's drive to produce more and more at lower cost. Such companies are dismissive of protests at their felling of trees to create vast acreages of monoculture, of the indiscriminate use of pesticides and herbicides on fruit trees and cereals and of the increasing use of anti-biotics in animal husbandry throughout the world.

Surely, it's time we, the 'silent majority', woke up to the need for a sea-change in attitude towards consciousness. We might, by broadening our focus point from human beings to the whole of nature, be able to instigate a planet-saving shift. Perhaps, by a change in thinking, we can subtly influence long-entrenched attitudes regarding the status of nature.

We humans have more or less created the devastation of nature. It is no longer just plants and animals who are being destroyed but humans along with them (See: *'Chemical Pesticides and Human Health: The Urgent Need for a New Concept in Agriculture'*, 2016, 'Frontiers in Public Health', U.S. Library of Medicine, National Institute of Health.) Let us see how we can work alongside nature. It's time we took our responsibilities seriously. We have created this devastation. We need to think differently, to work with the rest of nature to revitalize the land and sea. Gaia is always ready to do her bit, but we have to help, not thwart her.

Recent research suggests that we need to think more along the lines of pan-consciousness if we are to have any prospect of saving our planet.

*Dianne Cockburn*, **April, 2019.**

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Rain-Drenched Girl

I have always loved the rain
when your curly hair is sparkling,
halo-like, studded with jewels
in a grey, mysterious world.

Moist crystals drip gently down
in the innate rhythm of heartbeat.
When you appear in this symphony,
in your white dress, wetness

wrapped around your body in transparency,
I'm full of wonder, forget all the inconvenience,
wipe you dry, wring out your dress.
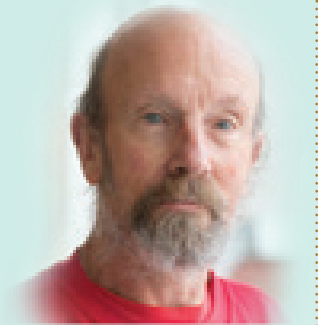Nothing is as beautiful as a secret meeting

with my rain-drenched girl.

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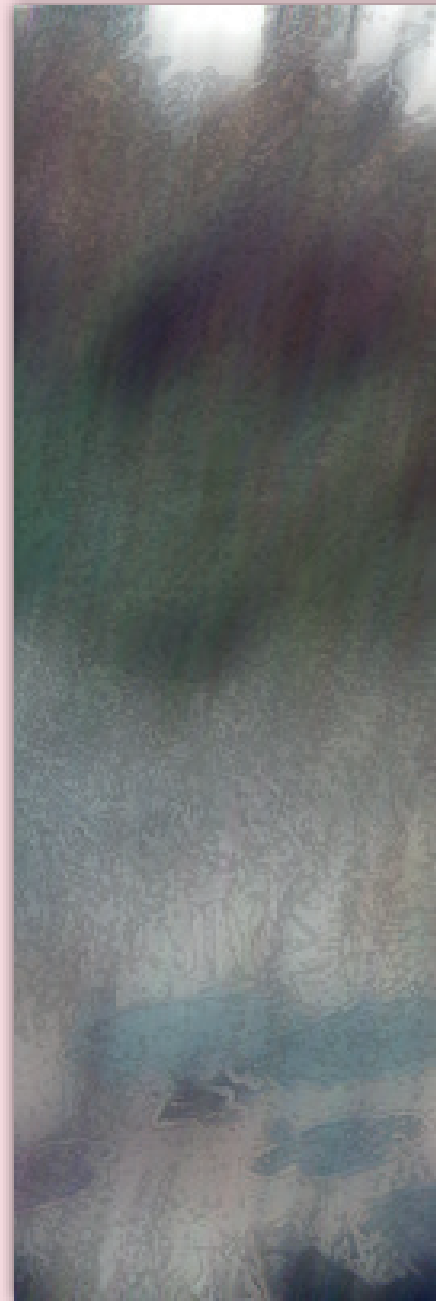
Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Lyric Suite: Ellipses

CHRIS NORRIS

I can tell you, dearest friend, that if it became known how much friendship, love and what a world of human and spiritual references I have smuggled into these three movements, the adherents of programme music – should there be any left – would go mad with joy.

The best music always results from ecstasies of logic.

Alban Berg

Alban invented an excuse to keep his poetic passion within those boundaries that he himself desired. He himself constructed obstacles and thereby created the romanticism which he required.

Helene Berg

My thought on bad days: Alban, you rotate
Women like tone-rows, cyphers fit to run
Through every permutation, whether scored
In love's or music's cryptic alphabet.

My thought on good days: Helene, all that's great
About him, man and artist, has been won
By formal rigors passion-bred though shored
Up hard against an errant passion's threat.

Yet still I bless the structures you create,
My husband, all those cryptograms you've spun
Round women's names, those women long adored,
Though safely, from a formal distance set

By tone-rows strong as marriage-vows or fate
That tell the clued-up listener: once begun
This thing has its own rules which yet afford
A counterpoint beyond our life-duet.

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Alban Berg

No telling Alban 'Let the row dictate
What happens next; let it ensure that none
Of those twelve tones recurs and gets to lord
It tonally. Else you'll convey regret

For music's bygone power to correlate
Tonkunst and *Rührung* so that everyone,
Each listener, might respond in full accord
As art and feeling paid their mutual debt'.

For thus spake Schoenberg, he who prophesied
Tonality's demise, decreed a line
Of true successors (Alban first of all),
And said his twelve-tone method guaranteed

That Austro-German music would hold pride
Of place for centuries to come. Incline
That way as Alban might, he'd never fall
For any such dodecaphonic creed

Schoenberg

That banned tonality outright, denied
Its hold on our emotions, sought a sign
Of his elect vocation in the call
To cast aside all merely human need

For aural sustenance, and even tried
To stage a power-grab, one with certain *Mein-
Kampf* echoes, as a gambit to install
His progeny as music's master-breed.

That term, 'the Schoenberg School', is misapplied
In Alban's case when analysts confine
Their interest to the tone-rows and play ball
With his, the Master's, plan to leave un-keyed

(Hence tonally adrift on every tide)
Those future works where all the rows combine
In ways planned from the outset, hence in thrall
To acts of will no feelings can impede.

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II

I said just now that Alban's passions ran
To zealously desiring all that placed
Strict limits on desire, or holding true
To musical procedures that require

(Just ask his best performers!) such a span
Of concentrated effort that we're braced
For obstacles and passions that break through
The lineaments of undeclared desire.

Anton Webern

That's why they treated him, the Schoenberg clan,
As some effete backslider with a taste
For harmonies that might have sounded new
Decades back but whose date would soon expire

Once modernists who'd stayed out in the van,
Like Webern, showed how weak and Janus-faced
Was Alban's wish to stage a counter-coup
With Schoenberg loyalists in his line of fire.

Truth is, my husband was the kind of man
Who'd not see music's legacy debased
By factional in-fighting, and who'd do
What those hard-core atonalists aspire

To place beneath their peremptory ban,
That is, create a music that embraced
The twelve-tone method only to accrue
Some storm-defence as passion's seas ran higher.

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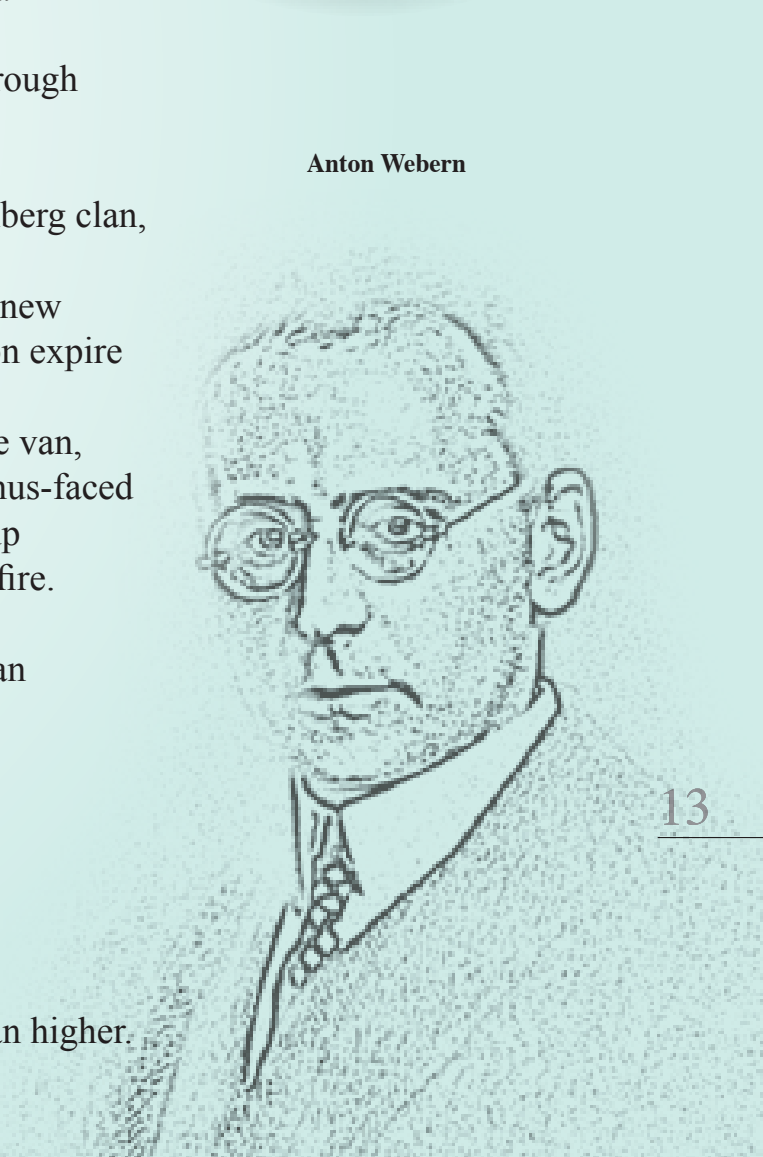
They're noted down for all with ears to hear,
Those women's names, as in the *Lyric Suite*
Where he encrypts Hanna Fuchs-Robettin,
His latest sweetheart, with the usual show

Of overdone anxiety to steer
Us off the track while analysts compete,
As he half-meant, to crack the code and win
Acclaim for putting listeners in the know.

Please understand: there's nothing I need fear
From so-called rivals, no way that he'd cheat
On me for real, just as the mortal sin
Of going tonal on the twelve-tone row –

The standard Schoenberg-Webern-Darmstadt smear –
Is something that lot endlessly repeat,
Thus neatly proving that the charge they'd pin
On him's just part of their recruitment show.

III

One thing I know because it rings out clear
In every bar: that talk of his 'retreat'
To tonal ways is merely how they spin,
For their own purposes, the debt they owe

To Alban as reluctant pioneer,
He who saw through the grandiose conceit
Of Schoenberg's fashioning. His works begin
And end in shared humanity, although

(Think *Wozzeck*, *Lulu*) no-one's gone so far
In fathoming the depths of human vice,
Depravity, perversion, wretchedness,
And all portrayed in music of a kind –

Hanna Fuchs-Robettin

No, his uniquely – where from bar to bar
They streak the soundscape, like red wine through ice,
While tonal intimations seem to bless,
If fleetingly, the victims left behind.

You'll say I look too fondly on what are,
By any standard, sins that have a price
For me, his wife, requiring I repress
My hurt or anger and appear resigned

To serial infidelities (they jar,
These jokes, but let his wandering eye suffice
As my excuse). It pains me sometimes, yes,
As it would any wife, though now I find

Those names just part of Alban's repertoire,
Another life-and-music link to splice
Along with tone-rows, Bach chorales, and chess-
Like contrapuntal moves that he'd a mind

To use when needed. If young women star
In occult roles as sirens to entice
The Sherlock-analyst, then why distress
Myself on that account? I soon divined

How each appeared a new-born avatar
Of Alban's *Ewig-Weibliche* who'd spice
His fantasies and quickly acquiesce
In any game for helping him unwind

When complications turned out too bizarre
Even for him. That's when he'd load the dice
And give the world a fighting chance to guess,
From other names and note-rows intertwined,

Whose name alone subtends his *aide-memoire*
Of wished-for assignations, his device
Of over-coded clues that might express
A single truth elliptically enshrined.

Nous

Socrates: Soul is the rational capacity of a human being

I have been tooled into this temporary capacity.
A bit of social shaping and the ache of an ID,
that cries out for Ego containment.
A measured stretch of thinking.
A vehicle of delivery to unpack and offer up,
hoping someone will find a use for it,
before it is finally stashed.

Eudaimonia is my best reward
A virtuous emptiness when it is all been cleaned
from attic to cellar I can happily forget my grubby usage.
I am *auto kath auto;* a temporary incarceration.
Finally when I have been closed down, perhaps
there is something to be recycled.

(Auto kath auto: itself by itself)

David Burridge