

# The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



## Editorial

### *Philosophy and Wisdom*

A member of *The Wednesday* group always signs off his e-mails with the phrase 'for the love of wisdom'. Of course, 'love of wisdom' is a literal translation of the word 'philosophy'. This is the original sense of the word, but when we look around the contemporary philosophy scene, we hardly see the expected wisdom. Even in ethics, which deals with this issue, we find talks about Utilitarian and other theories, but not what it means to the individual, as in Virtue ethics.

The Greeks seem to have valued philosophy because of their love of wisdom. It is Socrates who has been credited with turning philosophy from its concern with nature and science to the examined life and the search for wisdom, a kind of knowledge that he did not specify.

But the word 'philosophy' did not exist in many other cultures. For example, Quran uses the word '*Hikma*' which is wider in its meaning than philosophy. It took Muslims two centuries to adopt the term philosophy. The word 'philosophy' did not exist in Japanese culture until the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The word '*tetsugaku*' was coined from '*tetsu*' (wisdom) and '*gaku*' (learning) to translate the Western term 'philosophy'. However, wisdom is central to all these terms.

The original literal meaning of philosophy has shifted over long periods of time, but is that literal meaning of any value nowadays? I will argue that it is. After a long period of working in philosophy, studying, researching, teaching or publishing, there comes a moment when philosophers ask themselves about the meaning of it all. Yes, philosophers might help scientists in clarifying their concepts or the kind of questions they are asking. But do scientists really wait for philosophers to help them with their work or do they get on with their task in the usual way they are trained or follow their scientific method? So, philosophers may ask themselves what have they truly achieved? Many philosophers expressed this puzzlement and disappointment with their work. They feel that the personal aspect of what it means to the philosopher has been lost.

More successfully is the turning of philosophers to

social issues, such as critical and literary theories, Marxism, Feminism and ethnic justice. Great philosophical work has been done in these fields, but they also have generated opposition on many grounds, such as weakening the subject or altering its nature. But one could argue that this is not necessary and that such involvement with social issues might help philosophy out of the charge of its irrelevance, as well as expanding the scope of philosophy and its influence. But does this eliminate the sense of philosophy as a wisdom? I would say it does not. The human being lives in two spheres, social and inner spheres. Yes, one can have a social cause that one could identify with, but there comes a moment in life when the personal aspect comes to the fore. In other, older cultures, religion played the role of taking care of the inner life, but in a more secular society philosophy may take this role, as may art and poetry.

However, it could be argued that secular societies have developed functional ways to deal with this matter through their institutions, such as bereavement and other services. Yet again a functional way of treating the personal aspect may not be sufficient. A person at a critical moment wants to ask the ultimate questions of life and death, human nature and feelings, that need careful philosophical consideration, such as consulting the Stoics or looking for the wisdom of religion and spirituality.

In conclusion, I would say that the contact between philosophy and science in general, and the social sciences in particular, is inevitable but it does not eliminate the sense of philosophy as wisdom. This wisdom has a connection with spirituality, in being concerned with the good and examined life, but differs from both in being rationally deduced and conceptually argued for, although one has to take rationality here in a wider sense, that is, without excluding a vision of a larger reality than the one defined by the limit of the senses. I am fully aware that a concept might change its use from that to which it was created. But I think that wisdom is essential to philosophy.

*The Editor*

# *Evil and The Will in Schelling's Philosophy*

## Beyond Radical Evil

**What is evil? Why is there evil? Theologians struggle with these questions. Philosophers have their views as well. Kant thought that humans have a natural tendency to be evil, he called it Radical Evil. But the post-Kantian Schelling disagreed. According to Schelling evil is essentially linked to the will.**

ERIC LONGLEY

It is difficult getting a point of entry into Schelling's works and then holding on. There are continuing themes but, unlike say Kant, Fichte and Hegel where development follows mainly a linear course, Schelling does not navigate a straight course; there are constant revisions, additions and supplements. Old positions are clarified, added to, and overtaken by new positions and ideas. It is not that Schelling does not develop new ideas but that there is a relentless series of revisions, new developments, repairs to old positions, and some setting out of new perspectives and positions.

Two of the major concerns of the German Idealists were to anchor knowledge in a solid foundation, and to pursue rational autonomy for humankind. No one more than Kant initiated and inspired this movement, and no one more than Kant sought to anchor thought and morality in reason. The bug in the ointment of reason is evil. Schelling, a contemporary of both Fichte and Hegel - a flatmate in the latter's case - started out supporting Kant and Kantian philosophy as it was understood. Soon Schelling found that in his quest to develop Kant and Kantianism that Kant's philosophy had its limits and problems. Schelling butts up against the limits of Kant and to overcome these limits he must abandon some of Kant's central teachings, and in doing so Schelling eventually rejects Kant's foundational basis for philosophy and for any conceptualisation of evil.

### **The Philosophical Nature Of Evil**

The spectre that haunts religion is, that if there is a God who is an absolute force - an omniscient all-powerful God who is merciful - why is there evil? We might also ask what is evil? If it is not just transgressing God's rules, what constitutes evil? Schelling reaches into this problem of the philosophical origins of evil and the philosophical nature of evil. In answering

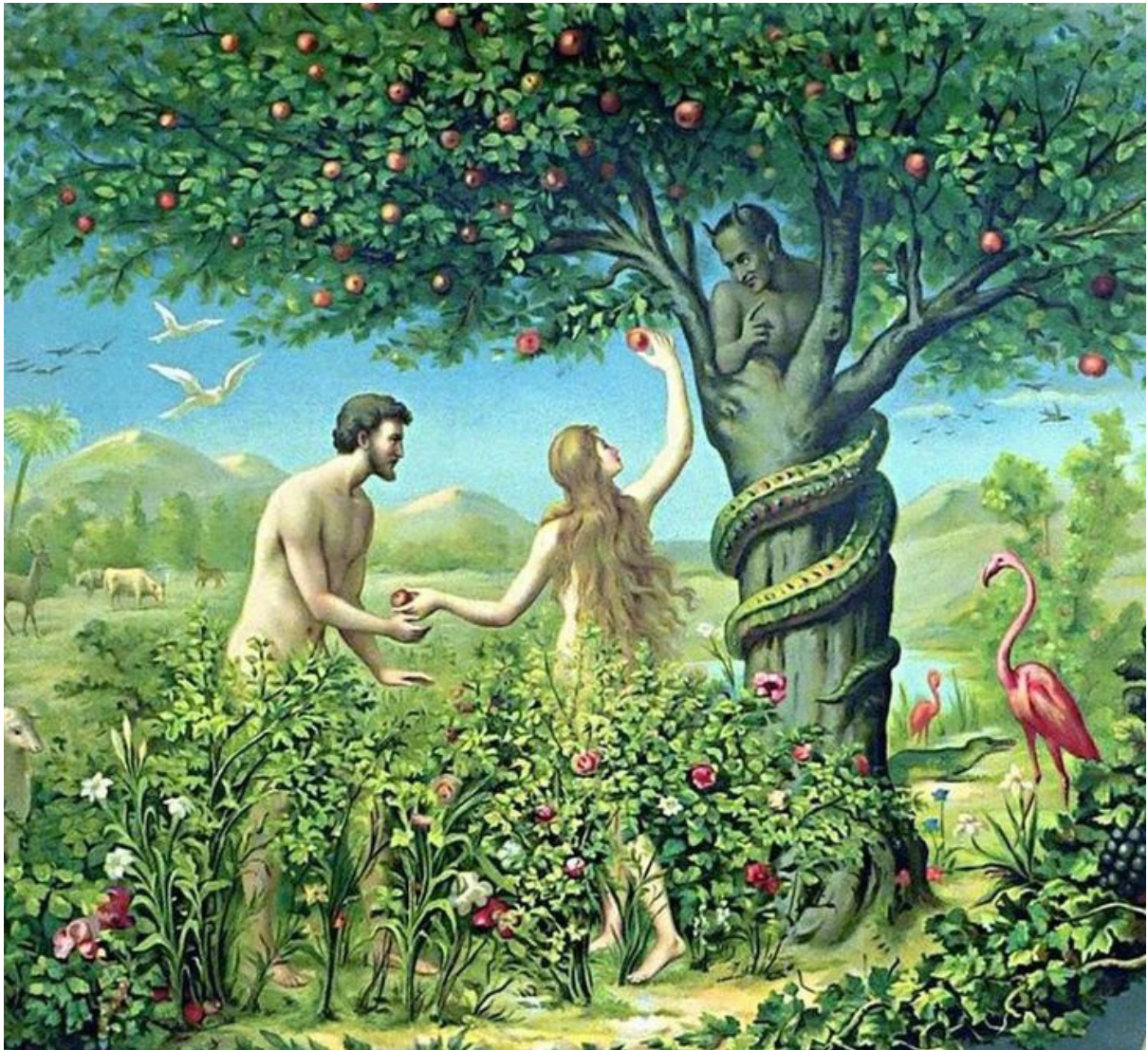
these questions Schelling joins freedom to evil, seeing the two as inseparable in that each relies on the presence of the other in order for its own existence. It is by seeing the inseparable unity of the two that Schelling is able to break through the limitations of Kantian philosophy.

There have been various and numerous attempts to reconcile the idea of God with the existence of evil. But there is no reconciliation that stands up against detailed scrutiny, neither should there be. The existence of evil does not disprove God but does confirm faith's irrationality. There is an irreconcilable contradiction between an omniscient beneficent force and the existence of evil. If there is such a God there can be no evil, and if there is evil there can be no such God. No amount of abstraction, convolution or word play can overcome that contradiction.

Reason is not so peremptorily dismissed as religion in the pursuit of an understanding of evil. Reason - by itself a compelling force - would be in opposition to freedom if it were an irresistible compelling force. If there is a superior force to reason, then reason itself cannot be the solid ground on which to build an understanding of the world. Reason can decide good or bad, but it is not an insurance or barrier to evil. Indeed, there is no reason to suppose that reason itself does not or cannot lead to evil.

In his 1803 lectures Schelling posits that the 'modern world' began with the 'fall of man.' The Adam and Eve apple moment is brought about when a human 'breaks away from nature.' The implication is that prior to breaking away from nature human and nature were one.

*'Surrender to nature has not been a sin so long as it was unconscious; this was Mankind's Golden Age. With consciousness, innocence*



**Adam, Eve and the devil**

*and reconciliation with nature were lost, voluntary surrender to it became necessary. From the ensuing struggle freedom emerged as both conquered and conqueror’.*

So humankind’s ‘Golden Age’ was when it had been, albeit unconsciously, one with nature. Not a relationship with nature, but as one with nature, wherein consciousness was with and in nature, not separated from it.

With the advent of consciousness, when humankind recognises itself - and the other as something outside itself - it is divorced from nature and is supplemented by a relationship between consciousness and nature. Voluntary subordination of nature to consciousness becomes necessary – that is, as humankind and nature are separated, they now enter into a relationship in

which nature surrenders to consciousness, the world/nature is now subordinate to consciousness which has to try and know that which is not itself and with which it does not occupy a oneness. This closely mirrors Kant’s view that consciousness organises the senses through which it knows the world but the world as a thing ‘in itself’ cannot be directly known. Schelling separates consciousness from the other but does not privilege the other as unknowable (the thing in itself).

In Schelling’s schema a struggle ensues from which freedom emerges as both conquered and conqueror. We can hazard a possibility that would fit with Schelling’s other views as to what he means by conquered and conqueror. Consciousness is now separated from nature and seeks to conquer that with which it once shared a oneness. Consciousness is

## History

now also conquered in that it now does not enjoy the freedom of nature but is separated from nature. The age of innocence - the Golden Age - departs when consciousness enters.

For evil to exist there has to be freedom of choice. Freedom emerges when a choice has to or can be made. Without freedom, it is contested, evil cannot exist. A natural disaster is not evil as it is not the exercise of freedom of choice but the action of unconscious nature. Arguably, evil requires not only conscious choice but also intent. Intention may be implicit in choice but not necessarily: for example A may be chosen over B but there may be an unintended consequence of choosing A. This unforeseen consequence may cause great harm but was the choice evil? Clearly if there was no intention to cause harm, it is difficult to see that it could be evil, if evil requires intention. If intention is not required for evil, then the nature and scope of events encompassed by evil is significantly widened to the point of absurdity.

Similarly, where there is a compulsion to act then there cannot be evil as the action was not a result of freedom of choice. It might be argued that an act carried out under duress cannot be evil as there is compulsion and not freedom of choice. But if this is a compulsion that is resistible it is a choice made under the freedom of choice whether to obey the compulsion. The choice is to defy the compelling authority and suffer the consequences or to obey the compulsion. For compulsion to negate freedom of choice it has to be an irresistible compulsion.

Kant explains evil, or at least the propensity for evil, as a 'radical innate evil in human nature'. So, for Kant evil is compulsive, well at least to a degree. Following the comments above, the question becomes whether the compulsion is irresistible or not. Kant is trying to explain why an evil choice would be made and not a rational choice, the assumption being that rational choices cannot be evil! Kant's 'innate radical evil' does have the whiff of the seminary about it, it sounds very much like the idea of Christianity's 'original sin,' although Kant went to some lengths to say this was not the case.

There is a contradiction, or at least an unresolved tension, between acting morally in accordance with a universal maxim as a subjectively adopted principle valid for all rational beings, and our instincts and/or desires as the radical innate evil lurking within the subjective mind. It is the difference between freedom



Schelling

of choice and absolute compulsion: the former allows for evil, the latter provides no space for evil. Kant's explanation is to subject humans to acting on desire and treating this as evil – the question arises as to which desires comprise radical innate evil and which are not, and on what basis are they evil or not?

The Kantian structure sets moral choice (good) against human desire (evil). Kant subordinates evil to psychological or instinctual desires. It might be argued that in resisting or rejecting our desires, humans only serve to alienate themselves. Kantians might argue that is a good thing too if it prevents evil. Of course, taken to its extreme the pursuit of morality would be to deny our own humanness – perhaps in this way the pursuit of good could be regarded as evil.

### Intentional Evil

There is an underlying assumption that to be evil it must be intended. Of course, there could be a category of evil that is not intended - natural evil for example - where there is no intention and, therefore, no responsibility. To a degree Kant holds the view that good deeds must be intentional, the result does not qualify the act as evil or good. The act must be carried out in order to conform to one's moral duty and for no other reason. In short, it is good to be good. Intentionality of moral duty, and not result, matters.



Kant

But why should humans reject harmonious social co-existence, promised by reason, for the selfish instincts of desire? Kant does not have any answer, except that a choice is irrational and therefore not moral. The only choice for Kant is the moral rational choice, anything else is servitude to the ‘radically innate evil’. Kant’s freedom does not allow evil to be choice. The character of radical innate evil appears to be absolute compulsion, and as such is not freedom of choice.

If evil is denied by the philosophical system, then the role of freedom is constrained and cannot be absolute, in which case the principles underlying the application and exercise of freedom have to be spelt out. If there is to be absolute freedom, unfettered by limitations, then there must be space for evil - no freedom, no evil. In order for there to be freedom there must be freedom of choice. Such freedom implies intentionality, responsibility, and consciousness. To quote Schelling,

*‘the real and vital concept of freedom is that it is a possibility of good and evil’.*

Kant’s reluctance to incorporate into his philosophical system the potentiality of evil in a moral choice instead of an expression of radical innate evil relegates freedom to the point of indifference. If freedom exists it must, to be freedom, be capable of choosing good



Hegel

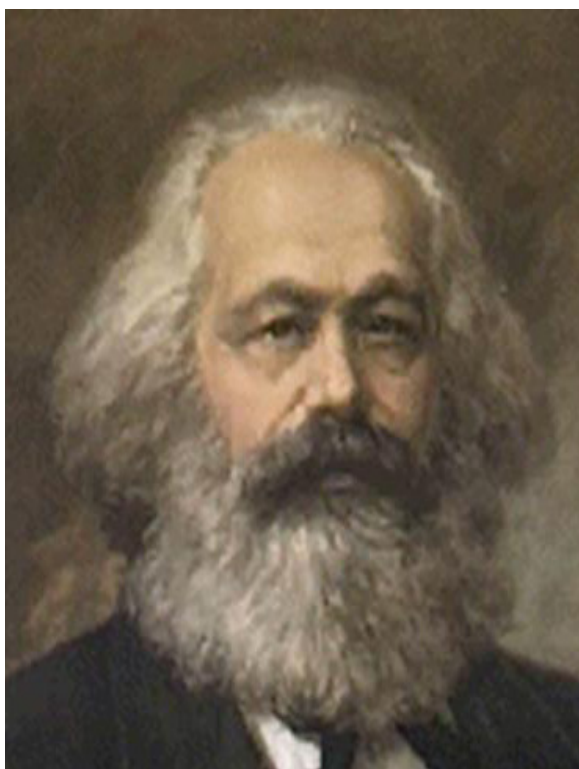
and bad. Limited freedom is not freedom at all.

### Evil and The Irrational

The rationalist approach summed up by Hegel is that the real is rational and the rational is real. For Schelling the irrational is irreducible, and it is real. This is directly counter to the thrust of German Idealism. Reality does not have to be rational, and the non-rational is not reducible to the non-human or nature, neither is it to be relegated to the basement of human desire and instinct. Evil can be a rational or irrational choice. The failure of reason to cope satisfactorily with freedom and evil helped propel Schelling’s eventual move away from philosophical systems and his search for a new, different grounding for existence and Being.

It is the elevation of self will that causes or gives rise to evil. Human will is regarded as the bond of living forces as long as the will remains in unity with the universal, the oneness of human and nature. When the will moves from the centrum as its place then it displaces the first bond of forces and the will must strive;

*‘to put together or form its own peculiar life from the forces that have moved apart from one another; an indignant host of desires and appetites ... this being possible in so far as*



Marx

*the bond of forces, the first ground of nature itself, persists even in evil. But since there can indeed be no true life like that which could exist in the original relation, a life emerges which, though individual is, however, false, a life of mendacity, a growth of restlessness and decay.'*

Let's try and unpack that into something a little easier to carry in our thoughts. Perhaps it is easier to think of evil as wilful disorder, a false life, certainly this has echoes of Marxian alienation which makes it attractive to Marxists. Evil in Schelling's view is self-destructive disorder, a positive perversion or reversal of principles. As Dale E Snow puts it

*'The general possibility of evil consists in the fact that, instead of accepting his self-hood as the basis or instrument man can strive to elevate it to the ruling or universal will'.*

In a way Schelling is suggesting that evil is the reversal Self is the ground of Being. Human beings are self-positing, or to put it another way, Beings essentially make themselves. It follows that freedom is, therefore, where humankind acts according to the laws of its own inner being and is not determined by anything else whether within or outside of it. Or to put it another way, freedom and Being are unfettered by compulsion or other forces.

Schelling's conceptualisation of evil allows, or rather requires freedom, but it does not answer why the choice should be for evil? If we take the view that choices can be both irrational and rational, then the choice of evil, the subordination of good as universal to the individual or the particular has strong echoes of Kant's system and its elevation of desire to the motor and motivation of evil. There is clearly a temptation for humans to assert self, the self-will, over the universal. If there were no such temptation and no taking of that temptation, this would undermine the creative force where creation is born and develops out of contradiction to conformity.

The self, for Schelling, determines and defines itself through its own actions and deeds, a view that later informs Marx' and Engel's notion of history and alienation, of humans as self-creating but capable of self-alienation. Freedom must therefore be grounded in the self. In Schelling, there is a difference between being as existence and Being as the ground of Being. This separates Schelling from the German Idealists who generally seek a causal grounding, a starting point of which develops into a systemic grand narrative. In Schelling there is 'no first and last'. Everything mutually implies everything else, 'nothing' being the other and yet no being without the other. So being does not produce Being. Prior to awareness of the other there is only the essence of longing of Being to give birth to itself. Longing here is not rational, but it is the origin of the life of Being. The non-rational is, in this context, irreducible. This is a direct counter to the rationalism of the German Idealists and their presumption of rationalism.

*'This is the incomprehensible basis of the reality of things, the irreducible remainder which cannot be resolved into reason by the greatest exertion but always remains in the depths'.*

For freedom to exist it may be necessary to accept that there is no rational causal grounding of Being and if this so then the *cul de sac* of German Idealism is exhausted.

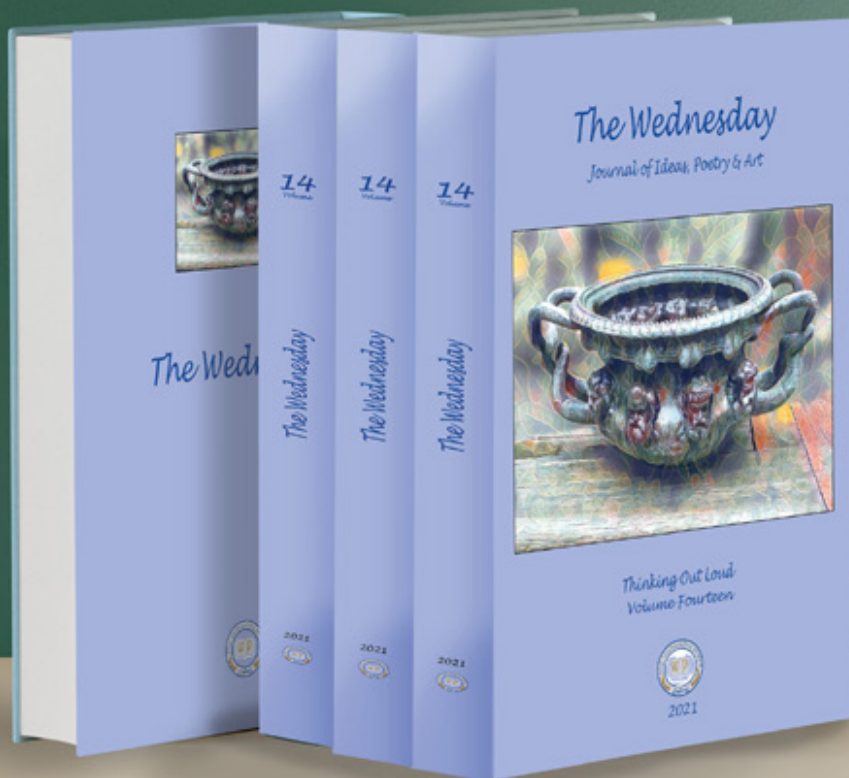
Schelling's evil is abstract but highly flexible, it privileges the self as the grounding of Being. Arguably there are deficiencies in Schelling's evil, but it is above all a useful jumping off point to leave Idealism behind before venturing forth into the dark night.

*(All quotations, unless noted, are from Schelling).*

# The *Wednesday*

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## **Unheard Unseen**

**Unheard, unseen, my thoughts they draw you in.**

**They claw you nearer, rip you all apart,**

**as poker-hot the passion of my heart**

**is welding, altering your scaly skin.**

**A silver fish, your shining self-escapes,**

**your soul leaps far and plays the torrents' games,**

**conquers the waves, evading all that tames**

**and tries to mould you into pre-planned shapes.**

**I know how futile this endeavour proves.**

**Life's never still, one cannot hold what moves,**

**as always fish escape, until they're caught;**

**and once, when finally, their last breath fought,**

**the air will kill and then their eyes so still**

**will stare defiantly into a shattered thought.**





Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

## Wisdom is Not Cleverness

**The topic discussed by *The Wednesday* group on 24th May was inspired by three poems. Edward Greenwood's poem *It is not Wisdom* included a quote from George Santayana's third *Sonnet*, which was a quote from Euripides' play *Bacchae*, in which the chorus praise Dionysus - or Bacchus - the god of fertility and wine:**

**τὸ σοφὸν δ' οὐ σοφία**

**tó sofón d' ou sofía**

**wisdom is not cleverness**

### CHRIS SEDDON

Edward Greenwood's poem compares religious practice, such as prayer, to immersion in fiction, as when watching a play. Although neither may focus on the language of literal truth, they can both support our emotional life. Perhaps wisdom requires this kind of poetic truth as well as literal scientific truth.

George Santayana's poem points to our need for an inward faith that goes beyond our necessarily limited knowledge, and inspires us to action and understanding. Perhaps wisdom requires this kind of faith to believe in and act beyond that which our prior experience would justify.

Euripides' play contrasts arrogant defiance and self-will, with peacefully and simply living one day at a time. Perhaps wisdom requires this kind of humility and acceptance, as well as courage and determination.

Another member presented some themes contrasting wisdom and cleverness from the recent film release 'The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry', in which a retired brewery employee with no religious or walking background steps out to post a letter one day and ends up walking the length of England to save an ex-colleague from cancer. She is not saved, but, through finally coming to terms with the loss of his son to suicide, he does save his broken marriage to the woman he left at home. He displayed no cleverness at all - no good reason for believing his walk would save the woman, no factual basis for feeling that he owed her a debt, no conscious awareness that his marriage needed saving, and certainly no idea

how to do it. His wisdom lay simply in giving in to the very human instinct to walk to someone who is dying, to live off the land, and to express an outrageously impractical but very human desire to have a dead son return to life. There is wisdom in humbly acknowledging our humanity and ceremonially laying down the unnecessary burdens of what we wish were otherwise, so that we can devote our energy to what we value that is still available. Sometimes, it seems, wisdom means honouring our human instincts, even when we do not understand why.

A member recalled their regret that, in their eagerness to prove a point in debate, they had hurt another person's feelings. They felt that, whilst they might have been clever, they had not been wise. Examples like this suggest that wisdom can include an awareness of our true values - we might be able to prove the point without hurting the other person's feelings, but we should consider which is really more important to us. In this respect emotional intelligence might be as valuable an asset as intellectual intelligence.

Whilst being reminded that there is nothing wrong with cleverness in itself, we also remembered how often technology is developed and deployed with great ingenuity but little concern for our relationship with each other and our environment. This provided another illustration of the importance of honouring our true values if we are to be counted as wise.

We were reminded that there is a difference between knowing what others value, and knowing



Gödel and Einstein

what we ourselves value. In another tragedy by Euripides, Medea poisons her own children. There is some debate as to whether her actions were actually wrong under the circumstances. It seems clear that she knew they were wrong in some way, but it was not clear whether she was violating her own true values or simply transgressing a social code.

On the subject of moral confusion, one member spoke about the wisdom of the Twelve Step recovery programme from alcoholism and other substance or behavioural addictions. Addiction may have poor adult role models as an antecedent, but in any case, will often lead to the addict continually violating and even suppressing their moral values. Addictive behaviour is often based on a compulsive desire to escape or 'fix' personal problems, but without enough self-awareness to realise that it does not in fact 'fix' anything permanently, but instead makes things worse. Hence the Twelve Steps begin with a humble admission of powerlessness, a realisation that the addict's conscious willpower is damaged, and a series of steps designed to help them get in touch with their true values, sometimes for the first time, and deal more effectively with the personal difficulties that have prevented them from living life in line with their values.

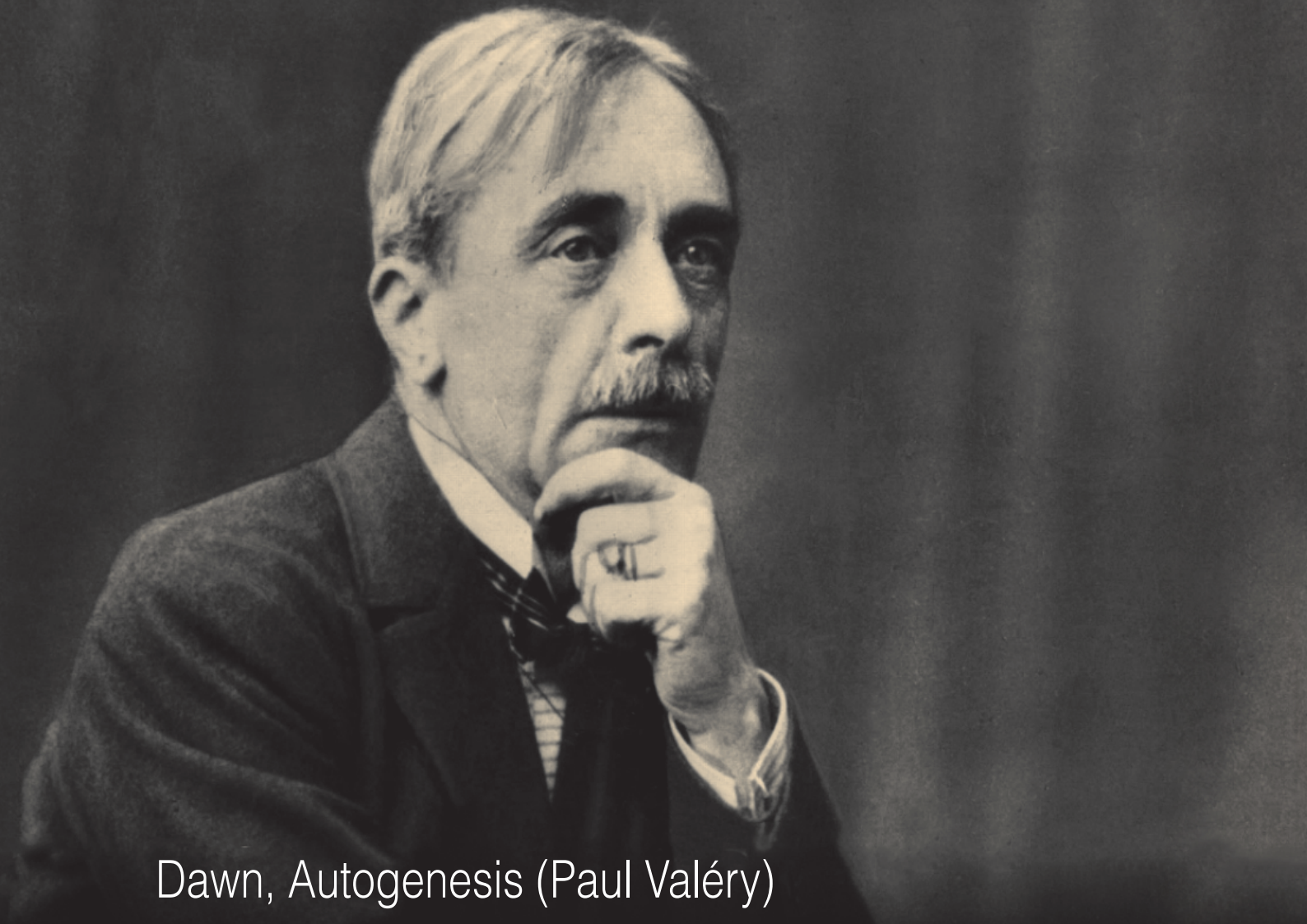
It was also pointed out that whilst clever rhetoric may win an argument, it is not always the best way to discover the truth together. Furthermore, we cannot possibly attain all truth, nor would it benefit us. Wisdom would appear to require the ability to focus on relevant truths.

It was suggested that different emotions represent a tendency to focus on certain sorts of truth. Fear

may focus on threats and ways to escape them, anger on threats and ways to defeat them, love on needs and ways to meet them, and grief on needs no longer met and ways to meet them in future. Thus, wisdom includes not merely having knowledge, but focusing on relevant knowledge.

An extreme example of cleverness as opposed to wisdom was provided by the twentieth-century logician Kurt Gödel. His most famous proof demonstrates that certain types of formal systems cannot prove everything that appears to be true. It was suggested that someone may be drawn to study logic in the first place because of a desire to find certainty, arising from a chronic emotion of distrust, and that this same emotional focus fuelled Gödel's interest in his famous result as well as his personal interpretation that even logic cannot be trusted. Despite his immense intelligence, Gödel's instinctive mistrust was so great that he would only eat food that had been tested for poison by his wife, to the extent that when she died, he would no longer trust any food and died of starvation.

In summary, it was generally felt that whilst wisdom may benefit from cleverness, it need not always. It is also characterised by an alignment to one's own true values, consciously or otherwise. It can include not just knowledge, but a focus on relevant knowledge, and the ability to manage one's own emotional focus. It may include courage and faith that goes beyond reasonable knowledge, as well as the humility to accept our limitations - moral, intellectual, and human. Perhaps it is not surprising that wisdom is often expressed not in literal language, but in poetry, fiction, art, music, other expressive arts, mysticism, and religion.



## Dawn, Autogenesis (Paul Valéry)

Paul Valéry

. . . . as if there were a moment (*extremely fragile*) in which you are not yet the person that you are, and you could come back to life as someone else.

Paul Valéry, *Notebooks*

Dawn, autogenesis: a time to shed  
The memories, feelings, thoughts, distinctive traits,  
And sense of self that, when I went to bed  
Last night, assured me of the myriad ways  
My life to date with all its works and days  
Would see me through to dawn and so restore,  
When I awake, a link with all that went before.

Else who's to know – that nagging childhood dread  
Not quite thrown off, still oddly apt to faze  
The adult brain – all that we took as read  
About ourselves, about the I that stays  
Unchanged, or near enough, through every phase  
Of sleep and serves reliably to shore  
Me up at times when no mind's eye stands guarantor.

12



CHRIS NORRIS

Yet, once again, how should I think to head  
It off, that fear, by any thought that lays  
Such question-begging stress on what I'm bred  
Up to confirm (like some of Piaget's  
More senior infants) by the role it plays  
In helping day-wake cogitos explore  
Their world, not souls bereft of overnight rapport?

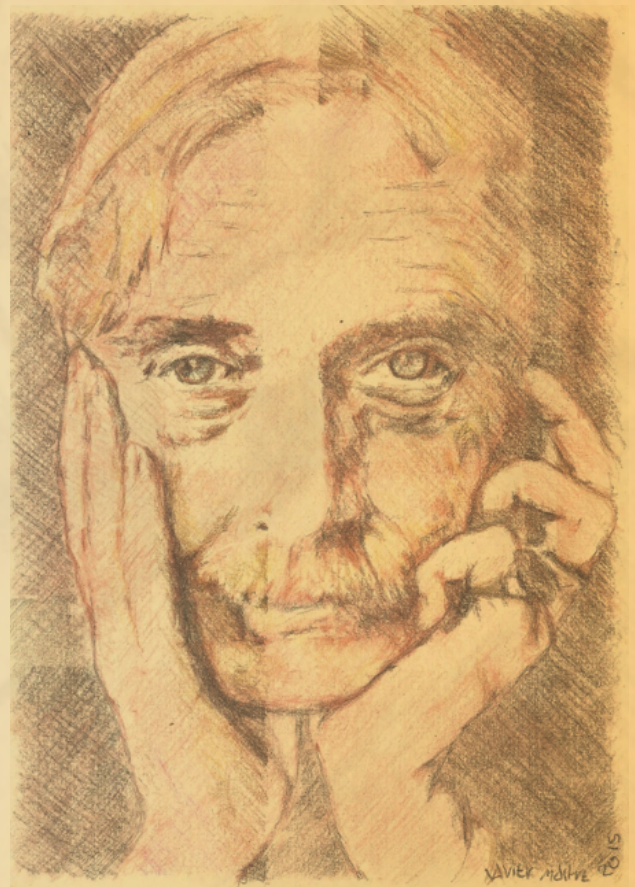
Yet there's the poet Valéry who said  
Why bother with those tedious resumé's  
Of *vita ante acta* fit to shred  
With last week's newspapers, those sad arrays  
Of sepia-tinted homage hindsight pays  
To some idea that they might underscore  
The precious few life-likenesses those snapshots bore.

Have done with all that stuff and strive instead  
To count days past days vanished; doze or laze  
A moment, then suppose a new life spread  
Before you as the compass-needle strays  
From yesterday's true North, new scenes amaze  
Your eye, and there beyond the sliding door  
It's daily branching lives-to-come life holds in store.

Perhaps he thought to ease the heavy tread  
Of that French verse tradition, to erase  
By self-forgetting all the weight of dead  
Forms, alexandrines, and ornate clichés  
That hung like mouldy fruit on every phrase  
And told him: mute those classic strains, ignore  
Such antique stuff, or save it for your reject drawer!

New self at each new dawn: that's where it led,  
This thought of Valéry's that might well craze  
A lesser artist yet in his case fed  
A mind abstraction-cooled though set ablaze  
By thinking that methodically essays  
A path beyond the rigid either/or  
Of prose and poetry – academicians' law!

They err who think a life-conserving thread  
Must link today's hello with yesterday's  
Goodbye lest self be so discomfited  
By sleep's intrusion that some deep malaise  
Must seize it. *Au contraire*: the self betrays  
Its indigence by treating as a flaw  
That nightly lapse by which true poets always swore!

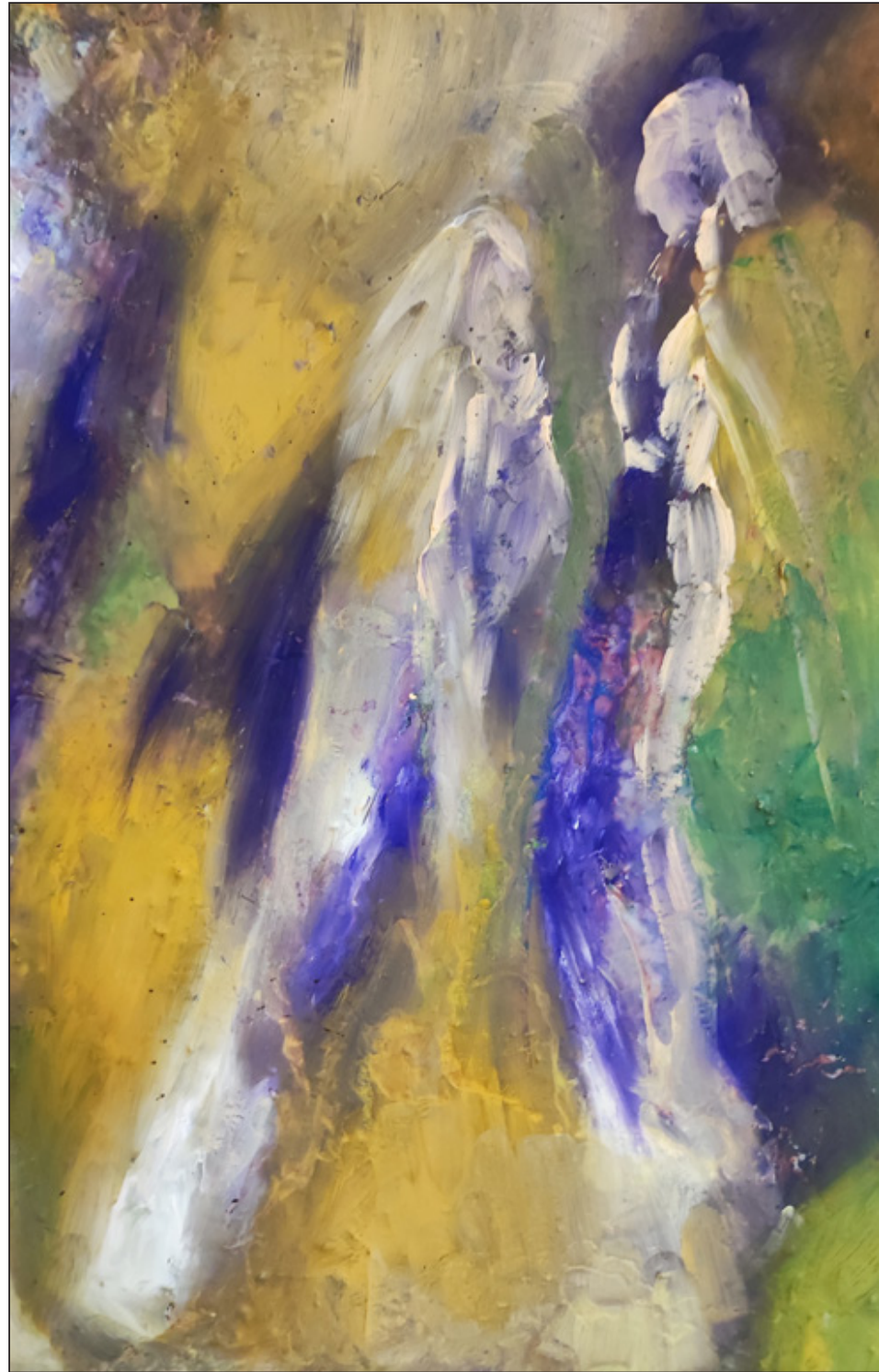


## Seeking Advice

Dr. ALAN XUEREB


I have been a lawyer for the past twenty-seven years or so. The first twelve years of my professional life I had to give advice on a daily basis to clients individual and corporate. It becomes second nature. The last fifteen years I did not need to dispense advice as such on a professional level, but the propensity to give advice became part of my *forma mentis*. It is probably due to some professional handicap that my disposition towards other persons changed, and I felt I had a moral duty to advise, instead of not caring. This painting portrays the act of someone seemingly more experienced giving a young girl advice. But what is advice? Let us go slightly Heideggerian and analyse etymologically the word advice. The origin of the word advice comes, as it often does. From the fusion of two Latin words ad 'to' + visum, past participle of videre 'to see'. The original sense was 'way of looking at something, judgement', hence later 'an opinion given'. The word 'advice' was introduced into the English language through the Old French word *avis*.

Technically speaking then the origin of the word advice was more in the shape of an opinion. In our modern world



**'The Advice'**  
Oil on canvas (30x40 cm) 2013

we distinguish between professional advice, like that given by a lawyer or a physician and what would be normally categorised as non-professional or friendly advice which in real terms would be just an opinion.



This distinction becomes blurred when we turn to philosophy, particularly morality. So much so that Dr Farbod Akhlaghi, a moral philosopher at Christ's College - Cambridge, claims that everyone has a right to 'self-authorship' and thus every person must make decisions about transformative experiences for themselves.

In the paper, entitled *Transformative experience and the right to revelatory autonomy*, Akhlaghi writes: 'It is not the value of making a choice as such but, rather, that of autonomously making choices to learn what our core preferences and values will become. For autonomously making transformative choices when facing them, deciding for ourselves to learn who we will become, gives us a degree of self-authorship'. (Farbod Akhlaghi, *Transformative experience and the right to revelatory autonomy*, Analysis, 2022).

This theme of self-authorship and autonomy reminded me of a book my wife Silke got me for Christmas a few years back, namely: *Autonomy and Liberalism* (by Ben Colburn, Routledge, 2010). In this book Professor Colburn, whom I had the pleasure to exchange emails with a few months before I read his book, introduces his *institutional* conception of autonomy as an ideal of people deciding for themselves what defines a valuable life, and living their lives in accordance with that decision. This, he notes, sits within the same family of views as Raz's conception of autonomy and parts of the ideals of individuality defended by Humboldt and Mill. Colburn's book concerns the foundations and implications of a particular form of liberal political theory. Understanding liberalism this way offers solutions to various problems that beset liberal political theory, on various levels.

So, you see the older – presumably wiser - character in my painting is dispensing advice to the younger more inexperienced mademoiselle. In this painting the main characters are doing quite the opposite of what Colburn and Akhlaghi suggest. Should we stop giving advice on a personal level, influencing our relatives' and friends' transformative decisions? Should the State stop telling us what a good life is? I will leave you to *autonomously* reply to those questions!! In the meantime, I will still seek advice from my significant others when I need to make a transformative decision, then whether I heed that advice or not will be my decision!

## *The Wednesday*

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## *Where Is The Power?*



Where is the Power  
And where is the Glory,  
That were to end  
A meaningful story?

Both were the dreams  
Of weak humankind,  
Who balked at the bounds  
Where it was confined.

No historians tell  
Of Heaven or of Hell,  
Only of places  
Where we humans dwell.

And what do they tell us  
When they have spoken?  
The tell of vain visions  
And hearts that are broken.

*Edward Greenwood*



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