

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Critique of a Critique

I have been consistently writing in favour of the critical turn in philosophy, from Kant to Critical Theory, but recently I came to realise that there are limits to critique. What brought me to this realisation is the consequence of turning the critique on itself: Is it possible to be suspicious of what has been called 'Hermeneutics of Suspicion'? I thought yes, this thesis might be self-refuting, and what seems a revolutionary thesis could fall foul of its own claim.

Kant started the critical trend in philosophy, but initially in its epistemological aspect: What is the condition of possibility of knowing the world or anything? This led him to what he termed the 'Copernican Revolution'. Simply put, the world conforms to our own conceptual scheme, rather than our conceptual scheme conforming to the world. It also sets a limit to human knowledge: there is no knowledge of the world in itself, or entities and realities beyond the bounds of sense. Kant was driving carefully between the empiricist conception, that takes entities to be independent of the human mind, and the idealist who thinks these entities are mind dependent. However, there are more than epistemological consequences for philosophy, theology, metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics.

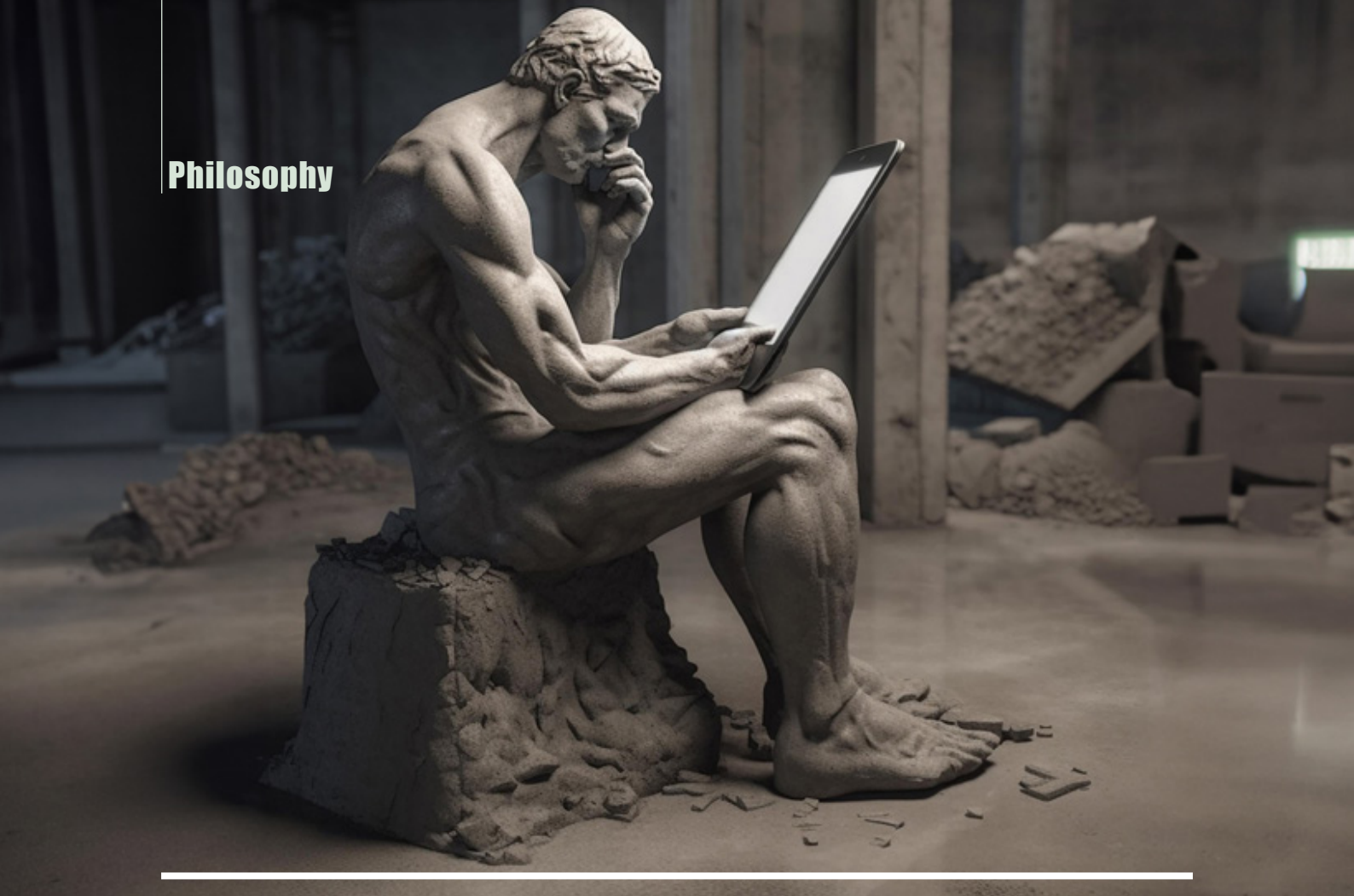
Kant's theory metamorphosed into a more complex set of theories. Kant put the subject (the human who knows and acts in the world) on centre stage. According to Kant, such a subject is free and autonomous, that is, he can legislate for himself and others. In fact, the moral test of any maxim, according to Kant, is whether it is universalisable to other humans as a general law. But the very idea of a critique has led to a more complex idea of forces beyond the human, whether these are material, social or biological, that determine human beliefs and actions. Hegel thought that there is Reason behind individual actions in history that lead to the expansion of rationality and freedom. He called such forces 'the cunning of history'. Marx looked for these forces not in the human mind - although he credited humans with creativity - but in the material conditions

in which they live. Nietzsche and Freud did not look for these hypothetical forces in the mind of the individual, nor in their material conditions, but in their instincts and drives. It is these last three thinkers who have been credited with the 'Hermeneutics of Suspicion'. There might be a way of reconciling the views of these 'suspicious' thinkers, but that is not the topic of this editorial.

Critique was given more force by marrying it with dialectic. Hegel thought that truth is dialectical. It is the movement of finites towards infinity and unity. While finite things are limited by their opposites, the task of the dialectic is to show that they are in a continuous relationship with their opposites, and there is a continuous movement of relative identity and new contradiction, until complete rationality is reached. In other words, there is a continuous movement of difference and identity that will culminate in a total identity, the infinite or the absolute. This applies not only in thought, but also in social institutions, community, and the state. But according to Hegel's critics, he seems to privilege identity over difference. For these critics, particularly Adorno and Deleuze, what is there in reality and thought is difference and not identity. It is this idea that made me suspicious of critique. If you apply this to social movement, and Adorno was a leading figure in Critical Theory, it may result in social turmoil, with difference as the norm that leaves little room for the stability that is necessary for social cohesion.

In my view, society needs stability as much it needs movement and progress, Hegel maybe right in privileging unity and identity, but Adorno and Deleuze may also be right, that we need difference as well. It is not either or, but a dialectical movement between the two. Identity on its own will lead to stagnation. Difference on its own will lead to disintegration. What is needed is a settled balance between the two.

The Editor



A Balancing Act: The Real A.I. ‘Dilemma’

This paper is a response to ‘The A.I. Dilemma’, a presentation by Tristan Harris and Aza Raskin of the Center for Humane Technology on 9th March 2023.

DAN McARDLE

In his 1739 essay *A Treatise on Human Nature*, David Hume described what we now refer to as the ‘is/ought’ problem. He noted that, when encountering a difficult problem, he was ‘surprised to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not’. In other words, although we *can* do something, *should* we?

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This tension has come to the public mind with the release of ChatGPT, a recent major realization of what artificial intelligence could, or already has, become. We can see this in the emerging struggle between what we might call the technologists and the philosophers. The technologists are very good at asking how we might achieve some goal - achieving space flight, curing disease, creating robot servants – but they are not good at asking whether this goal is a good idea. The philosopher

points out that the technology which brings space flight also brings nuclear weapons; that some medicine might also cause drug addiction; and that, if we are not careful, we may become servants to our own robots. To better understand our current dilemma, we must first visit the perspectives of the technologists and the philosophers.

Technologist vs Philosophers

When we look at the world, It is obvious there are many problems: disease, war, famine, and so on. The technologist views these problems as challenges to solve. Consider the technological advances of the last 150 years, such as the automobile, the airplane, and the Internet. These were all responses to limitations imposed on humanity by nature. The automobile allowed us to travel long distances much faster than by horse, the airplane allowed us to stay in the air longer than a few seconds, and the Internet magnified our

ability to communicate with one another. In each case, the technology focused on some attribute that already existed and improved it, granting us some long desired capability.

Because technology isolates a given existing attribute, its impact becomes a measurable phenomenon. If we plot this on a chart, we can immediately see the value proposition. For example, with no aviation technology, we can only jump in the air for a few seconds, but with the right tools, we can extend this to minutes, or even hours. The longer we are able to stay in flight with minimal effort, the more we can mark that as successful. Computer technology is similar: we measure the value of a computer by how fast it can process instructions, and we make all sorts of changes to improve the number of instructions it can process in the same time period.

Viewed through a purely theoretical mathematics lens, this approach makes a lot of sense. In statistics, the law of large numbers asserts that the more data we have, the closer we will get to the correct answer. Put another way, the more times we run the machine, or the more inputs we collect, the closer we get to assurance that the machine works as we expect, or that the inputs we are collecting represent accurate data. A similar principle emerges in calculus, where, following Zeno's paradox, we can approach the limit of some sequence or formula without ever actually reaching it. Mathematically, one can assert that the limit or the normal distribution in some ways represents the optimal value, or the truth of the situation. The closer we get to that value, the closer we are to being good.

The philosopher takes a different view. Rather than simply focusing on human limitations and seeing how we can overcome them, the philosopher asks why the limitations exist in the first place. Chesterton put it well when he suggested that upon seeing a fence, we should not take it down before asking why it was built. The philosopher points out that theoretical mathematics is only a *model* of real life: although we can collect lots of data, the philosopher asks whether we are sure the data truly represents what we want to learn. While the technologist strives to complete the calculation, the philosopher asks if the calculation is the right



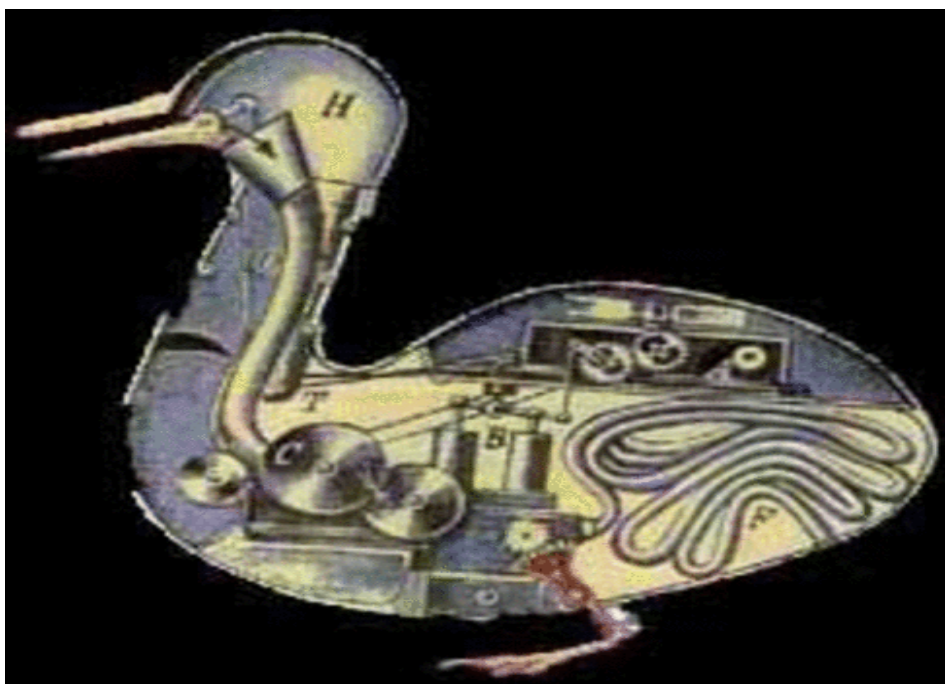
Jacques de Vaucanson

one to use.

If we look at ChatGPT as a kind of reconstruction of a human mind, several issues emerge. It is a fantastic system that can provide many answers, provided the questions are simple. If we ask it about the score of a sports game from 50 years ago, we will almost certainly get a verifiably correct response. But if we ask it *why* the team in question won the sports game, it will falter. Put another way, it is very good at representing given data points, but it is not very good at reconstructing complex ideas which may have different interpretations. We can test this by asking about heated or taboo topics, or unresolved questions, and it will almost never be able to give a good response. And when it attempts to, the responses often fall short, or are plain wrong.

Origins of the 'Dilemma'

Now we must ask another question: when technologists apply technological solutions, it is to solve a perceived problem— but how do they discover what problems there are to solve? And, more specifically, what is the genesis of the ChatGPT solution? To answer this question, we must cover some history. The idea of creating a machine that can simulate humans is centuries old. In the 1730s, the French inventor Jacques de Vaucanson created autonomous mechanical ducks which could simulate digestion of food. Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein* was in many ways a response to the Industrial Revolution, a harrowing warning not to play God. And the Copek Brothers introduced the word 'robot' in their 1920



The Mechanical Duck

play Rossum's *Universal Robots*.

But what really kicked off the modern debate on robots and artificial intelligence came out of the Second World War. After helping the Allies to crack the Nazi Enigma cipher with his 'bombe' machine, Alan Turing expanded on his 1936 paper, *On Computable Numbers* (which established the modern computer, the 'Turing Machine'), and in 1950 published *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*. This paper revisited the concept of how much a mathematical machine could do given the properties explored in his prior work, and asked if humans, in a discussion with someone else, would be able to discern if they were talking to another person, or to a machine. Dubbed 'The Turing Test', this idea inspired MIT researcher Joseph Weizenbaum in the mid 1960s to create ELIZA, a computer 'therapist', and to write his 1976 book *Computer Power and Human Reason* about it. The Turing Test has surfaced for decades in popular culture, including when H.A.L. is being interviewed by a reporter in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and when a 'replicant' is being interviewed in *Blade Runner* (1982). In 2023, ChatGPT has emerged as the latest incarnation of this question.

One of the open questions in computing is, given a set of instructions, what properties may emerge over time? Perhaps the best known example of

this is John Horton Conway's game of Life, in which there is a grid with a set of pixels which have various properties, and instructions they must follow with each proceeding state. Steven Wolfram expanded on this in his book *New Kind of Science*, where he goes over countless examples of states and instructions, and shows how they produce pretty pictures. We're starting to see more advanced versions of this with 'deepfakes', as well as computer software that can take a given keyword or two and automatically generate images out of them. ChatGPT seems to do something similar. They all follow a fundamental principle native to the Turing Machine— given an initial data set and set of instructions, advance states until we produce something that seems to satisfy our requirements.

The same results which please the technologist can fill the philosopher with extreme anxiety. The philosopher steps back and asks questions about the results, as well as the process which produced them. They question not only *what* we have created, but also *why* we created it. After all, did we learn nothing from the story of the Tower of Babel? When man tries to become God, he destroys himself. The atomic bomb gave the Allies an edge and helped to win the war, but fundamentally changed the nature of warfare. Prometheus brought fire to humanity and was punished by Zeus; Icarus flew too close to the sun and burned off his wings; and now,



Alan Turing

to end the war, we created a weapon capable of destroying the entire world. One might look at the current discussions about ChatGPT and artificial intelligence in general and ask similar questions. This is the heart of the problem we see before us.

When technologists, as they have for the last few decades, disregard philosophers as antiquated and inhibiting progress, we soon rebirth challenges we thought we had long ago solved. In recent years, enrollment in the humanities has collapsed to the point that many universities are looking to cancel programs altogether, while adding funding and emphasis into STEM. What happens when our schools produce an abundance of graduates capable of building powerful machines, but not capable of asking whether such machines should be built? And, when these graduates are surrounded by people praising their intelligence, calling them 'genius', and backing these words with high-paying jobs, should it not logically follow that they consider themselves experts not only in their own field, but any other fields where they might apply their expertise? This is how we have hit our current dilemma.

Restoring the Balance

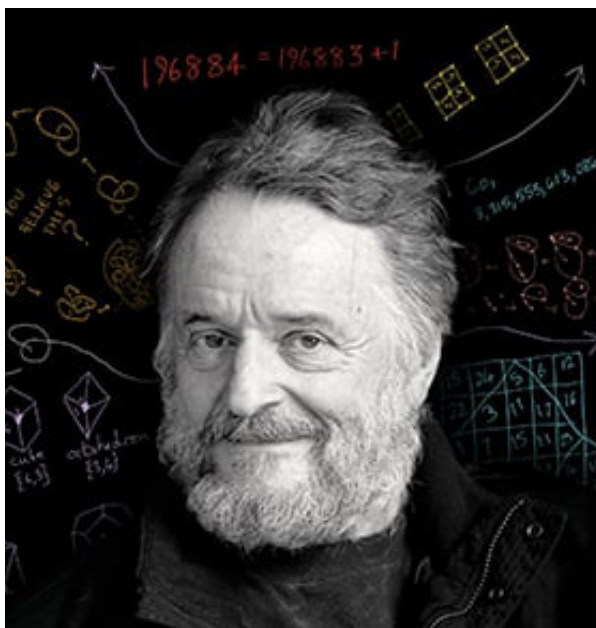
The AI technologists seem to have realized they do not have the correct answer, that their boat has gone downstream and they have no paddles.



Joseph Weisenbaum

We can see hints of the Prodigal Son parable: the technologists pursued scientific progress without considering the societal implications, discovered the consequences, and are now crawling back and asking for forgiveness. To proceed as a society, we need to ask two important questions: what have they *actually* created, and why are they asking for help?

First, let us review the facts insofar as they are publicly available. ChatGPT is closed source, but similar tools are open source. It looks like the technologists have created a system that reads in a natural language inquiry, breaks it into tokens, infers some kind of structural meaning, and then delivers a response by reassembling a vast data archive into a recognizable output. What comprises this data archive is not known, although it seems they have violated quite a few copyright and licensing agreements to assemble this data. There also appear to be no safeguards in place, allowing children to ask inappropriate questions and get equally inappropriate answers, or for sociopaths to learn how to build bombs or commit other crimes. Beyond this, the AI technologists do not seem to fully understand what they have created. In most industries, tools exist to troubleshoot or 'debug' issues which arise, to help diagnose the problems and ensure they are fixed and do not happen again. Because a computer is fundamentally a calculator,



John Horton Conway

it should be possible to trace any operation to understand why something bad happens and how to fix it. When the AI technologists claim there is no way to understand it, they are giving us balderdash, and proving that their operations are dangerously reckless and have the operating competence of a trailer park meth lab.

We should also compare their warnings and pleas for help with what they actually created. They claim to have unlocked some sort of Pandora's Box, through which jobs will be lost, and fake news will become the norm. But is this really the case? Consider the ability to create fake videos, fake images, fake phone conversations, etc. All of these things are recordings, and none of them is possible without some kind of device like a telephone or a computer. For example, one could, in theory, use this AI technology to create a fake phone call to simulate someone's voice and steal sensitive information, but this could be thwarted by physically meeting the same person. Beyond that, much of this boils down to being able to detect whether something is a forgery. Many fields have experts who specialize in this practice, often brought in for appraisals or to validate transactions like auctions. But in the end, the real issue is not that these 'deepfakes' can exist, but that people have become dependent on these devices and forgotten how to communicate without them.

And now we come to a big question: why are the AI technologists asking for help, and who are they asking? While an obvious answer would be that they are not experts in philosophy or law, and therefore seek help from experts, this is wanting. We do not need a degree in philosophy to understand basic hallmarks of human decency, such as that murder is bad. Do we really need laws against murder to understand instinctively that we should not kill someone? Put another way, if there were no laws against murder, would it suddenly become acceptable? If, as seems obvious, the answer is no, then why did the AI technologists have no similar objections before embarking on what amounts to playing God? Perhaps this is the kind of mentality we arrive at when we focus on science to the exclusion of philosophy.

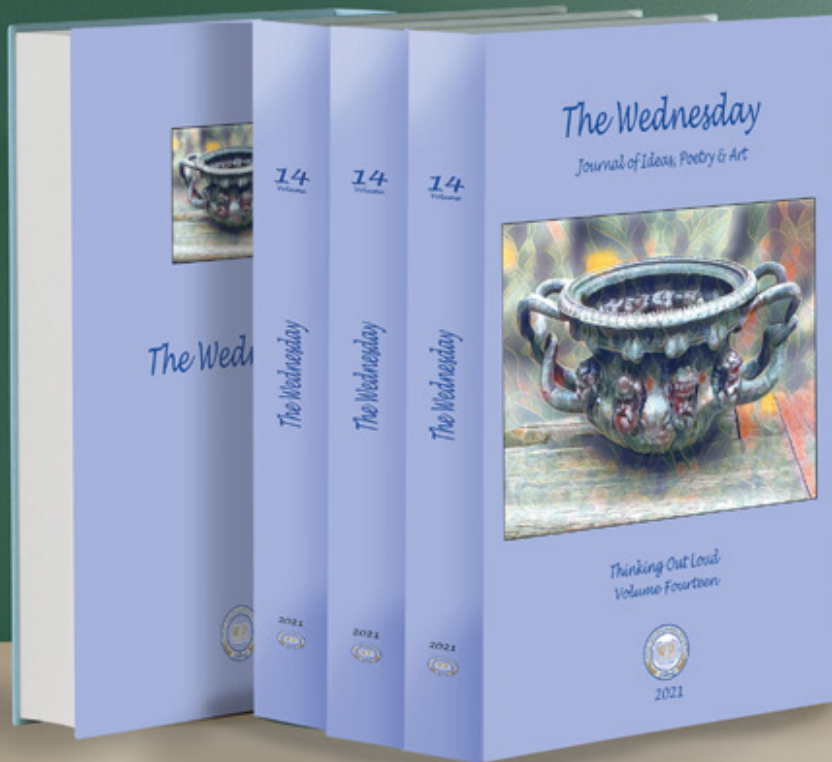
Notice that these technologists are asking for regulation. Is that necessary? Why can they not police themselves? Nothing would prevent OpenAI from taking ChatGPT offline while they add in safeguards. Are they afraid, as they claim, of what horrors this technology could unleash on the world, or are they afraid of being sued and put in jail for those impacts? By offering up scary stories of what could happen with a software project which remains closed source while allowing the general public to create accounts, it looks more like they are trying to cash out without liability. In a world that has forsaken morality for an ill-defined sense of ethics, they can parade about words like 'regulation' without fear, knowing that writing any regulation would require their help, not only ensuring that they can keep their service online, but preventing other companies from competing, thus creating a legal monopoly for themselves.

So how do we move forward? It is time for the philosophers to step up and help to correct this imbalance. In addition to demanding answers to major and fundamental questions about how this technology is being used, we need transparency over what data sources are being used. ChatGPT represents the product of an imbalanced society which praises scientific progress over moral consideration. Petitions are nice, but they have no teeth: we have to ensure the technologists actually listen to and start collaborating with the philosophers so we can restore the balance.

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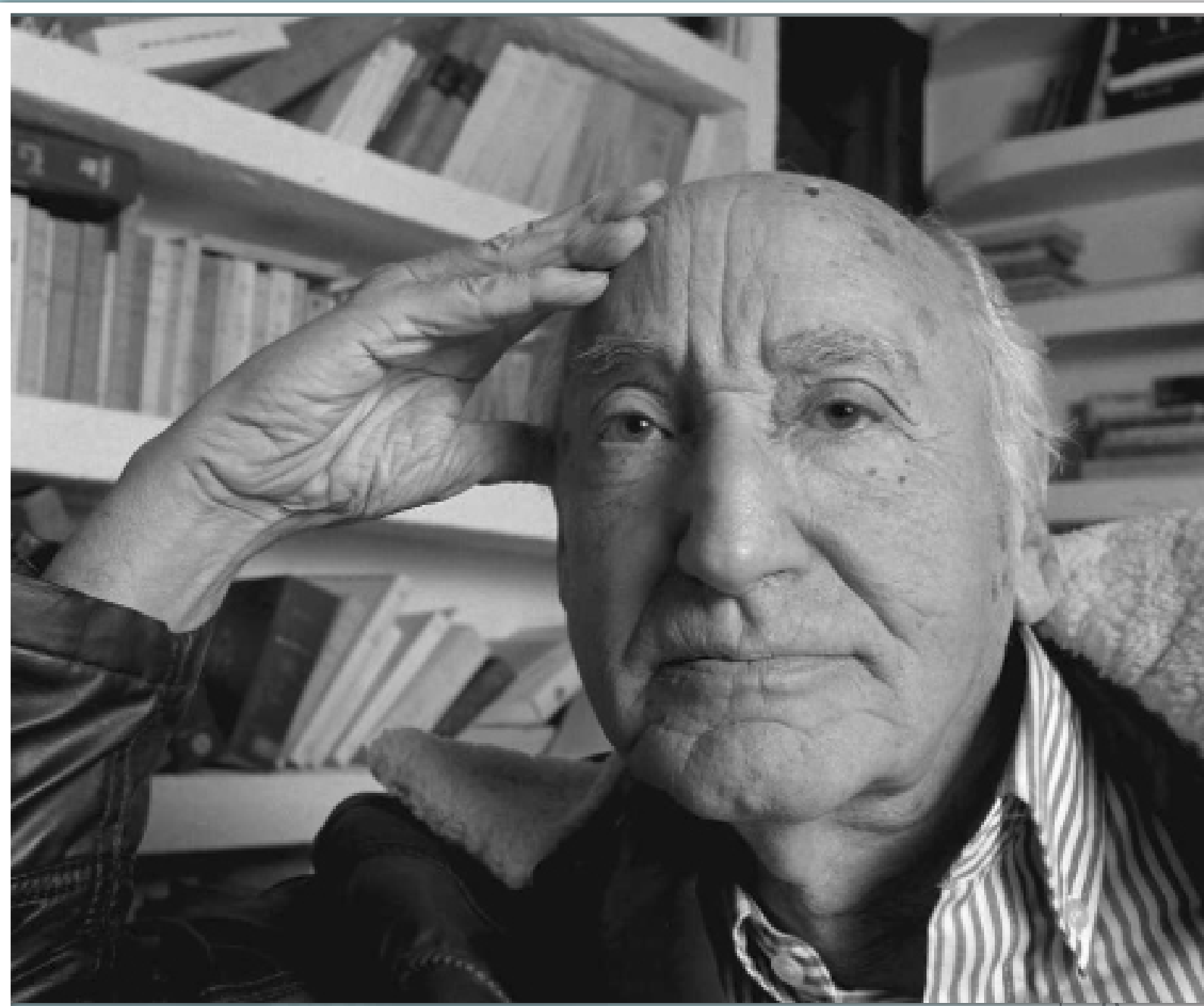
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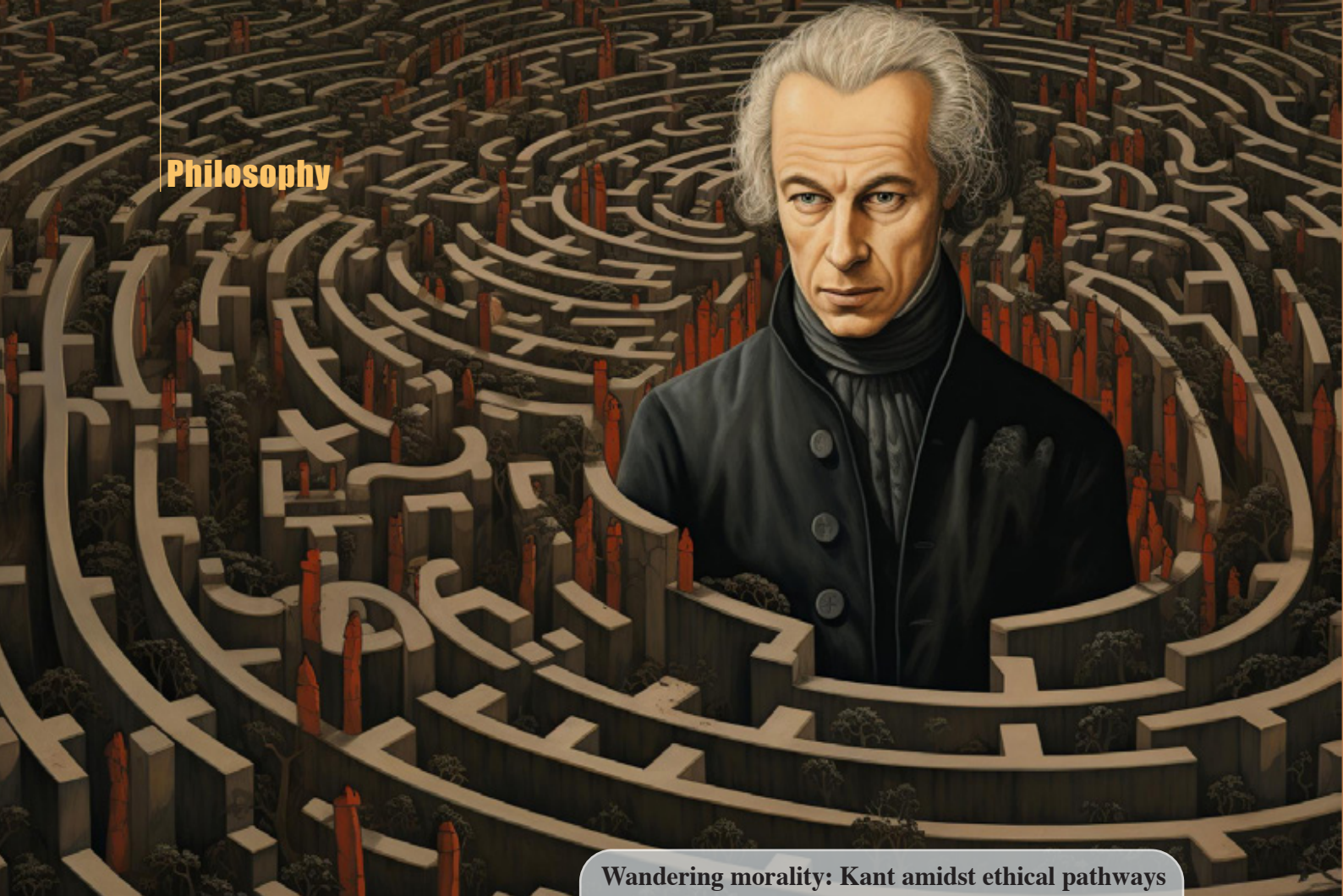
On the death of Carlos Bousoño

Without digressions, determinedly
you grew old like a river reaching the sea.
As one who reaches the sea and the sand,
you let go of the safety of the land.
You stemmed against the wind, resisting age.
Your spirit overcame and disengaged.
Your words became salty and filled with shells,
drifting in light, drafted on spells.
Young in its fervour, brother of the waves,
Your heart carried weight, wherever it braved.
Wherever it braved, you came into being,
as when morning dawns and night is fleeing
in a slim light, that appears, and again you know
of a new day's break and your life feels aglow.
You reached old age in the knowledge of silence,
in the power of reflection and the spirit of forgiveness,
with the insight to listen, to learn and find peace,
as the sea waves receive, hold on and release.
As the sea winds play with an errant dove,
so the spirit in everything enfolds you with love.
It carries you, written in sea, salt and wind
and in all that is forever entwined.



Carlos Bousoño, (born May 9, 1923, Boal, Spain—died October 24, 2015, Madrid), Spanish poet and critic, a leading theorist of Hispanic literature and member of the Royal Spanish Academy.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Wandering morality: Kant amidst ethical pathways

Reflecting on Morality

We can probably all agree that everyone in a group agreeing on something does not make that thing correct. And we can probably also agree that if we enlarge the group enough, there will be less agreement. Many moral debates centre on that second point: each party believes it understands what is correct and thinks the other party does not. But I would like to look at morality through the lens of that first point: it seems to me that our system of ethics is how it is because that is what we can agree on, not because that is what is right. My objective is then to sketch out a naturalistic idea of morality, how it works, and where it is headed.

PETER STIBRANY

According to Wikipedia, Queen Elizabeth the first launched England's first national public lottery in 1566 to raise money to repair the harbours. But the prize money was all paid back to players in 1569, making the exercise an interest-free loan to the crown. Even so, 'only 10% of the lots were purchased. Local elites were often hostile, because of distrust of the government and concerns about the immorality of gambling' (Dean, 2011).

The Ascot Racecourse, built under the patronage of Queen Anne, started multiple-horse races with betting by the spectators only in 1711. Governments passed

a litany of laws and regulations over the next three hundred years to curb gambling, but these culminated in 1960 when private casinos were made legal in the UK.

Today, there is a consensus that 'problem' gambling should be mitigated in some way. But gambling is morally neutral or positive. The argument goes that if someone is not hurting anyone, their enjoyment is a good outcome, and a portion of the money gamblers lose goes to fund good causes, and supporting good causes is morally positive. We also ought to respect other people's rational decisions. We must give them



Thomas Scanlon

the freedom to make choices as long as those choices do not violate the rights of others. The acid test here is whether we can wish for everyone to engage in ‘non-problem’ gambling as a social activity. Yes, we can. Many of us do. In short, we have agreed as a society that ‘responsible’ gambling is not wrong.

Thomas Scanlon elevated this agreement principle into a contractualist moral framework. In *What We Owe To Each Other*, he proposes, ‘*An act is wrong if its performance under the circumstances would be disallowed by any set of principles for the general regulation of behaviour that no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced, general agreement*’. But I see two problems with this approach. First, there is no guarantee that what we consider suitable for us individually will benefit our society in the long term. For example, in approving gambling, we imply (and the lottery ads affirm) that:

- It is good to get something while producing nothing to earn it.
- Pennies will never add up to riches; pennies should be risked.
- It is good to be rich. That is the acme of success. And it is bad to be poor.
- There is a better world than the one you are in, and a lottery ticket is your entry.
- If you do not win, you should keep gambling because you might win in the future; imagine the regret if your “numbers” came up and you had not bought a ticket.
- It is good for the government (i.e., for us) to take money from gamblers so we can get things we do not want to pay for through taxes (50% of the money bet returns to the punters in prizes, 40% is a tax, and 10% pays for administering the lottery).
- Gambling losses are what people without hope pay to buy hope; it is a straightforward voluntary transaction.

In agreeing that gambling is good, have we also implicitly decided that all these other things are good?



Bill Joy

The second and more significant problem for me in Scanlon’s argument is the ‘no one could reasonably reject’ part. What if someone in a community of gamblers rejects gambling as morally flawed, is the rejection ‘reasonable?’ Or is it a sign of insanity? Contractualists rest morality on agreement, and to gain agreement, they artfully engage both our envy and our pity to propose a symmetrical, or in their language, fair contract.

Symmetry And Asymmetry

Systematisers of ethics almost universally use symmetry to underpin their theories. A modern example is Peter Singer’s idea that we should value and act toward every child equally, whether ours, our neighbours, or a child on the other side of the world. But why stop there? Why not consider the trillions of people not yet born, as long-termists and effective altruists do? George Washington told the Continental Army before the Battle of Long Island: ‘The fate of unborn millions will now depend, under God, on the courage and conduct of this army’. He inspired them to give their utmost, even die, for future generations.

How does one weigh what we owe to a single person now against what we owe trillions of future people? Symmetry drives utilitarianism to madness. And yet, it seems that philosophers laud symmetry as the essence of morality and condemn asymmetry (inequality, discrimination, preference, and the like) as the essence of evil. And yet people are not fungible. We all may have the same value and dignity, but we do not have the same rationality and utility. Symmetry and asymmetry are both essential to moral judgement.

The Purpose Of Morality

I asked ChatGPT: What is the purpose of morality? The answer was:

‘There are many different theories about the purpose of morality. Some argue that morality serves to promote social harmony and cooperation by setting norms

Philosophy

and standards of behaviour that are widely accepted and enforced. Others contend that morality is a way of promoting individual well-being and fulfillment, by guiding people toward actions that are conducive to personal growth and happiness.

Another view is that morality is rooted in religious or spiritual beliefs, and serves to guide individuals toward actions that are in accordance with the will of a higher power or ultimate reality. Still others believe that morality is simply a natural aspect of human psychology, evolved over time to promote the survival and flourishing of our species. Ultimately, the purpose of morality may be multifaceted ...'

I do believe moral behaviour promotes social harmony and human flourishing. But harmony and flourishing are not the purposes of ethical conduct. And I agree with the religious idea that morality guides individuals in accordance with the will of a higher power, but that idea leads to no new insight.

The Hand of The Past

Beyond that, moral intuitions guide people to make better decisions before they have had the chance to learn from personal experience to understand why those decisions are better. Following moral 'oughts', whether that is an urging of conscience or written commandments, is how we are influenced by lessons learned over time.

But why are our intuitive moral judgements not absolutely compelling? For example, most societies today have ethical and legal injunctions against killing people. But in various ways, murder still happens. Optimists might say we have not yet evolved far enough, our passions are being tamed, and we will eventually converge on ethical perfection.

The Incomplete Evolution Argument

Our intuition balances long versus short timeframes, the degree of uncertainty of our predictions, and various other considerations. But the intuitive weighting factors we evolved may not be suited to our situation today.

We can point to other systemic moral failures traceable to a mismatch between our evolved psychology and our current situation. For example, we tend to undervalue long-term harms in preference to short-term gains, as demonstrated by our emerging ecological disaster, and we preferentially consume more than we produce, bringing us debt spirals and systemic collapses.

Arguably, our intuitive moral judgements need to be rebalanced in some way to fit our current situation. Philosophers point to reason as the balancing factor.



ChatGPT

But is reason up to the job? Our ability to understand consequences fades quickly as we project further into the future. And worse, rational capacities are not equally distributed among us, and we are subject to a host of cognitive biases, including one that makes us more confident when we know less. So, if you can see more clearly than I can that my current, intuitively good behaviour is ruinous to my long-term well-being or that of my society, we are set for a confrontation. Each of us has an instinct to think that the other is overly confident and wrong.

In short, even when there are correct answers, our ability to see them is, to varying degrees, compromised and asymmetric. Despite this, philosophers argue that we should decide the clash of reason and feeling in favour of reason. We should do things we reason are correct even if they make us feel bad in the short term, safe in the knowledge that everything will be well in the longer term. But they neglect to tell us who among us has the correct answer, assuming some of us do.

Is Consistency Right?

Another pillar of reason is consistency. Moral philosophers take the line that we should apply our ethical principles consistently. But in the absence of perfect knowledge, we could be consistently wrong. Arguably, a degree of inconsistency is an effective way to cope with uncertainty. The more uncertainty, the more value there is in inconsistency. In practice, we are pretty inconsistent in our moral judgements. And sometimes, we are moved beyond inconsistency to transgression.

Transgression And Perversity

Explaining the thrill of transgression is one of the core ingredients in successful moral theorising. But

transgression is just a nice word for what is common between perversion and eroticism; it is a stone in the shoe of conventional ethical theories. For most people, doing what is wrong is wrong; some call it a sin. Delight in it is even more wrong. But this intuition is just part of the mechanism that powers transgression. The allure of forbidden fruit is a foundational force in our psyche.

Transgression is evolution's way of recognising that there is no moral system to which we can cleave exclusively. After all, where there is a compact set of rules by which to do the right thing, evolution has found and implemented a solution. Our inconstancy is testament to the absence of a clear answer to the question, 'What ought I do?'

Of course, if everyone transgressed all the time, there would be chaos, so most people should be consistent most of the time. But it also makes sense that a few should have a different idea. It makes sense to spread bets to preserve the species for the occasion when the usual answer is disastrously wrong. It may be better for society in the long term for some of us to be selfish, duplicitous, insulting, and even violent. But we would be hard-pressed to agree this as a moral principle. It is not symmetric; it is not for agreement. The next question, perhaps in some sense the final one, is whether our evolved moral system will see us safely through our increasing abilities to kill ourselves.

The One And The Many

Concentration of power is certainly not new. But I would argue that it has been supercharged by technology. Individuals such as Jeff Bezos have gained vast wealth by using technology to give us what we want. But is it good for us to give so much wealth and influence to one person? Most people say no, we should leave world-changing choices to a democratic process. They intuitively want something more symmetric.

Others point out that sometimes, the majority is wrong. For example, without the decisions of a small number of plutocrats in the West and autocrats in the East, we would not today have any form of transition away from fossil fuels. And if we are going to concentrate power in the hands of only a few persons, why not pick those whose services we have most rewarded with money? But there are also technologies with which a small group could extinguish a large portion of life on Earth. We are already in a never-ending effort to keep the nuclear, chemical, and bacteriological weapons from proliferating; those were last century's gift to posterity. Nuclear weapons have no other uses, and even atomic power has been marginalised. But the new genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics technologies could end



Marshall McLuhan

disease, hunger, and toil; they will spread widely. Containment will be far more difficult.

Bill Joy, an engineer at one time famous in the computing world, pointed out in a Neo-Luddite position paper, *Why The Future Doesn't Need Us*, back in 2000, that genetic, nuclear, and robotic technologies could enslave or destroy humanity. He quoted Thoreau: 'We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us'. Critics said Joy was flogging a dead horse. Advances in computers and genetics could foreseeably give someone elected neither by vote nor money the ability to do much damage. If inconsistency and transgression drive our choices at the margins, can we survive with that much power available to individuals?

Emergent Morality

Marshall McLuhan's idea from sixty years ago that human society was developing an electric nervous system, a bit fanciful at the time, seems credible today. We are each becoming cells interlinked by social media. He did not foresee these links intermediated as they are by algorithms that encourage and prune the emergent social organism in ways difficult to understand. To the extent we live online, we live in an Orwellian world of centralised oversight. This oversight is intentional, consistent, and rational. However, its mechanisms are not public; most of what we know has been revealed by individual whistle-blowers acting, we suppose, on conscience.

Suppose we think of ourselves as cells of a vast flesh-and-software organism, a singular entity. The moral judgements of this entity will emerge from fundamental tensions analogous to those that drive us individually. But symmetry-based ethical systems will fail to govern it; they can not apply to a creature without peers.



Love & Politics: a Tanka

(Japanese extended haiku-like
verse-form: 31 syllables in all;
lines of 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 syllables,
rhyming ababb)

1 (LOVE-POET)

Love is life sublime!
So say we lovers, crooners,
We who'd spend our time
Banging dustbin-lids soon as
Strike up with you harsh tuners!

Give us the sweet stuff,
Love-songs, poems lyrical,
Not rough-house street stuff
Or verses satirical –
Why scant it, love's miracle?

For gods' sake spare us
That Brechtian sermonising;
Don't try to scare us
By all the time devising
Plans for the next uprising.

Just leave us piping
Those love-songs, lyrics graceful
Like ours, not sniping
Or letting fly a case-full
Of slogans in-your-face-ful.

So here's a handy
Tip from us: do please treasure
The love-struck dandy
Whose every lyric measure
Brings value-added pleasure.



CHRIS NORRIS

2 (ACTIVIST-POET)

Croon on, you luvvies!
Carry on cuddling, kissing;
'Push-come-to-shove' is
The one item missing
From all your commie-dissing.

You lyric poets,
Spare us your love-clamouring –
Surely you know it's
The bother-boots hammering
That message: 'quit yammering!'.

Sure, better tucked up
In bed with your darling-hearts,
Not getting sucked up
In it when the snarling starts,
Or batons on body-parts.

Just spare us a thought,
Us anti-racist fighters,
When we're up in court
And those race-hate inciters
Go free, like lyric-writers!

See how we're taking
The flak while you continue
With your love-making,
And how only our sinew
Holds back the thug who'd chin you.

So, love-bird, let it
Sink in: you're perching
On Cloud Nine, get it?,
And all your deep soul-searching
Won't stop the branches lurching!





‘FVTVRVM’ (2023) mixed media bas-relief (60x80)

Hope For A Better Future

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

The ability to run scenarios is perhaps the most human of all qualities. Daniel Gilbert, a leading Harvard psychologist, refers to the human brain as an ‘anticipation machine’ (see his 2006 book: *Stumbling on Happiness*). For example, theoretical Philosophy of Law uses foresight as a research tool into the human condition. It has the aim to build on what is pre-existing and to bridge the gap between human progress in all fields and the law that is most of the time reacting to these new developments.

There is of course a causality limit. Time flows in one direction. Law cannot regulate what is unknown or what has yet not come into being. However, philosophy of Law has the ability to ‘project’ analysis of matters that are likely to come into being at some point in time. In so doing it prepares the ‘knowledge’ basis for any legal prescription necessary to regulate a particular subject

matter. A projection of the future is not necessarily a prediction. This is an important point since whilst prediction is somehow *fictional*, projection, on the other hand, is solidly based on actual reality. So current trends and norms become the basis on which one can build this projection. The same applies to technology, medicine, economy, politics and a number of other fields. Foresight is extremely important when trying to prevent disasters, pandemics or economic crisis.

The first elaborate philosophy of the future was probably written by Plato in *The Republic*. The latter is a Socratic dialogue, written around 375 BCE, concerning justice (δικαιοσύνη), the order and character of the just city-state, and the just man. It is Plato’s best-known work, and one of the world’s most influential works of philosophy and political theory, both intellectually and historically. In the dialogue, Socrates discusses with

various Athenians and foreigners the meaning of justice and whether the just man is happier than the unjust man. He considers the natures of existing regimes and then proposes a series of hypothetical cities in comparison, culminating in Kallipolis (Καλλίπολις), a utopian city-state ruled by a philosopher-king.

Another similar work is *Utopia*, which is a work of fiction and socio-political satire by Thomas More, written in Latin and published in 1516. The book is a frame narrative primarily depicting a fictional island society and its religious, social and political customs. Among modern day futurists are Isaac Asimov, Nikola Tesla, Michio Kaku, and Ray Kurzweil.

As seen then, interest in the future and the attempt to predict what will happen can be traced back a long way through history. However, the first attempts at more systematic studies about the future were made in the US defence during World War II. Nonetheless, it was the political, social and technological transformations of the 1960s and 1970s that significantly increased interest in future studies worldwide. At this time, special institutes for future studies were established in many countries, including in Sweden where the Secretariat for Future Studies (predecessor of the Institute for Future Studies) was established in the early 1970s. The University of Oxford as well has such an institute: the Future of Humanity Institute (FHI). Academics at FHI bring the tools of mathematics, philosophy and social sciences to bear on big-picture questions about humanity and its prospects. The Institute is led by Founding Director Professor Nick Bostrom, who happens to be Swedish.

As R. Poli explains, a philosophy of the future sees the world as an unfinished process, as a continuous tendency toward new horizons. Within this process, what matters most is the tendency itself, more than its starting and ending points. To understand this situation, one needs an ontology of the not-yet, of being as processual, and therefore of being understood as an incomplete, still unfolding reality, indeterminate with respect to its endpoint, leaving room for entirely new determinations as well as for growing or maturing ones. A philosophy of the future provides guidance for distinguishing genuine from not genuine futures. Similarly, it distinguishes between utopia as focused on the endpoint and utopia as focused on everyday life, especially its humblest, tiniest aspects – which is a way of saying that the roots of the future are in the present, if only we learn to see them. (See Poli, 2019, *Anticipation and the Philosophy of the Future*, in Poli (ed.) *Handbook of Anticipation*, Springer.)

This bas-relief, which is part of a collection I was commissioned to create by the European Court of Justice with the theme ‘*in varietate concordia*’, portrays a couple, man and woman, the latter with child, pointing towards an unclear future horizon, which may be bleak or beautiful. The existential threat posed to humanity is truly caused by humanity itself. The idea behind this work is that we hold the key to our own future. We hold the key to the survival and well-being of our future generations. We need to start thinking more as a species. That is the only way we have left to give hope of a better future to those who inhabit this planet of ours.

The Wednesday

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A Desk



A desk, a chair and a whole world outside
To which you think you have something to say,
But that world is too busy and won't stay,
And what you say will only be decried.

So better far your inner life to hide
Don't let it all be trampled by the way
Or thrown away with rubbish to decay,
Or be revealed for others to deride.

A desk, a chair, a world of solitude,
Where you can meditate with inner calm
Such choice is in your power, if you so will.

There is no need for you to sit and brood,
A whole world lies within to be your balm,
So let your agitated mind be still.

Edward Greenwood



The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.

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