

The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

A Matter of Philosophical Language

Following the editorial in the last issue of *The Wednesday*, I received two interesting comments. The editorial argued that there are two ways of looking at philosophy, one starts from the whole to construct the world of reality, the other starts from the particulars and stays with the particulars, without looking for a totality or a whole.

Both comments seem to agree with the editorial by pointing towards a way of tolerating both views. One comment said the whole (absolute, bigger-picture, visionary) can comprehend or encompass the particular (analytical narrow focus) but the latter cannot comprehend or encompass the former. However, each approach points to something important. The second comment said that any choice between the absolute and analytical view does not depend on disposition or feelings of the person concerned.

I am fully in agreement with these comments. I think if you start from the Absolute, as the speculative philosophy wants it, you can construct a story for the particulars of empirical plurality. But it does not work the other way round. The analytical approach busies itself with the particular and empirical and ignores (if not dismisses) metaphysics all together.

I now wish to go further in explaining the difference, and to say that there are conceptual resources available to one tradition but not to the other. They form the philosophical language of that tradition. To think philosophically in a radical way, a concept or a set of concepts have to be present to the philosopher or to be created. They represent a paradigm shift. These concepts generate a new vocabulary or a new language for philosophy. Such shifts happened with Descartes' Cogito, Kant's doctrine of the faculties, the 'I' of Fichte, the Absolute Identity of Schelling and the Logic of Hegel, in one tradition. These all are of metaphysical nature. In the other tradition, we find the Tabula Rasa of Locke, the Bundle of Properties of

Hume, Common-Sense philosophy, and the Linguistic Turn. These all refer to an empirical reality and take such a reality as the absolute, the very thing the first tradition revolted against.

But it is not only a matter of a new language, but there is also an ontology as well. Take for example, Kant's analysis of reason into sensibility, understanding and reason. The last two are important because they have different types of concepts with different spheres of application. Understanding deals with concepts applicable to experience (or the bounds of sense), reason on the other hand deals with Ideas that cannot be met in experience. He gave Ideas a regulative function, but they were applied by his successors to a much wider reality than sense-experience.

There are also other concepts, such as intellectual intuition and philosophical construction. They are all part of the philosophical system that went far beyond what Kant envisaged or allowed. But all this language has been by-passed or ignored in the analytical tradition so it is unwilling or unable to discuss metaphysics. This tradition is not interested in metaphysics or a bigger picture. It is interested in particulars that it takes to be absolute (or in-themselves).

These two languages are suited for two different objects, the absolute in one tradition and the particular in the other. If these two objects are to be brought together, and philosophy is to have an integral form, one language has to be integrated into the other or work closely with its opposite. This relates to what Iain McGilchrist says about the right and left functions of the brain. We absolutely need both, but the right brain (vision, imagination, big picture) must have precedence, while the left brain (focus, analysis) does its essential work in the light of the right brain's overall picture. Until that happens, we will have a dualism for the foreseeable future.

The Editor

Rhetoric's Troubled Past

Sadly, 'rhetoric' has now become a dirty word. Yet a proper knowledge of rhetoric is essential to a deep understanding of language, particularly for philosophers and poets. Acknowledged or not, rhetoric still plays a fundamental role in creating powerful, expressive discourse in all fields of human endeavour. It continues to surround us in daily life yet we only pay attention to it when it becomes obvious as propaganda. So here is a simplified and very brief history of rhetoric, the objective of which is to provide some background as to why the word 'rhetoric' is nowadays used so negatively.

MIKE CHURCHMAN

Persuasive language has long been a skill essential to governance – long before the techniques of rhetoric were codified and taught. The oldest essay ever discovered on effective public speaking was written around 3000 BCE, addressed to Kagemni, the eldest son of the Pharaoh, Huni. However, it was not until the 5th century BCE that someone called Corax, about whom almost nothing is known, created what is credited as the first theory of forensic rhetoric. His pupil, Tisias was one of the first known teachers of rhetoric to be followed by his pupil Gorgias, of Platonic fame.

We know that when rhetoric was introduced into Athens it became a hot topic, the latest craze. People were excited about this new way of looking at communication. Like fans of the latest iPhone, young Greeks queued up to get access to this dazzling verbal technology. But, sadly, rhetoric's dark side was there from the start, symbolised by the position of two statues in the temple at Athens. The goddess of persuasion, Peitho, stood alongside Aphrodite, the embodiment of love, beauty, pleasure, procreation. Why? Because the goddess of persuasion was not just associated with eloquence, but with seduction and rape.

Yet rhetoric's association with the art of dialectic was already clear at this stage. Whereas dialectic's job was to organize the arguments, rhetoric's job was to put them across convincingly. This entailed presenting proof if possible, other evidence if not. In the many cases where certainty was impossible,

rhetoric's task was to put forward arguments with the most probability of being true. Isocrates, who ran a school of rhetoric in Athens, believed this was a discipline that could promote democracy, free speech and human rights despite the fact he could see how in the city a number of professional blackmailers were at work, extorting money by threatening lawsuits and using rhetorical skills to win them.

Plato imagines Gorgias debating rhetoric with Socrates. Asked whether rhetoric is all about persuasion, Gorgias agrees and defines its role as: *'To persuade people in the kind of mass meetings which happen in law courts and so on: and I think its province is right and wrong.'* Socrates, though, thinks rhetoric misleads people and asks ironically: *'Do you think that when rhetoricians speak, they want what's best for their audience?'*

Aristotle provided us with the most influential texts on the interrelated arts of logic, rhetoric and poetics. He clearly saw rhetoric as the counterpart of dialectic, both techniques being capable of generating two sides of any question, both involved in calculations of probability and persuasiveness. The difference is that rhetoric is continuous, not interrupted as in question and answer. And, to be persuasive, rhetoric must engage the emotions. Effective persuasion, he said, is based on three elements: a credible source, clearly stated arguments and an appeal to



Peitho and Aphrodite

emotions. He argued that the aim of persuasion should be to increase happiness.

By the 1st century BCE, rhetoric was an intrinsic part of Roman government. The lawyer and politician, Cicero, believed in human rights and the brotherhood of man and credited the development of civilisation to the power of persuasion. He modified rhetorical theory and practice drawing on Aristotle, Isocrates and his own teacher, Hermagoras. His division of rhetoric into five parts, invention, disposition, elocution, memory and pronunciation, fed through into the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

About 100 years later, Quintilian wrote his 200,000 word twelve volume textbook on rhetoric. In his *Institutes of Rhetoric*, he placed rhetoric at the centre of what it means to live a good life. The aspiring orator should learn how to use language in the service of ethical objectives. He saw the harm rhetoric could do in the wrong hands but argued that rejecting rhetoric for that reason was like refusing to eat because some food can make you ill.

The Middle Ages

Rhetoric did not disappear after the decline of Roman power, but many classical texts did.

Important elements of rhetoric were preserved in the art of preaching especially after Augustine in the early 5th century. Boethius wrote a book about distinguishing rhetorical from dialectical topics. Bede wrote a textbook for monasteries in the 8th century called *De schematibus et tropis*. But essentially rhetoric proper, as persuasion, had lost its audience and became more and more a list of linguistic techniques mixed up with dialectics.

This meant medieval scholars had only a partial and fragmentary view of the original theories of rhetoric. The discipline was broken up into pieces and absorbed into other fields such as logic, theology, moral philosophy and the study of poetic forms. It was severed from its roots in human psychology and descended to acting as a system of rules and verbal tricks used in letters requesting jobs or money from powerful people.

But then, in 1421, a complete copy of Quintilian's great work was found, covered in mould and dust, at the bottom of a tower in the Abbey of St Gall. More discoveries followed including Cicero's and Aristotle's writings on rhetoric. The subject became a hot topic once again. Around 2000 books were written on the art of rhetoric between 1400 and 1700 and read by several million people throughout Europe.

Philosophy

In 1599 the Jesuits issued their blueprint for education, the 'Ratio Studiorum', which ensured millions of schoolboys in Catholic Europe would study rhetoric until the 18th century.

In Protestant England, the new grammar schools provided intense training in rhetoric. By the middle of the 16th century textbooks contained more than 5000 rhetorical terms. Children were taught how to construct a good speech, invent variations on a theme, play with word sounds and puns, argue both sides of a question, enlist metaphors to decorate a text and similes to point a moral. They read Cicero and Quintilian and learnt lots of different maxims from a book called *Wise sayings for young people*. They were forced to learn by heart hundreds of proverbs, sentiments, epigrams and aphorisms. The result was that rhetoric was in the bloodstream of the educated classes. Shakespeare emerged from this educational culture, master of more than 200 rhetorical techniques, his inventiveness matched only by his exuberant joy in the richness of the still young English language. Here was a unique and unrepeatable rhetorical phenomenon, combining intellectual power with highly imaginative and emotional persuasion in dramatic form.

But just as the use of rhetoric peaked, the era of the spoken word was beginning to give way to the era of print. One major catalyst of this period of change was the work of Professor Peter Ramus. He saw the advantage to teachers of being able to lay out items of thought in a highly organised manner for pupils to study and remember. His method was the dichotomising of ideas, splitting them down into atoms of thought spatially organised on the page. Diagrams, emblems, what we would now call graphics, were used to make the necessary elements of reasoning much clearer. Knowledge was now being separated from discourse and live arguments, instead becoming a matter of silent study and memorising. The Latin tag then in common use was 'Verba volant, scripta manent' ('Spoken words fly away, written words stay where they are'). The world of sound surrendered to the world of space. Debate and dialogue, which had been the staple of learning right up to the 17th century, was forced to give way.



Quintilian

Thought was now seen as visual arrangement based on atomised versions of arguments. Because there are so many arguments they need to be simplified, knocked 'into shape'. Each thought ended up in its own little box. The metaphor of containment took prime position. Ideas 'contained' truths. Books had 'contents'. The contrast between rhetorical style and the plain, logical setting out of concepts was clear for all to see. Clarity and simplicity predominated over profundity. Memorisation was more important than thinking for oneself. Mental activity became a quantitative process. Method was now seen as the best route to certainty and truth.

Despite being an accomplished rhetorician himself, Ramus from his position in the university of Paris, mounted an attack on the classical works of rhetoric. He said the idea that rhetoricians could be virtuous as well as eloquent was '*useless and stupid*'. He separated rhetoric from the reasoning processes that had been so important to its classical integrity and assigned them to 'dialectic' (logic). Invention, disposition and judgement were hived off to dialectic with rhetoric only allowed to keep elocution and those elements intended to delight the audience. It was in this new age of printed media that things began to go seriously wrong for rhetoric. It was hated by the new scientists in the Royal Society who rejected all '*swellings of*



Adam Smith

style’ and wanted a ‘*close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear sense, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness*’ as possible.

Modern Times

Nevertheless, rhetoric continued to be taught in British universities albeit more and more as a branch of literature. In Edinburgh, a young Adam Smith set out the idea of ‘New Rhetoric’. He taught how to adapt style to different subjects and drew on examples from classical and English literature. His new approach assigned argument to dialectic and presented rhetoric as a means of persuasion ideally suited to praising or condemning particular points of view. Yet rhetoric’s flame as an instrument of social progress had not flickered out entirely. Smith’s friend, Professor Hugh Blair, argued that: ‘*To speak, to write perspicuously and agreeably, with purity, with grace and strength, are attainments of the utmost consequence to all who propose, either by speech or writing, to address the public.*’

The second half of the 18th century saw a flurry of interest in rhetoric and literary criticism with more than 50 textbooks and essays written by 30 different authors in Britain and Ireland. This period also saw a strong desire amongst the upper classes to improve their speech and reduce



Peter Ramus

their regional accents - the emphasis being on achieving a high quality of communication for better understanding.

Rhetoric just about survived the 19th century as part of literature, elocution, politics, law and preaching but it had lost its status as a force for good in personal and public life. By the first half of the 20th century, it had all but disappeared from the educational system. In 1936, I A Richards set out to restore rhetoric’s role as a mode of understanding when he wrote *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* but even he said in his opening remarks ‘*So low has rhetoric sunk that we would do better just to dismiss it to Limbo*’.

The irony of all this is that rhetoric, resurfacing as propaganda, has become more powerful than ever in the modern era when, through radio, television and now the internet, audiences of millions can be swayed by persuasive speech. As modern culture swings back to orality, accompanied by strong visual imagery, to soundbites and logos, rhetoric is caught up more than ever before in the maelstrom of human cross-purposes. That’s why, in my view, every professional communicator, including philosophers, should understand rhetoric to the extent they can identify its mechanisms and track its influence in every mode of discourse.

Thinking the Concept of Irony

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 1st February.

RAHIM HASSAN

The concept of irony is linked to the name of the 18th century German Romantic critic and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. He used it to show the contradictory attitudes or paradoxical position of the poet. He wrote in one of his fragments: 'Irony is the Form of paradox'. He takes it to be 'continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self destruction', or in some other formulation it is the fluctuation between freedom and necessity, between intention and instinctive feeling. The debate on irony has not stopped since Schlegel. To provide an understanding of this concept, we invited Chris Norris to give members of *The Wednesday* meeting a talk on irony. The talk was wide ranging and so was the debate that followed. I will give below a summary of the talk, keeping close to what Chris Norris said.

Chris said that the concept of irony is important because it is related to textual interpretation, particularly because of the issue of intentions in

literary interpretation. Whenever the relationship between utterances and accepted or intended meaning are described, then there is room for irony.

A number of leading critics discussed irony, such as Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Irony* and Paul De Man in *Aesthetic Ideology*. De Man was critical of Booth. Booth sees a difference between stable ironies where you think you can guess the intention of the writer, and those in which you are at a loss as to what the writer means. The latter can be seen in German romantic irony, such as Schlegel.

Chris made the observation that renewed interest in the concept of irony is encouraged by current historical and political conditions. In the last century, irony was important for New Criticism in America, especially Cleanth Brooks. Their idea is that a good poem has an organic form, well structured, and one of the principles of structure, they thought, is irony. But irony in the sense of opposing interlocking attitudes, is something detached from intention, or any intelligible human purpose. This went along with New Criticism aversion to intention because it is subjective, and they looked for quasi-objective features of the poem.

The debate on intention, Chris said, is very much related to irony since Schlegel talked about the concept. For him, trying to locate the intention behind irony is a mistake. It is an attempt to prevent an ironic attitude. It could also cause legal problems, if the wrong intention was attributed to a poet in some serious case. This led to the debate about Booth's idea of a 'stable irony'. Is there such a thing as stable irony? Booth believed there is. It has been argued that there is a need for establishing the parameters for a stable irony for ethical and social reasons, such as the possibility of clear communications. It has also been argued that we should question any unstable irony because it means some sort of self-evasion, bad faith or hypocrisy in the text.

Chris said that Paul De Man defines irony as 'the trope that ends all tropes'. It is a moment of aporia



Friedrich Schlegel



Wayne Booth



Paul De Man

where one set of assumptions or attitude intersect with another. But De Man takes irony to be most elusive of tropes. For him, it is a trope because it is a deflection of meaning from straightforward discourse. In his first book *Blindness and Insight*, he criticised critics and schools of criticism, and irony is essential to his reading. He criticised New Criticism for ignoring intention but talking about irony. The new critics also talk about the organic form, that the poem is enclosed on itself, hence the intentional fallacy and the biographical fallacy. But De Man pointed out that talk about irony fractures any form, as soon that it is recognised that intentions could be read against themselves, and readings could be divided against themselves in the same way. If that is so, then an idealised form is going to be shattered. De Man applied this to Brooks book and the phenomenologist critic Hills-Miller. William Wimsatt in *Days of the Leopard* saw the reintroduction of intention by post-New Criticism as subversive. So irony is charged with blowing away settled ideas, intention and literary form.

William Empson, Chris said, wrote a lot on irony. His general view of irony is that there are all kinds of ironies and that the best is what he called 'double irony', an irony that has targets, which are however viewed in a generous way. The ironist takes a broad view of their subject's situation, to discover what lead them to hold views which may have been unacceptable. He looks for an irony that shows

the goodness of human nature. Irony differs from satire. It is more serious and well-intentioned, while sarcasm is mean.

Chris also discussed the use of irony by Kierkegaard. In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard considered irony as a historical category. He argued that it was fine for Socrates to be ironist because he lived before the time of Christ. But those who come after Christ, for example Schlegel, are not forgiven. He showed how irony worked in *Either/Or* in his interpretation of the seducer in Volume One and the judge in Volume Two who seduce the reader into accepting their version of truth which an ironical reading shows to be false. So, both characters are the result of irony by the implied author. But after writing on irony, Kierkegaard says in *The Point of View For my Work as an Author*, that this is how you should take his words, which goes against what he wrote on irony.

Answering a question about the present situation of irony, Chris said that sarcasm was left behind in the current political atmosphere. There is an irony when there is a discrepancy between how things are and what they are taken to be. But irony could become ineffective and lag behind in the current situation when what is needed is action to rectify the situation and not just irony. Irony could be disabling, and this is one of the criticisms of irony. But irony has its role within literature. Chris also went on to talk about irony and music.

Goethe's Conversations with Eckermann

EDWARD GREENWOOD

Nietzsche said of Goethe:

'Goethe... belongs to a higher order of literature than 'national literatures': that is why he stands to his *nation* in the relationship neither of the living nor of the novel nor of the antiquated. Only for a few was he alive and does he live still: for most he is nothing but a fanfare of vanity blown from time to time across the German frontier. Goethe, not only a good and great human being but a culture ...' (Nietzsche *Human All Too Human*, Hollingdale translation section 125 of 'The Wanderer and His Shadow').

Goethe was born in Frankfurt-am-Main on August 18th, 1749. His father was a city councillor. Goethe himself was to take on posts of civic responsibility in Weimar later on. He died in Weimar on March 22nd, 1832, at the age of 83. Eckermann was present by his deathbed. His life spanned the rise and fall of the ferment in poetry and philosophy. It also spanned the French Revolution and the rise and fall of Napoleon. The post-Goethe period marked a new era as Heine said, an era of political upheaval and the rise of social theorizing from a materialist viewpoint which rejected the earlier German philosophical Idealism while at the same time being indebted to it.

Goethe practiced all genres, from lyrical poetry to drama to the novel. In 1774 he brought out *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the story of Werther's unrequited love. In 1775, Goethe moved to Weimar in the east in Thuringia. He was to live there for the rest of his life. The house is now a Goethe museum. Very soon he became a friend of Karl August the grand Duke of Saxe-Weimar who appointed him as state councillor.

In 1805 his great friend Schiller, with whom he had conducted a voluminous correspondence, died. Schiller had completely fallen out with Friedrich Schlegel and the Jena set, but Goethe was more tolerant. By 1796 his *Bildungsroman* or novel of education *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* was

complete. In 1806 he finished the first part of his most famous work the drama *Faust, a treatment* of a medieval legend from a post-Enlightenment point of view. In 1809 he published a novel about two couples who exchange partners, *Elective Affinities*.

In 1811 Goethe brought out the first part of his autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*. The second part appeared in 1812. Along with the Schlegels Goethe was a pioneer in what has come to be known as world literature, an incorporation of Persian, Indian and Arabic literature into the canon which was originally confined to the Greek and Roman classics.

Goethe was an all-round man rather than a specialist. This and the fact that he lived through such a turbulent epoch made his opinions on a wide range of subjects of great interest. He was interested in history and philosophy but also in botany and physics, especially optics. His dispute with the Newtonians over the nature of light has itself created a vast amount of commentary. Perhaps Goethe and Newton passed each other by. Goethe was interested in the phenomenology of vision, Newton in its underlying physics.

Eckermann and Goethe

The Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann is the table-talk of the aged Goethe with all his range of production and experience and wisdom. It was translated from the German By John Oxenford in 1848. It appeared in an Everyman's Library edition by Dent in 1930. All my quotations are from the 1946 reprint. Eckermann called June 10th 1823, the day in which he first met Goethe, 'one of the happiest in my life' (p.1). He was impressed by the statues in Goethe's house as evincing Goethe's love of Greek antiquity.

On January 2nd 1824 Goethe spoke of Shakespeare as 'having included the whole of human nature in all its elements' in his works (p.31). Shakespeare, says Goethe had great contemporary dramatists,



Goethe

but towered over them as the Matterhorn towers over the Alps.

On Wednesday April 14th 1824, Goethe turns to philosophy and claims that: ‘philosophical speculation is an injury to the Germans, as it tends to make their style vague, difficult, and obscure’ (p.56). The stronger their attachment to certain philosophical schools, the worse they write. Anyone who has wrestled with Kant, Fichte, Schelling or Hegel will agree. It must be said that Goethe kept himself aloof from philosophy and was capable of sloppy thinking. He once remarked that he prided himself on never thinking about thinking and that is just what philosophy is.

The conversation on Tuesday January 18th 1825 is one of the longest. It runs to seven pages and covers a wide variety of topics. He speaks of women’s poetry in Germany. He claims that women do not understand the importance of *motifs* in poetry. He remarks that the learned often think that a poet such as Shakespeare based certain passages on another writer without seeing that they probably came directly from life experience. He then turns to his admired Byron and produces one of his most famous remarks about him: ‘But Lord Byron is only great as a poet; as soon as he reflects, he is a child’.

On Saturday June 11th 1825 Goethe speaks of how the poet must see the universal in the particular (p.118) and on how French literature is now being influenced by German literature. This is, of course, the reversal of the situation in the eighteenth century.

On March 21st 1827 they engage in several discussions of Sophocles, with a discussion of the characters of Oedipus and Philoctetes (p.179). Goethe goes on to talk of the one-sidedness of August Schlegel’s criticism. He has extensive reading, but: ‘All the learning in the world is still no judgment’ (p. 181). Schlegel does however treat both Shakespeare and the Spanish poetic dramatist Calderon with justice and ‘even with decided affection’ (p.181). In placing Aeschylus and Sophocles high, he seems to be simply following the tradition among philologists (p.180). He follows them too in his unjust depreciation of Euripides (p.182). In this depreciation Schlegel anticipates Nietzsche.

On April 11th 1827 Goethe discusses Lessing and his often quoted remark ‘that if God would give him truth, he would decline the gift, and prefer the labour of seeking it for himself (p.191). When on April 11th 1827 Eckermann asks Goethe which of the new philosophers he thought the highest: “Kant” said he, “beyond a doubt. He is the one whose doctrines still continue to work and have penetrated most deeply into our German civilization”” (p.191). He recommends in particular Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*.

Goethe died in Weimar on March 22nd 1832. The following morning Eckermann is deeply impressed by Goethe’s dignity in repose and lays his hand on Goethe’s heart and bursts into tears (p.426).

(This is an abridged version of a paper presented to The Wednesday meeting 28th December 2022)

Drowning

**I know about drowning,
Not the emotional lyrical death
some poets glorify,
but of acrid salt water
like memories, and cold
as the marble coffins,
where the dead are laid in.**

**Water flowing into the mouth and throat
fills every crack, freezes you,
makes your skin split, swell and burst.
Waves and foam pour on you
who was born without gills
in crystalline water, gentler
and more powerful, clearer and darker.
This is where you came from...**

**We will drown, one way or the other,
return to the womb, to the gentle
heartbeat of the deep,
without voices to call us back
without hands holding us back
from unborn dreams –**



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Mummies



CHRIS NORRIS



Egyptian mummies, long an object of modern fascination, seem to link us with the ancient past by preserving distinct human form. But this was not the true reason for the intricate process, a major new British exhibition will argue.

The technique was instead a way of transforming dead dignitaries into a shape that the gods would accept. So far from ensuring the survival of individual features, mummification aimed to make the occupant of a tomb match a divine formula.

Vanessa Thorpe, ‘Dead Wrong: Victorians ‘mistaken’ about why Egyptians mummified bodies’, *The Guardian*, November 12th 2022

[W]hat sense is there in saying that it is my secret, or in saying more generally that a secret belongs, that it is proper to or belongs to someone, or to some other who remains someone. It’s perhaps there that we find the secret of secrecy. Namely, that it is not a matter of knowing and that it is there for no one.

Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*

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It seems the Egyptologists were wrong.
They back-projected, thought the mummies showed
How that thanato-culture went along
With their Victorian view of what bestowed
Distinction on the dead, or what dress-code
And physiognomy might most impress
The gods – generic features *à la mode*
To ease them through the well-accoutred throng,
Plus individual touches aimed to bless
Immortal yearnings with unique success.

Too ready, the Victorians, to see their
Preoccupations mirrored, their desires
And fetishes reflected in the care
Those ancients took to do what it requires,
That passage to the afterlife – no pyres,
No purgatory, no suchlike evidence
Of fleshly turned to flesh-consuming fires,
But more an affirmation of the share
They’d yet deserve in all that fed their sense
Of civic pride and self-made excellence.



Worse still, we see: our forebears thought to find
In those embalmed, close-swaddled residues
Of sheer alterity what brought to mind
Their civilising mission, the good news
Of commerce, Christian faith, progressive views,
The British empire (their and God's great gift
To man), and – so the experts now accuse –
Their zeal to represent all humankind
As needing skincare, make-up, or face-lift
To get them past the stuck-in-limbo shift.

For it's a travesty of their intent,
Those swaddlers and embalmers, if we're led
By Flinders Petrie to believe they sent
Their dearest to the kingdom of the dead
Cosmetically enhanced to stay ahead
Of other aspirants by pulling rank,
Arriving like a fashion centre-spread
Or this month's *haute couture* advertisement,
And showing they had classier looks to thank
For making that far shore while others sank.

The truth, we learn, is that the utmost art
Of Egypt's top mortician-teams went not
To have them sweep the beauty stakes or tart
Them up but rather to ensure they got
The gods' superlative award for what
Those gods invariably judged supreme
Since perfectly contrived for them to spot
How fine it was, how hard to tell apart
From their own forms, and hence fit to redeem
The only exit-pass from death's regime.

No pious moral in this curious tale
Of ancient customs retro-modified
To meet whatever shifting needs prevail
From age to age. Except, perhaps, that pride
Comes not so much before a fall (since why'd
Things have to go the gods' way?) as before
The mere contingencies of time and tide
That pluck like under-currents at the shale
Of last year's pieties and leave the shore
Replete with washed-up wreckage to explore.

Like a small child who fingers a wrapped sweet
So they, the Egyptologists, began
Palpating, brushing, tracing hands and feet,
Then the squeezed body-outlines (woman? man?),
And, late in time, used MRI to scan
Those finer details lovingly concealed,
Millennia back, to foil each latest plan
Of theirs so no soul-fingerer can cheat
What's wrapped within of its eternal yield
While there's a layer yet untouched, unpeeled.

Or so they tell themselves, the crowds who gaze
In endless fascination at the still
Inviolable winding-cloth that somehow lays
On every rapt thanatophile the will
To wind, unwind, rewind, enjoy their fill
Of endlessly revealing, like a shrewd
Striptease artiste or hermeneut, what skill
Or sense-diviner's knack it takes to raise,
From every secret spilled, a multitude
Of wraps refastened, mysteries renewed.

Evil or Stupid?

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

Orcs, in J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle Earth fantasy fiction, are a race of humanoid monsters, which he also refers to as *goblin-kind*. It is believed that Tolkien derived the word *orc* from Old English believing it refers to a kind of evil spirits, which in turn is thought to derive from Latin *Orcus* 'Hades', although Tolkien doubted this etymology.

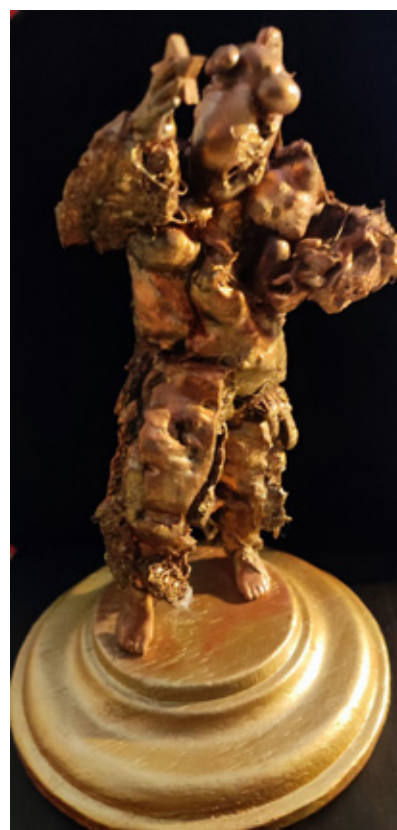
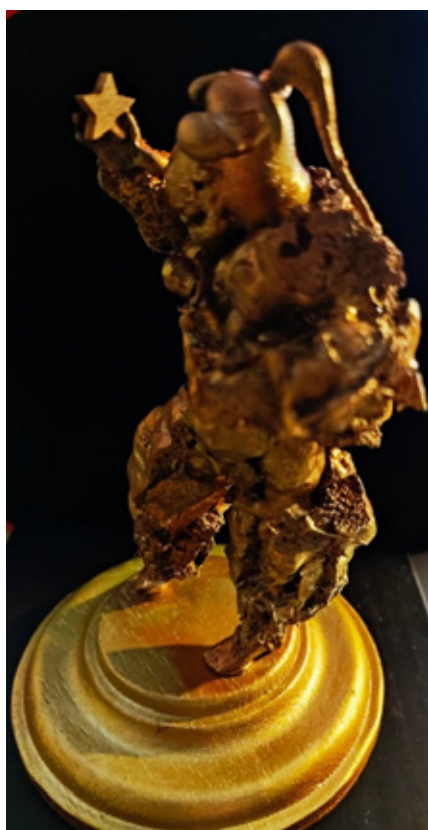
The word 'Orcnéas' is found only once in *Beowulf* and is cited as an example of the word 'Orc' in Old English text. In point of fact, its meaning is not clear, and it is thought to refer to corpses (néas) from the Underworld.

*þanon untydras ealle onwocon
eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas
swylce gigantas þa wið gode wunnon
lange þrage he him ðæs lean forgeald*
—*Beowulf*, Fitt I, vv. 111–14

*Thence all evil broods were born,
ogres and elves and evil spirits
—the giants also, who long time fought with God,
for which he gave them their reward*
—John R. Clark Hall, tr. (1901)

English literature scholar Robert Tally describes orcs as a demonised enemy, despite Tolkien's own objections to demonization of the enemy in the two World Wars. In a letter to his son, Christopher, who was serving in the RAF in the Second World War, Tolkien wrote of orcs as acting on both sides of the fighting. According to this view, one may then say that Tolkien's orcs are really and truly a personification of what is evil in humanity. However, what if, it is not evil but ignorance or stupidity that was/is affecting humanity?

The German theologian and philosopher Dietrich



'Orcneas'
– 2023 – 12cm
Polyurethan sculpture

Bonhoeffer wrote: ‘Stupidity is a more dangerous enemy of the good than evil,’ Bonhoeffer penned this sentence ten years after the rise of Adolf Hitler to supreme power. These words reflected tough lessons soaked in blood. Total war had engulfed the world, and a totalitarian regime was controlling the country. Bonhoeffer contemplated on how this came to pass. He thought about the nature of evil, but came to the conclusion it was not evil itself that was the most dangerous enemy of the good. Rather, it was stupidity.

According to the German thinker, one can fight against evil. Evil gives people a nauseating feeling in the stomach. As Bonhoeffer sustained, ‘evil carries with itself the seeds of its own destruction’. To avert wilful wickedness, one can always build barricades to stop its spread. Against stupidity, one is defenceless.

In the same vein, herd behaviour is among the foremost causes of stupidity. According to the polymath Peter Burns numerous scientific studies have shown how individual humans can be swayed by the crowd to adopt positions which go against all logic. In a classic examination of human folly, psychologist Solomon Asch looked at how individual people respond to the majority group around them. Do they conform to the group’s view? Or do they strike out on their own contrarian (but ultimately correct) path? The results were overwhelming, but incredibly telling for showing how stupidity arises. In the course of the 12 experiments on conformity, around 75% of the participants conformed to the majority view at least once.

Stupidity facilitates the process in which society is captured by evil forces. A narrative is created that incorporates simple explanations for complex problems, offering ‘solutions’ and scapegoats. Whoever does not conform to this standard orthodoxy becomes the ‘other’ - an enemy to be devastated.

Similarly, Socrates held that harm always injures the offender and that no one would seek to bring harm upon oneself. In this view, all harm is the result of *amathia* (ignorance). In his words:

‘No one who either knows or believes that there is



Representation of an orc in Warcraft

another course of action better than the one he is following will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better’ (Protagoras 358b–c).

Aristotle did not agree with this perspective of ‘ignorance’. He gave this idea of *amathia* another interpretation - he used the term *akrasia*. The latter implies a state of mind in which someone acts against their better judgement through weakness of will. In a case of practical *akrasia*, one freely does something even though one judges that one ought not to do it. So whilst in *amathia* one has an act of harm committed due to an incomplete picture, in *akrasia* one has an act of harm committed due to a weakness in one’s capability to control oneself.

Furthermore, for Bonhoeffer, the majority of people were not stupid in every circumstance. Rather, it was a matter of what those in power expect. For him, stupidity was not the problem of the individual. Instead, it was a matter of groups of individuals coming together. A sociological problem. Folly found (and still finds) its strength in masses.

This resonates with Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous adage, that while insanity might be rare in individuals, it is generally the rule in groups, parties, nations, and epochs. This little statue was inspired by Tolkien’s description of orcs, reinterpreted and perhaps partially reimagined through the influence of Warcraft. Is this orc evil or just stupid?

Thinking Through Calligraphy

URSULA BLYTHE

Eastern appreciation of aesthetics is very different from a Western perspective of a work of art. Chinese calligraphy is a visual art form specifically relating to the craft of thinking and writing. Modern practice can be defined as ‘the art of giving form to signs in an expressive, harmonious, and skilful manner’. (Mediavilla: Calligraphy, 1996: 18). Calligraphy involves the design and act of performing inscription with a pen, ink brush, or other writing instruments. The inscription aims to show a profound understanding of life, known as ‘qi’.

Ancient Chinese philosophy held that ‘qi’ is the fundamental element of all life forms, as it transmits energy and maintains the existence of life itself. When human ‘qi’ dies, the Chinese believed that: *The life body full of vigour and vitality will be in a critical state of returning to nature* (Allen et al, 2010: 1).

‘Qi’ embodies the spirit of Taoism and philosophical thinking with Oriental characteristics reflecting the essence and composition of ancient Chinese art (ibid). However, ‘qi’ in calligraphy is more difficult to comprehend. In its aesthetic dimension, calligraphy is considered to be the most elegant of all artistic expression, particularly as it captures the intellectual heritage of China.

Qi is thought to be at the core of everything, particularly concerning one’s inner energy and philosophy. Thus, calligraphy or script is vital to the expression of these ideas that were written very carefully by hand in a most elegant manner. These central decorative pieces often depicted one significant word, such as Ren (*meaning compassion*) which is central to the Confucian school of thought.

The complex Chinese art of *Shufa* (meaning ‘way of

writing’) is supposed to cultivate the mind and is one of the most distinctive features of Chinese culture. These large scrolls were hung in living-rooms and public spaces for people to admire and reflect upon. Bamboo was used as the material for writing, known as the carrier of characters, and paved the way for the idea of paper. Bamboo slips were the original method for creating manuscripts and books, yet many of these archives decayed or were buried beneath the ground over the course of ancient Chinese history.

The philosophical world prevailed through the display of such vibrant pieces of calligraphy. The viewer would ponder and may endeavour to practice some of the moral sentiment or contemplate the qualities of these written characters, such as ‘composure’ or ‘creative flow’. It was not enough to be presented with a block of standard text, as the Chinese literary audience wanted to see characters brought to life through the human hand or a creative stroke, and most importantly an interconnecting mind.

Calligraphy captures defining human features such as handwriting, verve, strength, finesse, and admiration for ancient times. This in turn, defines the unique character of calligraphers. The appraisal of calligraphy is known as ‘yanxue’ which refers to someone who reads and practices. Yanxue requires one to use one’s eyes to observe and identify the ‘qi’ of the work to determine the author’s authenticity, quality, school, and substance of the work.

Therefore, ‘qi’ is regarded as a metaphysical concept integral to ancient Chinese philosophy. ‘Qi’ extended to calligraphy as an important part of human artistry and expression which was integral to depicting the cosmos. Hence, calligraphy is very distinctive from the Western appreciation of aesthetics.



Chinese calligraphy contains the essence of Chinese culture
(Igor Micunovic, 2020)

The Absolute and the Relative

We received two comments on the editorial of issue 175. The editorial argued that the difference between a philosophy that is interested in metaphysics and talks about the absolute, and the more analytical philosophy that is interested in sense objects could arise from different dispositions.

***Ruud Schuurman* wrote:**

‘It seems to me that no choice based on sentiments or disposition of the person is required. It is not one or the other. Both exist and are fully compatible:

- 1) the absolute (i.e., what I am, consciousness, being, God, the ‘super-natural’ = ‘meta-physical’ in the literal sense of ‘above the natural’) as well as:
- 2) the relative (i.e., what appears to me, what I am conscious of, what appears to be, the creations, the natural).

They just exist in completely different ways, are just of completely different but compatible orders.

Ad 1) the absolute is: it exists, necessarily, and in another way than as an appearance, while:

Ad 2) the relative appears to be: it exists (contingently) and need not exist in any other way than as an appearance.

Thus:

Ad 1) the existence of the absolute can be verified (i.e., that I am is self-evident, undeniable, and supported by empirical evidence), while:

Ad 2) the existence of the relative can only consist of unfalsified hypotheses, which is what science yields.

There is no conflict between them:

Ad 1) the absolute is ‘the dreamer’ (God), who can be known to exist (and it is important to know that God does),

Ad 2) the relative is ‘the dream’ (The creation), and making the dream beautiful is a relative but worthy enterprise (although waking up to the dream is definite).

Contrary to popular belief it is the absolute that can be verified and is concrete while facts about the relative (e.g., laws of nature) are ultimately merely yet unfalsified hypotheses, not verified knowledge.

What is truly speculative (i.e., metaphysical, in the derived, bad sense of the word, unsupported by reason, superstition) is the belief that there are things-in-themselves that are necessarily unknowable, i.e., that what appears are perceptions of things-in-themselves’.

The Wednesday

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Website:

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

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The *Wednesday* books:**

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24042417

Sort Code:

09-01-29

The Quiet Winter Sunlight



The quiet winter sunlight seems to bless,
Reflected from bare trees and grey stone towers,
So everything seems bathed in tenderness,
Although we miss spring's flowers.

But they will come, if time commits no treason,
And then the summer with the longed for rose,
Till early autumn, that most peaceful season,
Presages the year's close.

I've felt time pass for nearly ninety years,
And so the end, I know, is drawing near
And I cannot withhold my rising tears
Or quite repress my fear.

They're what to melancholy moods seem true,
But then I look around and calmly say
There may be still some worthwhile things to do
Before the close of day.

Edward Greenwood



The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.

To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk