

The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

Psychology of Critique

After writing 'Critique of a Critique' in last month's issue, I realised I had not discussed the motivation for critiques. My main point there was the scope and limits of a critique. A critique is necessary, but it has to be approached in stages. It has to go from revolution to equilibrium, then to another revolution at a later stage. This is to avoid a constant turmoil, intellectually, socially and politically. I tried to say this from inside philosophy, but is philosophy well equipped to provide a critique?

I think that the philosophical tradition is not well situated to carry a thorough critique of social and political life. Literature, social theory and political economy are familiar with the idea of a critique. Even philosophical views that carry with them radical critique gain their force from the use they are put to in literary, social and political theory. Philosophy seems to deal in eternal truths and not social change. Take the battleground of metaphysics and theology: philosophy fought one set of eternal truths with another. The ideas of relativism and perspectivism took hold of thought only in recent times, but with strong opposition. Praxis - using thoughts as a vehicle of social change, philosophy that applied itself in the social sphere - belonged to Marxism and Critical Theory, which can be described as social theory rather than philosophy in the traditional sense.

The problem is that philosophy has been treated in a specialised sense, or what is known as Academic philosophy. Every other way of doing philosophy has been called 'soft philosophy', or literature, but it is literature that does provide the link between philosophy and social and political issues. The Continental tradition seems to abolish the boundaries between different disciplines, making it easy to move between philosophy, psychology, literature, aesthetics and politics. A recent event in Italy, Festivalfilosofia, in the middle of September, demonstrated the public need for a bridge between philosophy and culture. Alice Carnevali, who reported on this festival for euronews, said that there were two hundred events, including art

exhibitions, debates, conferences, movies, and theatre gigs; and more than fifty philosophers coming from all over the world. She concluded her report with the thought that '...Festivalfilosofia succeeds in mirroring the fractures defining our times and tries to provide us with the tools to better understand them'.

Critique does not come from an abstract philosophising but from an agent in the world who has motivation governed either by positive or negative motives. Little has been explored in this area since Nietzsche. He presented some useful ideas in this regard. They are more psychological in nature. He thought that thought could be rooted either in weak or strong characters. Criticism might come from an impoverished life or from abundance. They are reactive or active. All the negative terms were dominated by 'resentment', one that is rooted in the idea of revenge. One finds these attitudes in separate individuals or in some pressure groups. But this should by no means turn into a reactionary attitude of constant suspicion. That would be more a sign of a base character, rather than nobility of a soul.

My worry about this analysis is that it is based on an elitist, aristocratic view. Nietzsche would see in such social movements an attempt at levelling down, reducing every grand view to something small, local and common. However, most of Nietzsche's thoughts were written in a state of euphoria, giving that he was ill for most of his life and his belief that he would be in the same situation as his father who was ill most of his life and died young. He was writing at an incredible speed. I love his style of writing, especially his attempt at provoking strong emotions in his reader and I understand why he wrote quickly, given that he thought he did not have long to live. However, philosophy is the place of slow reflection and awareness that the individual philosopher's emotion or deeper psychology could affect their ideas and judgment. This is unlike science where objectivity is easier.

The Editor

Dynamic Being

Western philosophy presents experience in terms of subject-object. The advantage of this is that the separation between subject and object enables the subject to think about the apparently autonomous object. But this rational advantage obscures consciousness from the original living appearance, distancing the self from direct access to the original living impression. The article below argues that there is an alternative that emphasizes the unity of subject and object through lived experience in a world of becoming.

WILLIAM BISHOP

The subject matter of this article arises from a concern to understand one's relationship to life. Indeed, the word 'life' may seem like a simple concept, but a concept tilts us into rationality that helps us understand while distancing us from the living experience of what 'life' names. François Jullien asks in his book, *The Philosophy of Living*: 'Has thought yet been able to get a grasp on what living is?' The word 'grasp' is significant here, for as Martin Heidegger pointed out, the early beginning of Greek philosophy was pervaded by a period of transition where the receptive and contemplative mood engendered by logos (word) became concealed in its transition to logic, which he characterized as a mode of grasping for the purpose of control. We will come back to this.

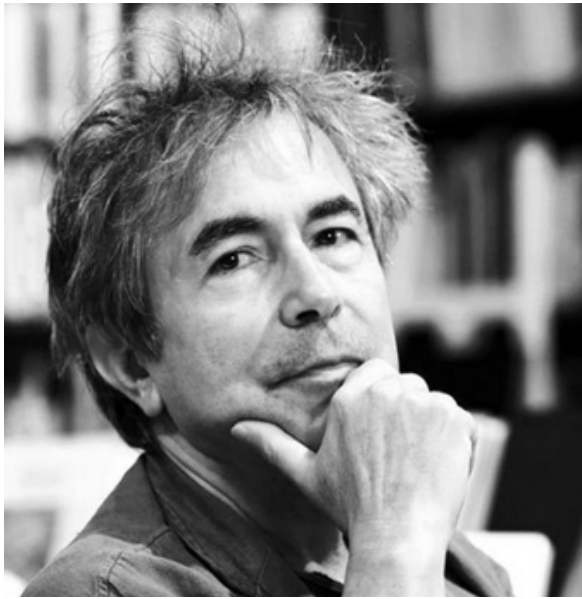
We each have a worldview, or particular stance in life, and this contributes to our sense of identity, which we may want to protect. Hence, figuratively speaking, our immune system may attack any new ideas coming our way liable to upset our stability. This defensive action is only human, yet evolutionary survival favours receptivity to 'foreign' ideas, which when absorbed, may cause adjustment in our worldview. Philosophy poses such a challenge, and phenomenology - which is relevant to understanding our relationship to life - presents this challenge. It is a not-so-new idea which, when generally understood, could have the impact of a 'Copernican Revolution'.

But what is phenomenology? One means of entry is to describe the experience of a person standing on a bridge over a flowing river and looking first downstream and then turning around and looking upstream, then imagining the flowing river below passing right through the body. This flowing river is a process that we can imagine as logos, as the flowing process of the creative Word, which enlightens our consciousness. The word, 'logos', has many meanings, which is consistent with the verbal, poetic, associative and lively nature of the ancient Greek language, but the meaning intended here is its creative power as Word, which conveys meaning.

This seems to be the meaning intended by Heraclitus (who was possibly the first person to employ the term).

The Upstream/Downstream Flow

Taking the directional flow of a river as our entry point to phenomenology, when we direct attention to the source of appearance, we arrive at a point where potential being becomes actual by appearing. Active being becomes present in consciousness as an event of joint appearance-meaning. This is the initial oneness of appearance at the living source (upstream). This is the pre-rational stage that applies to 'primitive humanity' and young children. But the story does not end here for with the evolution of consciousness human perception engages with the flow and, as it were, presents a barrier 'downstream' which arrests the flow, momentarily creating a representation of the appearance at the source. While the 'upstream' image (at the event of appearance) 'touches' the living source, the 'downstream' representation is a stilled image that confronts the observer-recipient in such a way that establishes a separate subject and object relationship. The advantage of this is that this separation between subject and object enables the subject to think about the apparently autonomous object. But this rational advantage obscures consciousness from the original living appearance, distancing the self from direct access to the original living impression. Unfortunately our current Western culture has settled itself in this 'downstream' position, with its discursive advantage, at the expense of distancing itself from living as a lived experience. Instead of experiencing the living present, we experience life in the form of representation, or existence at one remove from living experience. This may sound rather academic and abstract but its real life consequences are immense. Interesting in this respect, is a report of the impression made on a Native American on first encountering 'white men' of European origin. It goes something like this: 'Just look at their faces, they are mad because they think with their heads'. This implies that the Native American thought holistically with the 'heart', or contemplatively from the upstream source.



François Jullien



Heidegger

In theory our attention can shift to the point of origin of perception, which is like pure perception where what-is-there reveals itself as meaningful appearance. If language is ontological then appearance and name are connected. Without the name, the thing (appearance) would have no meaning. At this upstream stage the perceiver and perceived identify together in the event of appearing. This is the living experience of participation or immediate experience of the world. Martin Heidegger spoke of 'Dasein' as the being that is there for Being. This is the human being as a receptive conscious agent able to receive, register and respond to what is. When we understand the meaning that something is, then our understanding is just that meaning. So in the event of understanding, what is understood becomes itself in us. 'Downstream' we inhabit the world of ideas but 'upstream' the world inhabits us.

Goethe and his Scientific Method

Goethe appeared to be acquainted with the life-pole upstream. His approach to life was to see the whole in the part where the whole informs the part and the part reflects the whole. This is evident in his studies of plants. He immersed himself in his studies to such an extent that he retained the images in his memory. By employing observation and 'exact sensorial imagination' he was able to 'see' an archetypal form from which all plants are generated. This was the leaf form, taken to be a Protean form that could transform itself (through metamorphosis) into any plant while retaining identity as Proteus. It was through close observation through the senses combined with 'exact sensorial imagination' that he was able to envision the complete life of plant. This was like viewing the replay of a time-lapse film where

imagination combined with memory filled the gaps between 'stills'. This seeing of the whole plant as a development over time gives us the IDEA of the plant. This aesthetic approach to botany involved participation by the consciousness of Goethe in the plant. Consciousness made the connection, setting up communication between the two parties. Consciousness itself remains a great mystery, prompting the question: Who is conscious, and what is the nature of what consciousness is conscious of?

If the development of self-consciousness is the cause of the split between subject and object we need to ask: Who is this subject? We may assume that it is the taken-for-granted everyday self – but does this mask another deeper ontological self – a self that connects directly with Being? Such a question may leap beyond the world of everyday existence, but it is worth taking account of wider considerations; one of which is raised by Paul Davies in his book, *Romanticism & Esoteric Tradition*: 'Sacred grammar suggests that, viewed from the top, language as such is the Universe as spoken, breathed, sung, effused, by the singular, unpredictable Being. Only in "later" devolutions does language take on the mechanical/logical sequentiality by which it is commonly known to most of us.' Related to this thought, for Aristotle the human being was the place where meaning appears (topos eidon) and also the very appearing of appearance (eidos eidon). Life and language are intertwined. The Greek word 'on' is significant situated between verb and noun, combining both. Indeed it is worth imagining a largely verb-activated world and another world characterized by the knowledgeable noun. What a contrast reflecting the difference between



The flowing process of the creative Word

Greece at the time of Aristotle and the modern West!

Participation is a way of experiencing the world in immediacy. Participated lived-meaning derives from insertion in the world process of becoming. Dynamic Being is be-ing actively - becoming present as Appearance. Being is normally thought of as static but we are considering it here as 'becoming' – Being as potential has become actual and active. This active be-ing presents its appearance in the conscious human mind, and its initial appearance is what Heidegger calls disclosure, which becomes concealed by representation. Interestingly however, there are disciplines, such as Zen Buddhism, which try to eliminate the direct influence of the discursive rational mind to gain 'pure perception' of the world. One interpretation of this 'pure gaze' is that it is concentrated sensual attention, which leads to intuitive induction of meaning as insight. This correlates with attention maintained at the upstream source of the event of appearing where appearance and meaning show up in union. This is 'catching seeing in the act', where there is no separation between seer and seen.

Can Phenomenology Help?

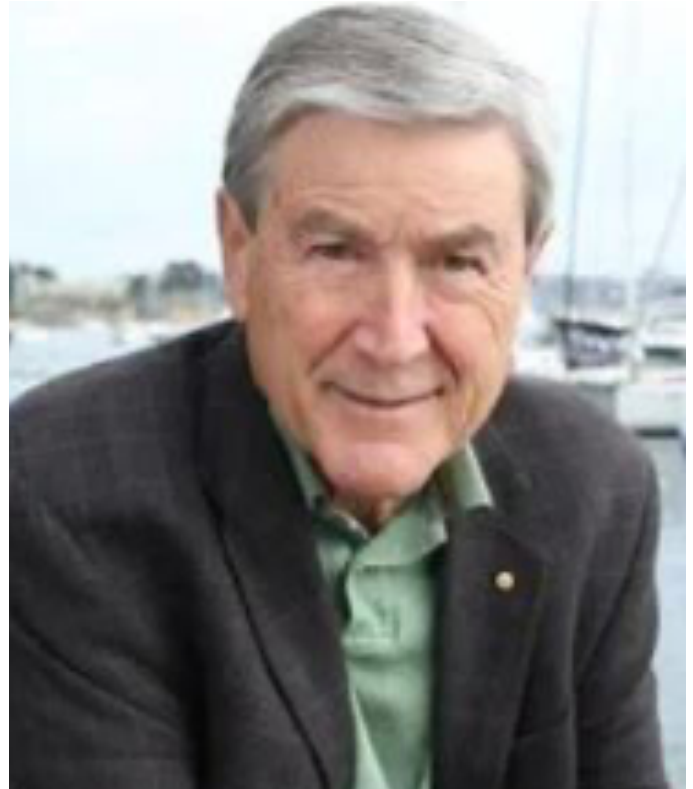
Can phenomenology represent a Copernican Revolution? Yes, if we include scientific and philosophical developments that have come in its wake. For it opens the mind to its own subtleties, pointing attention to the pro-

cess of becoming. It alerts us to the possibility of modern participation as a middle position of awareness between the pole of disclosure and the pole of closure. It highlights the consequences of downstream self-awareness, which can then be applied to an exertion of imagination to touch the source where appearance happens in living freshness. This is the significance of Goethe in relation to phenomenology: his 'exact sensorial imagination'. A modern form of participation will involve the conscious self through imagination inserting the 'I' into the communication process with phenomena, so that a phenomenon is participated as an appearance. This enables the 'I' from upstream to regard nature as 'thou' rather than 'it' – not as autonomous phenomenon but as an integral part of the process of Being's becoming – as life.

As implied by Heidegger, dominance by a grasping intellect could lead on to an instrumental view of life as mechanical and utilitarian at the expense of a conception of the living whole and one's place within it. This is why Heidegger thought that philosophy had moved away from consideration of Being and the reason why he wished to restore to contemporary relevance this fundamental direction of thought. The human being as Dasein, in the sense meant by Heidegger, has the advantage of not only being in the flow of becoming, but also is a knowing subject. Yet the knower, as subject, is subjected to an evolution of consciousness, which af-



Goethe



Paul Davies

fects knowledge, which in turn affects action. If at the highest level Being and Knowledge are One, humanity attains knowledge as a process. But as humans we are also gifted and troubled by emotions and ethical values. It would benefit humanity if Living could be balanced against the working of Mechanism, for it is as if, symbolically speaking, initially at the upstream source where potentiality actualizes as appearance, there was a garden supporting a tree of Life and a tree of Knowledge, but that the fallen tree of Knowledge has floated downstream, leaving the tree of Life stranded upstream. Now, in our present land of becoming, we need to restore reciprocity between these two tree-like hemispheres. This is not an easy task and life throws paradoxes in our way, such as: If a tree in a forest falls and there is no one there to witness it, will it make a noise? Subjectively speaking, no. Here we are, selves hardly known to our Self, 'thrown into a world' which confronts us with the problem of relating subject to object. But all is not fallen and lost, for where there is life there is hope.

Philosophy of Living

François Jullien remarks that there is hardly any philosophy that addresses 'living'. The nearest in his view is Montaigne in his reflective essays. In fact we really have to look to the arts to find attention paid to living, and we find this particularly in the novel and in drama,

by which means we can enter the living process of the subjective consciousness. These artful forms can transport us into other minds and worlds. Art can recreate living experience, and while vicariously living it, we may find it hard to distinguish the representation experienced vicariously from real life. There is ambiguity here, for fiction can seem to be more true to life than our own experience of it. The problem here may be an unconscious blending of upstream with downstream. This effect will be more pronounced with 'virtual reality', where our self may be liable to possession by the reality that is virtual, unless the recipient knows their self sufficiently to maintain self-consciousness even while in a virtual Wonderland with Alice. Yet original participation implies absence of self-consciousness (not of consciousness). Life is mysterious and challenging and it is especially challenging for the Protean human stuck downstream in a technological world to be able to manage change while retaining 'human values' pertinent to a self as subject. Coming to the rescue though, phenomenology points to the need for balance between direct insight and ratiocination so that intelligent living is not submerged under a represented world where paradoxically an external world exists in separation from a self. What is 'being' within the human being remains a question to be answered by Being, assuming that Being is identical with knowledge. At present we seem to peer 'through a glass darkly', but the future has yet to come!

Lake Spirits

The darkness of night fell like a mistake.

**The stars were flickering overhead
while the earlier voices lay dead.**

**Children were dreaming as if awake
and they wondered: are we alive?**

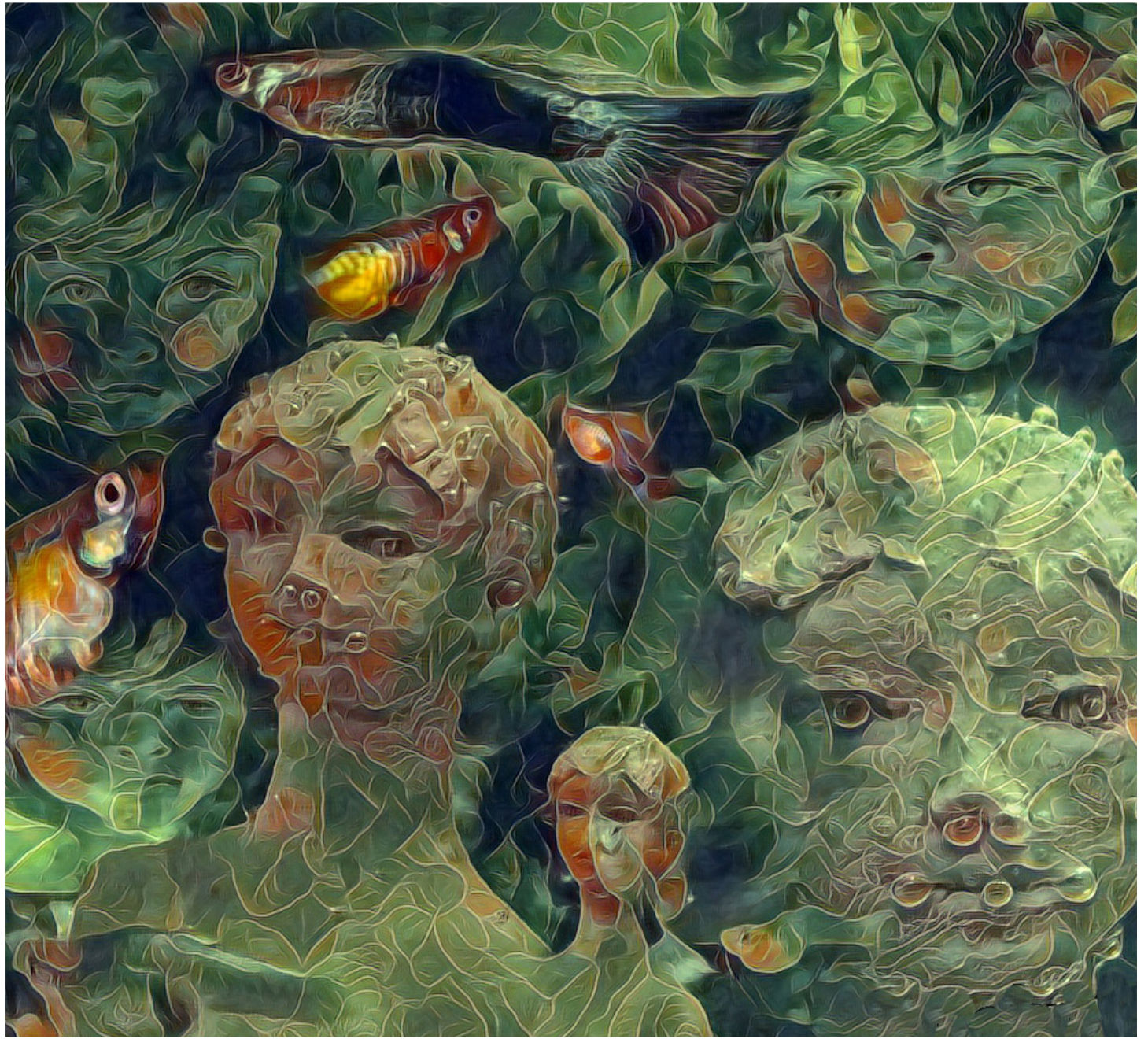
They had followed the spirits to dive

into the water of the magic lake.

**Their rosy features now lost in gloom
to a murky world beyond the tomb,**

**without a glowing daybreak to see
or the rising sun, the wing span of birds,
but fish without songs, so silently,**

**where blackness grew out of deep heartache
under the weeping willow branches
under the pale stars' sorrowful dances.**



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

On hearing about Badiou's *Being and Event*

On the sixth of September Chris Norris introduced the work of Alain Badiou, in particular his work *Being and Event*. Apparently, this includes an ambitious attempt to demonstrate the relevance of developments in the foundations of mathematics to diverse areas of general philosophical concern including science, politics, art, and love. Whilst it was not clear that these mathematical foundations are as reliable nor their relevance as straightforward as was suggested, some examples reveal interesting connections which might possibly encourage members of the Wednesday group not to sideline 'logic' as an irrelevance.

CHRIS SEDDON

We learnt that in Badiou's terms, 'Being' represents an established 'ontology' - an overarching framework determining how we think about and engage with the world - and 'Event' represents an unexpected and dramatic break away from an established ontology. These 'Events' occur in diverse 'conditions' or areas of experience, namely: science, politics, art, and love. Remarkably, Badiou believes that only mathematics can provide a reliable ontology - so he relates breakthroughs in science, politics, art, and love to corresponding breakthroughs in the foundations of mathematics. In common with most philosophers of mathematics he believes that these foundations lie in an 'axiomatic set theory' - that is, a set of more or less explicit assumptions about how things may be grouped together, or as he apparently puts it, how an 'inconsistent multiplicity' may be 'counted as one' in the form of a 'consistent multiplicity'. Apparently, he claims that a person or 'subject' only exists insofar as they are acting in good faith as a 'militant of truth' by challenging the contradictions of 'Being' at 'evental sites' to create transformative 'Events'.

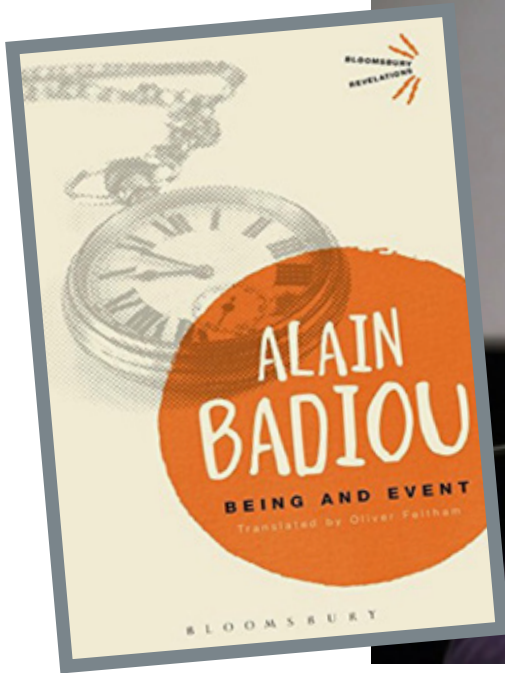
The Militant of Truth

Thus, St Paul on the road to Damascus was forced to confront his prior view of Christianity as a mere contradiction within established Judaism, pointing the way to a new international religion transcending all boundaries of ethnicity, nationality, class, or gender - to an extent. Copernicus is perhaps another 'militant of

truth', working on the 'evental site' provided by apparent inconsistencies in the observations of planetary motion, transcending the prevailing geocentric 'ontology'. Newton, Einstein, and Bohr may also be said to have helped create subsequent 'Events' significantly transcending the prevailing scientific world view. According to Badiou, such 'Events' also occur in politics - even if a new mode of 'Being' is not always immediately forthcoming. Thus, Marx may be seen as exposing the contradictions inherent in capitalist democracies, and the protest movements of 1968 may be seen as emerging from the 'evental site' provided by televised coverage of authoritarian repression. In the philosophical 'condition' of art, Schoenberg may be seen as a 'militant of truth', helping to promote a system of music with twelve equal tones which transcends the apparent contradiction of music such as that of Richard Strauss whose harmonic complexity threatened to obscure its original tonal key. Perhaps the introduction of perspective, impressionism, dadaism, cubism, and abstract art are also the result of 'militants of truth' working at 'evental sites' within the visual arts. In the philosophical 'condition' of love, Badiou gives the example of the birth of a child as an 'Event' requiring the new parents to reinvent their relationship, breaking out of their previous limited 'ontology'.

Sets and Infinit

Thus, political ideas of inclusion and membership are related to mathematical ideas



Alain Badiou

of set inclusion and membership. For example, the idea of a number being counted as one of the members of the set of even numbers is related to the idea of a migrant worker being counted as an equal member of the body politic as a registered citizen. The idea of the set of even numbers being included in the wider set of counting numbers is related to the idea of Jewish Christians being included in a wider set of Christians as a whole.

Badiou is particularly interested in the ideas of infinity explored by Cantor in the late nineteenth century. Newton was an earlier ‘militant of truth’ in this respect, challenging the contradictions in existing mathematics arising from the idea of motion at a point - necessary to explain the motions of the planets - by inventing the new mathematics of differential calculus. In Badiou’s terms the notion of a limit to an infinite series on which the calculus depends, is part of a new ‘ontology’.

In the above examples, transformations in religious, political, scientific, artistic and personal experience preceded rather than followed breakthroughs in mathematics. In most cases the relationship between the foundations of mathematics and other areas of experience is merely the unsurprising fact that the most basic logical ideas are relevant to any area of experience. The closest link was in Newton’s case, in which a scientific insight triggered a contemporary mathematical breakthrough - subsequent work in set theory merely

consolidated Newton’s mathematical ideas. However, it is clear that investigations into the logical foundations of mathematics dating from the late nineteenth century lead to developments in artificial language which enabled the recent revolution in information technology. In this respect it is ironic to hear the opinion expressed in Wednesday discussions - which often revolve around errors in logic and always these days use technology reliant on developments in logic - that logic is useless.

Clearly there is a connection between breakthroughs in the foundations of mathematics and breakthroughs in areas of experience, but this seems simply to reflect the unsurprising fact that the most general ideas of experience find expression using the most general ideas of analysis. But how reliable are the breakthroughs on which Badiou bases his ideas?

Consider first Cantor’s idea of ‘inconsistent multiplicity’, which Badiou apparently claims is ontologically prior to ‘consistent multiplicity’. Cantor wrote to Dedekind in July 1899:

‘A multiplicity can be such that the assumption of the ‘togetherness’ of *all* of its elements leads to a contradiction, so that it is impossible to regard the multiplicity as a unity, “a completed thing”. Such collections I call *absolute infinities* or *inconsistent multiplicities*’.

Presumably Badiou would not follow Cantor

in supposing that these so-called ‘inconsistent multiplicities’ exist in the mind of God, simply because they cannot exist in the mind of rational humans. He is more likely to follow Gödel in supposing that they exist in the superior irrational minds of humans, even though they cannot exist in the limited rational systems that those humans develop. In fact, mathematical systems do not rely on the existence of ‘inconsistent multiplicities’ any more than they rely on the truth of the sentence on which Gödel’s famous theorem focuses. Cantor’s original proof of the existence of different sizes of infinity does indeed rest on such a paradox, but there are valid alternative proofs.

The Axiomatic Method

It may surprise the non-mathematician that some mathematical ideas may be accepted by a majority, but not all, mathematicians. We are used to a naive certainty about the less fundamental mathematical ideas with which we are familiar. Part of the explanation lies in two other features of the foundations of mathematics on which Badiou has chosen to rely: the axiomatic method, and the extensional ‘ontological’ account of conventional set theory.

In the axiomatic method, instead of rigorously defining foundational concepts, certain statements exemplifying their use are simply adopted as so-called ‘axioms’ along with methods of valid inference as foundational assumptions. This method is useful when the foundational concepts are not well understood, and varying the axioms can, as Badiou suggests, lead to a greater understanding. For example, Euclid was not able to give a coherent definition of the concept of a straight line - he did not understand that it was an inherently metrical concept. He was however able to suggest some axioms about straight lines, including the famous axiom about parallel lines, which subsequent ‘militants of truth’ were able to vary to discover different forms of geometry. The axiomatic method is not suitable when the foundational concepts are already comparatively well understood and can be explicitly defined,

such as the foundations of logic. A disadvantage of the axiomatic method is that any axiom may be varied or added, which is then regarded as creating an entirely new ‘system’. Thus, any inconsistency that is discovered between axioms, or any disagreement as to their validity, will affect the whole system, rather than specific instances of a specific definition, as in a system based on explicit definitions. The difference is fundamentally one of clarity, since an axiomatic system can always be replaced by a defined system of greater generality.

In the extensional account, sets are regarded as identical if they have the same members. No account is given of how it is to be determined whether the members are identical, and no account is given of sets that only happen to have the same members. For example, if it happened that the Doctors of Philosophy in the Wednesday group were all the women, set theory could not distinguish between the concept of being a woman and being a Doctor of Philosophy. This shortcoming would have been glaring if set theory had not been developed within the context of pure mathematics, in which there are no contingent matters of fact, and in which the nature of identity is traditionally ignored.

It is tempting to end this article with a pointed question: why does Badiou, a revolutionary Marxist, choose to explain all progress in terms of sudden revolutions in a theory itself based on opaque and paradoxical conclusions from arbitrary authoritarian edicts? More constructively, applying his theory reflexively to itself, could it not be said that those presenting his ideas with only a limited understanding of what Cantor actually proved and how an axiomatic system actually worked were merely one ‘Event’ behind Badiou, and that Badiou, in accepting an axiomatic extensional foundation of mathematics, is merely one ‘Event’ behind certain other ‘militants of truth’ whose ideas may indeed be relevant within other ‘conditions’ of philosophy?

Happy 6th year anniversary The Wednesday

critical reflection

sharing thought

reasoning & argumentation

cooperation & responsibility

written & verbal communication

confidence & self-esteem

creative & independent thinking

Ibn Rushd [Averroes], The Andalusian philosopher, physician and judge (1126-1198) and a foundational source for post-classical European thought.

Valedictions: an update

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two;
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

John Donne,
‘A Valediction: forbidding mourning’

Donne’s compass metaphor: it works a treat!
What better visual analogue for all
Those fantasy-stocked travels, ports of call,
Flesh-stirring thoughts, and – as the fine conceit
Unfolds – the prospect, mission once complete,
Of setting out on the long homeward haul
When it’s not soul alone that now stands tall,
Nor the proud flags of Raleigh’s loot-filled fleet,
But that priapic tribute to the reign
Of Eros with its centre fixed to keep
The roving phallus harbour-bound again,
Its motions nostos-guided as they sweep
Sea-segments out and finally attain
What steered him through the months of fevered sleep.

We travel further, faster, fly apart
At speeds no compass-wielder could aspire
To match, devising routes so pent desire
Might find its end prefigured from the start
Of all our navigations and the heart
Take comfort, through vicissitudes as dire
As Donne’s, in working out what we require
Of post-Euclidean geometries to chart
The quickest way. Yet how should we compute
That passage from his compass with its twin-
Step halting progress or – an aid to suit
Such means – a compass-needle’s giddy spin
As ‘new philosophy’ bids us reboot
Our system lest some polar shift kicks in!



CHRIS NORRIS



John Donne

Clearly we stand in need of more advanced
Or quantum-savvy updates to achieve
That distance-shrinking trick of his, take leave
Of the 3-D coordinates that chanced
To fit the poet's needs as he romanced
His absent love, and help us now retrieve
From this long parting all we may conceive
Of our remote entanglement enhanced,
As if through soul-telepathy, by those
Conjugate particles sent spinning out
From singlet source on pathways that impose
A cosmic separation yet without
Disturbance to the inverse ratios
Whose holding good when measured stills all doubt.

Some experts say we draw false hope from this,
Take specious comfort from the quantum state
Where eigenvalues anti-correlate
At superluminal velocities
And therefore cannot (this is what we miss,
They say) allow us to communicate
Our loving thoughts and wishes at some rate
Beyond where spoiler Einstein rules we kiss
Resignedly goodbye. And should we then
Take up the 'hidden variables' idea
Of in-the-source spin-values fixed from when
The singlet splits to billion-fold light-year
Remoteness, still it seems the quantum gen
Says: no go – all the data make that clear!

Take courage: it's the orthodox QM
Équipe, signed up by Heisenberg and Bohr
To play for Copenhagen, who may score
On team-points yet be heard to grunt ahem
When, maths aside, the burden falls to them
Of giving those equations something more
Robust to work with than esprit de corps
Permits, or something they'd at once condemn
As downright heretic. It's back to Donne,
But Donne with knobs on, Donne whose intellect
Kept up with all the triumphs lately won
By science, chief among them the effect
Of new astronomy on old tales spun
By zealots of the geo-centrist sect.

Love, we may cleave to this, my realist take
On hidden variables, to lend a slant
More tolerant of absences, or grant
A sense of them that's less inclined to make
Of each long-distance stretch a looming break
In all the means by which we self-enthrall
To make-believe some distant confidante
Is, even now, just stirring half-awake
To an incoming call. I put it thus,
Doubt-hedged or duly qualified, to meet
You honestly on this: better for us
Not to stake every bet on those discrete
Entangled quantum ties where one odd plus
Or minus may cause hearts to skip a beat.



Love

14

Yet don't give up too soon on in-the-source
Spin-values, those that correlate way back
To my first setting forth. Then we shall track
The pilot-wave that set my journey's course,
Kept us in touch and, by its occult force,
Ensured our privacy since none could hack
Such public-key cryptography or crack
A code secure against the trojan horse
Of viruses and malware. Why then deem
Our situation better served or worse
Than Donne's, he with his compass-aided dream
Of rapt homecoming, we with dreams to nurse
By quantum riffs on that Odyssean theme
Rejigged for lovelorn travellers to rehearse.

It goes with me as with all those who bank
On love, luck, hope, a following wind, calm seas,
Quantum entanglement, or geometry's
Constructive consolations to outflank
The yawning absences. What else to thank
For sanity preserved, the stirring breeze
After long doldrums, and, along with these,
The thought-charged sensibility that shrank
Whole oceans in a trice. No leap of mind
But leaps thought-continent, discovers new
Synaptic routes, and promises the kind
Of dread-dispelling strength the poet drew
From those twin compasses that redefined,
What absence, love, and intellect could do.



Bohr

So with those quantum states: let no-one think
Them otiose, the wire-drawn metaphors
And images from physics that give pause
To sticklers who suspect an artful kink
Of thought yet serve, as once for Donne, to shrink
An irksome stretch of days, give lovers cause
For hope, and have them thus suspend the laws
Of solar time: 'eclipse them with a wink'.
The point goes wider: poetry does best
By love when feeling or emotion stay
In touch with thought, when passion thinks to test
Itself against what counter-passions may
Be thrown up by a thinking well abreast
Of science past and science present-day.

Say 'No concern of ours, that science stuff,
A tedious irrelevance', and you'll
Most likely end up playing jester-fool
To false imaginings and, soon enough,
Regret your role when reason calls the bluff
Of inchoate feelings never sent to school
With Donne's twin compasses or with the rule
Of thought-primed analogues more apt to slough
Desponding passions off. They err who speak
Of love as feeling's home-domain, a space
Where thinking takes back seat, and where you seek
In vain for wit's capacity to brace
Love's rapture or despair with its oblique
Yet spirit-healing charge. Else you'll back-trace
The line of wit from Donne's commanding peak
To Silver Age refrains on lyric commonplace.



‘Veritas’ - mixed media bas-relief (2022 - 30x30 cm) (Part of the collection ‘In Varietate Concordia’ being currently exposed at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

The Truth Is Out There

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

In his account of the Passion, the Evangelist John gives particular importance to the dialogue of Jesus with Pilate (John 18:33–38). Jesus treats Pilate as a soul who needs light and truth, and not as a judge. He is interested in the destiny of the man Pilate more than in his own destiny. With his appeal to receive the truth, he wants to prompt him to come to his senses, to look at things with different eyes, to place himself above the momentary dispute with the Jews. The Roman procurator understands Jesus’ invitation to him, but he is skeptical and indifferent about this kind of higher speculation. The mystery he glimpses in Jesus’ words frightens him, and he prefers to end the conversation. Muttering to himself ‘What is truth?’ he leaves the praetorium (Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa’s sermon).

In a post-truth era, the search for truth is an ever-growing existential quest. It is thus an all-pervasive and inter-disciplinary notion. Science, religion, philosophy and politics all try to find an accommodating compromise of what is truth. They do so in the hope of having a least common denominator with which they can make head or tail of the world around us.

Just to give one example, one may remember how concerned with truth Heidegger was when discussing art. Arguably many of the mainstream philosophers at some point of their philosophical journey tackle the issue of truth. Some see it as emanating from God, others as a sort of auditing between reality and perception.

This reminds me of the old X-Files adage 'The truth is out there'. Indeed, one issue the international community does not take seriously enough is whether it is true that we are not alone in this infinite universe. I say this not only because of my nearly childlike curiosity about the universe, but because I am sure that if we are not alone, such truth will shatter the current world order at all levels.

This possibility recently created turmoil in the United States and Mexico. In the former case a few months back David Grusch, who led analysis of unexplained anomalous phenomena (UAP) within a US Department of Defence agency until earlier this year, told the House oversight committee in Washington that 'non-human' beings had been found, as the issue of alien life received its highest profile airing to date. The US government had conducted a 'multi-decade' program which collected, and attempted to reverse-engineer, crashed UFOs.

In the latter case a few weeks ago Mexican lawmakers heard testimony that 'we are not alone' in the universe and saw the alleged remains of non-human beings in an extraordinary hearing marking the Latin American country's first congressional event on UFOs.

Now, whatever you make of these two very public and very high-level events one 'truth' (all puns intended) emerges as their common denominator, that if any of that information is true, the world may be faced with a truth that may plunge it into chaos, or not! Whether the bearings we currently have in science, religion, philosophy and politics may change drastically or not. But certainly this is something the world needs to consider now.

Moreover, the opposite of chaos might happen. We might actually unite as wars and conflict fade away in the face of the harsh 'truth'.

The words of former US president Ronald Reagan in his address at the 42nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, in 1987, come to mind:

'I occasionally think how quickly our differences world-wide would vanish if we were facing an alien threat from outside this world. And yet, I ask you, is not an alien force already among us? What could be more alien to the universal aspirations of our peoples than war and the threat of war?'

I let you ponder upon all this reflection in the hope that you will find some soothing truth of your own.

The Wednesday

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It Seems The Sun's Forever Gone



It seems the sun's forever gone,
So chilly is the day,
Yesterday it brightly shone,
But now the sky is grey.

Tomorrow's forecast cheers the heart,
Then it will shine they say,
I cannot wait for it to start,
Oh why does Time delay?

The mauve wisteria hangs its spray
Outside the sitting room,
So many blossoms fade away,
But soon the rose will bloom.

What marks much better than tick- tock
The passing of the hours?
The dial on the floral clock,
The leaves, the grass, the flowers.

Edward Greenwood



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