

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

Philosophy and Utopia

Last year, I attended a conference on the concept of utopia. Many names and ideas were mentioned, from Plato to Adorno, with a strong emphasis on politics. The question for me is wider than politics and involves the task of philosophy: Could philosophy have a vision of the future and of change? Are philosophers allowed to dream? Schiller thought that the play drive distinguishes humans from other creatures, but I wish to argue dreaming distinguishes us more precisely. I do not mean dreaming as in a sleeping state but as in daylight. What I really mean is the possibility of 'utopian thinking'.

However, I realise that the present historical context is very hostile to utopian thinking because of the dominance of information and technology and the heritage of positivism in philosophy in one form or another. But there was a time when utopian thinking warranted a book length reply by Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*. One aspect of historicism is the belief that history has a direction and laws that will lead to a better world. Popper opted for what he called 'piecemeal change', rather than utopian historical change. He is not alone in being anti-utopianism. Philosophy, for most of its history, has been anti-utopian. The further philosophy moved from mythology and mysticism the less utopian it became, but it might have lost the power to be imaginative and think of alternatives to the dominant paradigm.

Two factors seem to have killed utopian thinking within philosophy: the rise of science and the decline of religion on the one hand and the professionalisation of philosophy on the other hand. The scientific spirit infected philosophy, even when philosophy was viewed as an ideological tool to serve political change. Marxism insisted on its scientific credentials as opposed to other forms of socialism. Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, and Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* severely criticised socialist dreamers, such as Saint-Simon, Fourier and Robert Owen. As much as I appreciate a need for a clear scientific theory of change, based on 'empirical' analysis of history, I wish to argue for the right of these and other such thinkers to dream. The vision of these thinkers has stood the test of time and not the scientific spirit of their opponents. The scientific claims could be contested on logical, scientific

and historical grounds, but the spirit will stay alive and will inspire future history.

However, the most famous text on the role of philosophy in history comes from Hegel. At the end of the Preface of his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes: 'A further word on the subject of issuing instruction on how the world ought to be: philosophy, at any rate, always comes late to perform this function. As the thought of the world, it appears only at a time when actuality has gone through its formative process and attained its complete state. [...] When philosophy paints its grey on grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy, the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk'. This may give the impression that philosophy has been given a revolutionary role, that in a time of decline, philosophy, the owl of wisdom, will fly to point the way for a new beginning, a new dawn. But what Hegel meant is that this owl of Minerva, or philosophy, comes late and it looks back at a more complete picture of history, to make sense of it, and show why it developed in the way it did.

However, Hegel, in another set of lectures writes: 'This is nothing but the fundamental principle of philosophy, of free cognition of truth no longer cloaked by contingency. The age has at present nothing to do except cognize what is at hand, and thus to make it accord with thought. This is the path of philosophy'. This is in line with his slogan: 'What is rational is actual, and \ what is actual is rational'. It is more progressive than the first text, but still rationality comes at the end of a cycle of history.

It seems that philosophy is conservative in its socio-political outlook, but could it dream of alternatives within philosophy itself – the way philosophy is done, its relationship to poetry, feelings, imagination and metaphysics? In a time of a crisis within the discipline of philosophy (and the world), such dreams are not utopia but reality, not pointing towards an undetermined future or place, but an urgent task of the here and now.

The Editor

Spiritual Intelligence

Kant has imposed limits on human understanding. Since then, philosophy, under generations of positivist thinkers and philosophers of science, has become estranged from the idea of an intelligence that goes beyond the limits of external experience. But are we not missing on knowledge that is more important than only sense experience knowledge? What if there is, as the article below argues, such a spiritual intelligence? What is this spiritual intelligence? What is its scope? And how do we access it?

WILLIAM BISHOP

Angels were traditionally known as *Intelligences*; and the Latin root suggests that intelligence is the ability to understand. Now while the existence of angels may be contested it is doubtful whether comprehension can be attributed to the artificial (as in Artificial Intelligence)-unless a being or beings inhabit its system, because intelligence is an attribute of Being. Philosophically speaking it was Immanuel Kant who placed a limit on knowledge, saying it was not possible to know the *thing in itself*. While this may apply to ordinary perception and thinking, Rudolf Steiner demonstrated that when the ‘organ’ of thinking is developed, through special meditations, supersensible cognition becomes possible, shedding light on the ‘thing in itself’.

2 Arguably the culture we identify with has a conditioning effect on our awareness of life. In this respect the Spiritual Science of Rudolf Steiner yields awareness of a wide and rich living panorama into which our ‘personal world’ will fit. Grounded in science and philosophy, Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925) was highly clairvoyant yet employed the scientific method so that Spiritual Science is neither a philosophy nor a religion but *personally experienced* knowledge. It should neither be accepted blindly nor rejected, but considered with an *open mind*. Similar subject matter dealt with by spiritual science

can be understood and expressed in different ways. For example, the ancient Hindu tradition or the Cabala, both with claims to universality, may overlap with spiritual science, but arise from different approaches to *what is*. Central to spiritual science is the destiny of humanity in association with a divine supportive cosmos, where to *know oneself* means knowing one’s cosmic environment.

It is recognized that a person can have a deep emotional investment in the world conception they have come to adopt. While this is to be respected it can act as a defensive wall against unfamiliar ideas. Steiner fully accepted that anyone educated in scientific materialism could not logically (through the assumptions made) admit existence of a supersensible realm that interpenetrates the material world.

Overview

Spiritual Science provides an inclusive perspective on humanity and the cosmos and reconciles the world accessible to the human senses and intellect with the supersensible world. Building on ancient knowledge it relates this to the current stage of human consciousness, integrating everything within the whole in the context of evolution. Controversially it understands reality



Rodolph Steiner



Immanuel Kant

as *relationships of beings*. It is inclusive rather than exclusive as in Modernism that deliberately breaks with the past, understanding the material world to be created through the acts of (supersensible) beings from the ‘domain’ of Being, so ultimately matter exists through the force of beings (etheric forces). At the present time we live in a challenging time that undermines traditional beliefs and patterns of life. This process of change can be disorientating, but Spiritual Science can usefully provide direction for any person asking the triple question: Where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Cosmic Perspective

The biblical account of Genesis is regarded as figuratively true, with evolution resembling an organic process with cycles, repetitions and transformations in a progressive movement more in the manner of a spiral than linear progress. Each culture and religion have their place and the developmental process can be pictured as a journey from Paradise into a Fall to Earth and then incremental ‘rise’ to a New Jerusalem. Humanity is part of the cosmos of Being – a great chain of being or spheres within spheres of levels of consciousness and being. The Holy Trinity figures above nine divine hierarchies (intelligences) beyond the human being. Humanity has been created (by the divine intelligences) to become a tenth divine hierarchy with qualities of *freedom* and *love*. The divine world is eternal and so a temporal-material world has been created in which humanity can evolve. Creation is a process that includes development over eons of time. Our current Earth phase supports reincarnation of an individuality as a means for accruing experience for achieving this divine intention of a tenth divine hierarchy.

The historical process reveals that initially the human being retained awareness of the spiritual dimension to life (retention of supersensible vision) but through the process of development this was lost, and a condition arose where human vision became limited to the world accessible to the senses. This meant that only belief and myth remained as the legacy of the previous experience of a supersensible world. In time, with vision limited to the physical world, even beliefs and myths became suspect. This is today’s condition where a deep and penetrating materialism risks a total denial of reality to anything beyond the material world. Such a position unknowingly allows *adversary* supersensible beings to influence humanity at subconscious levels, applying pressure to follow their agenda. It is incumbent on Spiritual Science, from its perspective, to make this known since this is a *real* threat to the future of humanity. The current feeling of separation and distance from a supersensible spiritual world stems from the deliberate intention of the divine creator beings to provide a non-intervention space to allow the development of freedom. There is high risk in establishing a hierarchy of freedom and love which involves allowing autonomy in order to enable the development of freedom set against adversary friction and pressure. Success cannot be guaranteed.

The Four Worlds

The human constitution is best understood in the manner of a refined ancient Greek and medieval view than the atomistic point of view of scientific materialism. In this earlier tradition *four states of matter* weave the fabric of the world: solid, liquid, gaseous, and heat (fire). The earthly human being is comprised of these four ‘bodies’.



From Paradise to Fall

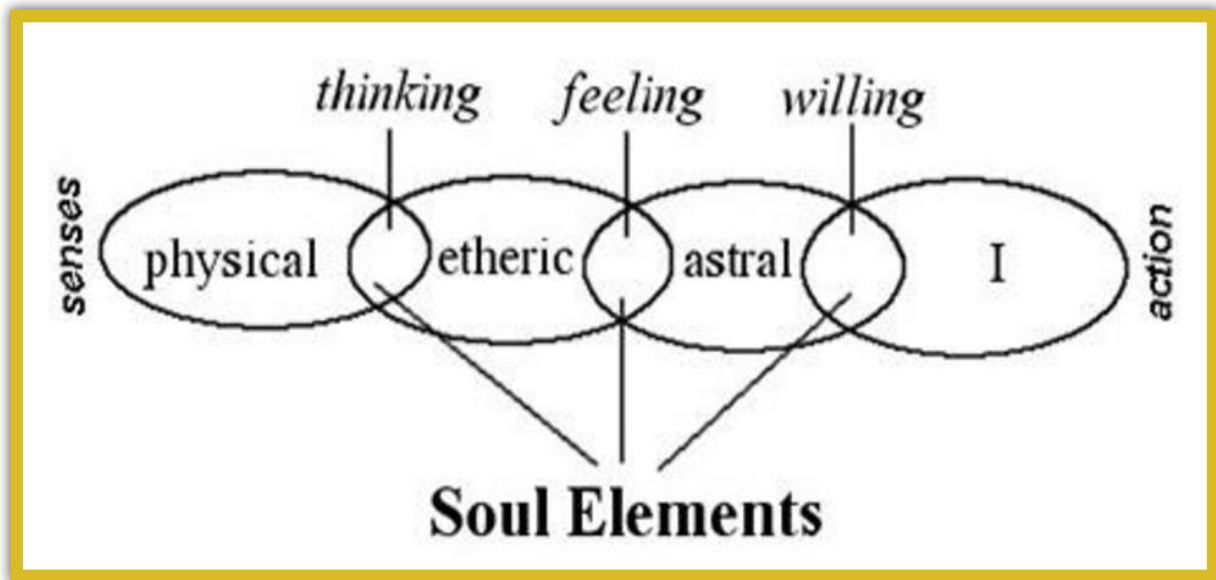
They can be distinguished from each other yet maintain cooperative unity. These four bodies identify with four worlds or levels of being: the solid to the mineral world; the liquid body to the energizing ether; the body of air to the soul world; and fire (temperature) to the ego ('I', self, or spirit). Only the mineral body is visible to the senses. And this complexity of the human constitution increases when a threefold system is distinguished: the head, rhythmic system, and metabolism-limbs. These three organic systems are associated sequentially with the soul faculties of *thinking*, *feeling*, and *will*. These interrelate as the *nerve system* (head - thinking), the *rhythmic system* (chest - feeling), and the *metabolism-limbs* (will). Interaction between the poles is mediated through the central rhythmic system (heart and lung).

Consciousness

The 'Great Chain of Being' is a useful concept with its hierarchy of levels of consciousness. With the human being's four interacting levels the mineral level (the nerve system including the brain) dampens the living element in perception, diverting it internally to a subconscious level. Consciousness relates to the astral (star) body (psyche or soul) that 'houses' *thinking*, *feeling* and *will*. Thinking is a supersensible process reflected in the brain and the impulse behind thinking is a powerful creative principle. Heraclitus called this the 'Logos': that which flows and attributes meaning to

things. Creation as a world process (or 'Word' process) is continuous. The Greeks before Plato experienced a participatory consciousness that engaged the world process - a living world of the verb. Their experience differed from ours, characterized as it is by a sharply outlined noun-world, the end result of a living process ('left brain'). One is lively and the other fixed in a spectator mode of subject-object due to an intervening self-conscious ego. This exerts a strong influence on how we perceive the world. But thinking is capable of metamorphosis to higher and more penetrating levels, known as *Imagination*, *Inspiration*, and *Intuition* (which involves merging of the ego in the 'other').

Early Greek culture demonstrates a vital turning point in the evolution of consciousness. For Plato ideas were captured in concepts yet there was still the sense of living flow, but Aristotle (Plato's former pupil) introduced analytical logic. This period coincided with a loss of perception of the supersensible world and the dominance in cognition of intellect over feeling. This change in emphasis from a supersensible to an essentially material basis for life has led on to a deeply materialist view of the world. But independence from direct influence of the divine powers was necessary to enable humanity to internalize the spiritual compass that previously came from outside. Socrates with his daemon exemplifies the point of this transition. Prior



The Four Worlds

to this the Furies acted externally on people but this influence was transformed into Conscience.

Evolution is seen to be influenced by cosmic patterns produced by different groupings of beings (forces). The sun focuses and projects these forces, and due to the recession of the sun around the zodiac (seen from Earth) the earth is progressively exposed to different influences. These influences from the animal circle (zodiac) were clairvoyantly known to previous ages. Now the cosmic cycle takes 25,920 years (a Platonic Year) and the rate of recession is one degree in 72 years. A cultural period (of 30 degrees) is therefore 2,160 years (25,920 divided by 12). It is relevant to us here that the early Greek period transitioned from a previous *Sentient Soul* epoch (characterized by feeling) to an *Intellectual Soul* era (head with heart). Odysseus is an early representative of the *intellectual soul*. The transition to our present *Consciousness Soul* (analytical with access through intuition to the spirit) began in the fifteenth century so the next change will begin around the year 3,570 (an era to be influenced by the higher self). The 'higher self' relates to the higher ego (the not 'I' but the divine in me).

Individuality

The individual is a microcosm of the macrocosm, which means there is correspondence between a human and the cosmos. At birth there is a hereditary influence from the parents jointly with a spiritual influence arising from previous incarnations. A complete human lifetime from birth to death includes a pre-birth preparatory period spent in the supersensible spiritual world; a useful analogy here is with the length of a day that includes

daylight hours plus the night to complete the 24-hour cycle. Correspondence with the cosmos can be seen in the roughly 70-year human life span, which corresponds to a 'cosmic day'. This relationship is consistent with cycles of reincarnation of the same individuality under the guise of different personalities or masks. (Typically, an individual incarnates once as male and once as female within a single cultural epoch.) It is interesting to note that Plato acknowledged reincarnation and observed that at birth all past memories were 'forgotten'. The object of the Earth phase of cosmic evolution is to develop the implanted divine seed, which involves the steady transformation of physical matter into spirit. Here the just law of cause and effect (karma) operates within life and successive lives.

Human life is like an organically unfolding time-organism similar to a living plant. Life itself consists of rhythms. Two powerful ones derive from the 7 moving planets (includes sun and moon) and the 12 signs of the zodiac. The correspondence here is that a human life is subject to 7-year developmental phases: 0–7 physical body, 7–14 the enlivening etheric body, 14–21 astral body (soul), 21–42 the ego (this includes 21–28 sentient soul, 28–35 intellectual or mind soul, 35–42 consciousness soul). These developmental phases also correlate with changes in historical epochs. Our present post-Atlantean era consists of seven cultural epochs: Ancient Indian (ether-dominant), Persian (astral-dominant), Egypt/Chaldea (sentient soul), Greek (intellectual-mind), Anglo-Saxon (consciousness soul). This relates to our present epoch as the 5th cultural epoch of the 4th era (post-Atlantean) of the fourth planetary 'embodiment'.

Challenge Of The Times

The times we live in challenge us to become aware of the supersensible dimension to life. But what can be known depends upon possession of the relevant capacity for knowledge. Imaginative vision can be developed through disciplined meditation now although this will develop in the course of evolution, enabling humanity to find unity in a common experience of the world (analogous to the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth).

There are essentially two opposing streams of spiritual beings. One seeks to extract people from the reality of the material world with enticement into an illusory world, diverting people from a progressive earthly path. The other limits an individual's horizon to the gravity-bound material world, derailing future human development by imprisoning participants in a material domain. These oppositional forces are powerful, and they sometimes cooperate. Intervening between these two forces on behalf of humanity is the human archetype (in whose image the human is made), the 'Alpha and Omega' supporting humanity for the duration of the Earth phase of cosmic evolution. Arguably the world of virtual reality exemplifies cooperation between the adversary powers where material technology works in union with illusion. Indeed, this technology can create such a powerful illusory world with the potential to substitute for the *need* for the reality of the natural and spiritual world.

Sub-Nature

There are currently four ethers that have come into being in coordinated sequence with four states of matter in the course of four planetary incarnations. These are *warmth, light, chemical-number, life*. It is understood that some adversary cosmic beings commandeered part of these ethers in the course of evolution and pressed them down below *Nature*, transforming them into forces of *Sub-Nature*. *Light* ether became electricity, *chemical* ether became magnetism, and part of *life* ether became the nuclear force.

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As humans we relate positively to Nature and to Super-Nature (the supersensible world) but sub-nature for humanity is an alien anti-life region. Avoidance of total seduction by the forces of sub-nature demands an equally active engagement with Super-nature. Hence the importance of awareness of the supersensible and of spiritual intelligence. The leading being of the *grounding* forces possesses penetrating cosmic intelligence yet lacks feeling, unlike the leader of the forces of levity that personifies emotional feeling and egocentricity.



The Representative of Humanity

Above: The 30-foot wooden statue of *The Representative of Humanity* at the Goetheanum, Dornach near Basel, Switzerland. Note depiction of the illusory powers above and the mineralizing, deathly powers below. With powerful gestures the Representative holds them apart and in balance against each other. This points to the central role played in evolution by the Spirit of the Cosmos (related to the sun) in becoming the Spirit of Earth for its duration for the sake of human redemption.

Activities

Numerous practical applications have arisen from intelligence invested in Spiritual Science. These include *education* appropriate to the developmental stages of the child and young adult; *agriculture and farming* where biodynamic methods utilize the dynamic forces of the cosmos; *medicine* which complements modern scientific medicine; Goethean *science* which utilizes the human being as the essential scientific instrument. Contributions have also been made to *religion*, the *arts* (essentially music, drama, painting, speech, eurythmy, architecture), and to *society*. Each of which is worthy of detailed study in its own right.

Appreciation

Edward Greenwood at Ninety

Edward Greenwood is the most senior member of The Wednesday group. He is ninety years old this month. However, it is not the number of years that counts but the activity of the mind. Edward has just published his memoirs and a book on tragedy. Here are some reflections on his life, work and poetry.



RAHIM HASSAN

It was in 2018 that a friend of mine told me about Edward Greenwood's interest in writing for *The Wednesday*. We got in touch by e-mail and he sent a poem (Against Plato) which I published in issue 16 (14.2.18). It was the start of a fruitful cooperation that has grown stronger with time. Since then, Edward has contributed a long list of poems, articles and talks on various topics in philosophy and literature. The year before the covid lockdown, he started travelling from Canterbury to Oxford to meet the group at the Opera Café and we used such occasions to ask him to give talks. He always obliged and his talks were enjoyed by the group. Since the lockdown in 2020 the group has met weekly via Zoom, and Edward has contributed a good share of talks and discussion. I am always amazed by his extensive knowledge of a wide range of topics and his excellent memory. His large library is always on hand to supply references.

Edward Greenwood was born December 23rd 1933 in Lancashire. He left his hometown of Nelson in 1951 to study English at Oxford. He wrote an undergraduate thesis on Matthew Arnold and had a life-long love of Arnold's poetry and critical writings. He named his first son Matthew. After Oxford, he took several jobs, including a librarianship at Keele University, before taking lectureships in New Zealand, coming home to Glasgow University for two years, and moving to the then newly founded Kent University at Canterbury in the mid-sixties. He lectured there in the English department until his retirement. He still lives in this lovely Cathedral town.

Edward has a special talent for learning languages and a keen interest in philosophy. Wherever his work took him, he struck up good relationships with colleagues who were teaching, or speaking, foreign languages and learned those languages from them. It is now familiar

for the group to hear him reciting poems in classical Greek, Italian, Spanish, French, German and Russian. He is also well versed in the culture and literature of all these nations, with a special admiration for the Greeks and a dislike for the Russians, culturally. However, he wrote a book on *Tolstoy: The Comprehensive Vision* (1975) and went to Russia to visit Tolstoy's house at Yasnaya Polyana which is now the Tolstoy Museum.. He was also a visiting lecturer to US and German universities.

His love of the Greeks, especially in his new book on *The Nature of Tragedy* (2023), is the antidote to a Christianity to which he strongly objects. This view is in line with his love for Nietzsche. Both Edward and Nietzsche are staunchly anti-religion. In fact, the argument of his book on tragedy centres on the contrast between the worldview of the Greeks and the Christians.

Poetry has a special place in Edward's life. He has published one collection, *Unfrozen Leaves* (2017), but he has hundreds of poems waiting to be published in one or several collections. Recent tragedies in his life, the loss of his second son, also named Edward, and the death of his wife Barbara four years ago, have given his poems a melancholic feeling. This has been exacerbated by his advancing age, although he enjoys good health and a Nietzschean spirit that pushes him towards more creativity in poetry and thoughts.

On behalf of *The Wednesday* magazine and group, I wish Edward on his birthday Many Happy Returns. Cheers!

- You can read all Edward Greenwood's poems and articles published in *The Wednesday* on our website (www.thewednesdayoxford.com). Please use the Index and filter by author for Edward Greenwood.

Sphinx Moths (Sphingidae)

Time is not essential but a recurrent dream,
as Sphinx moths abandon
their hideouts to greet the sparkles of dusk
in the shaking veins of twilight,
searching for pollen around the porch lamp
attracted to the sweet scent of red valerian,
honeysuckle, jasmine and buddleia,
a plentiful supply of nectar,
before darting to the next blooms.

We look, fall asleep and dream
our regrets, again and again rising
as unsubtle as the sphinx moths.
They are building up time
of each night passed, repeatedly,
never to forget, as another night
is always falling, only dawn
will hasten their departure,
recall them to the nooks and crannies of trees,
paint them one with the patterned bark,
where they are recalled by the tree spirits
and become their secrets again.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Consulting the Delphic oracles

In Praise of Parables (Keatsian Sonnets)

. . . so that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should turn, and their sins be forgiven.

Mark IV, 12

Each of them makes the parable a bit like a riddle in a folktale, where to get the answer wrong means perdition; but [Mark] and [Matthew] distinguish them. One says the stories are obscure on purpose to damn the outsiders; the other, even if we state it in the toughest form the language will support, says that they are not necessarily impenetrable, but that the outsiders, being what they are, will misunderstand them anyway.

Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy*

By parables alone we hit the mark.
Go wide, oblique or slant if truth's your aim,
Not straight like those who'd get the sense off pat.
Best leave at least some readers in the dark
If light's to dawn for others, if your game
Of hunt-the-symbol's not to see the sheep
Outnumber goats by millions: can't have that!
It's up the Eden-tree straight readers bark,
Their trust in honest dealers that's to blame:
Why think you'll get the point right off the bat?
Let parables ensure you always keep
Some secrets in reserve, don't rush to spill
The beans in one enigma-busting heap,
But let the truth-curve stretch out as it will.



CHRIS NORRIS

It's truth's long odyssey, that lengthening arc,
Or error's asymptote, the traveller's name
For never ending up quite where it's at,
Not having – wanting – anywhere to park
Your nostos-seeking self without the same
Old sense of compass-points that start to creep,
Directions wide of any habitat
You had in mind, or memories that hark
Back to a point just wide of whence you came
And call it 'home', though with the caveat:
'Go that way and your surest route will sweep
The largest area out, a space they fill,
Those quicker options that may overleap
Your parabolic curve yet fall short still'.

That shortfall tells the plain-truth seeker why
It's parable, not allegory, they chose
To share the gist with readers fit though few,
Those riddlers, Christ to Kafka, who'd supply
No four-fold exegetic key, or those
With truths to tell who none the less preferred,
Like Kierkegaard, to have their point of view
Not come across directly, eye-to-eye
With all-too-trusting readers, but disclose
Itself by stages, carrying them through
Successive modes of error till each word
Bears its intended sense, each mise-en-scène
Assumes its proper role, and truth deferred
Strikes home in souls elect or born-again.

Still let's admit it's Kafka's tales that try
The patience of a saint, or one who goes
The Kierkegaardian long way round yet who,
When the salvation-chips are down, gets by
On Søren's word for it. 'Let God dispose',
They think, 'and let the author's statements gird
My leap of faith, not have me join the queue
Of pseudonyms, those weaker souls who fly
To some face-saving doctrine that bestows
Both states, the Godly and the well-to-do'.
What's more: 'If Søren's notions seem absurd
To common sense or reason, then amen
To that – faith rules!'. Yet Kafka shows they erred,
Those fideists with their plain-truth-telling yen.

A grievous fault, misreading, if it's thought
To go straight to the heart of things, the one
And only truth, by closing every route
That might proceed by way of errors caught
And held in mind, or insights that have run
The gauntlet of misprision, or – the case
With artful exegetes – the overshoot
Of subtlety that sells intention short
Yet learns thereby how justice may be done
Through parable; how its provisions suit
Our need that text and reading have the grace,
Between them, to conserve what room for doubt
Or second thoughts might yet require we face
Continued calls to wait the meaning out.

Just think how those Romantics fared who bought
So deeply into it, the doctrine spun
By advocates of Symbol who'd recruit
The powers of mind and nature in support
Of their transcendent vision – 'let's have none
Of those prosaic allegories!' – yet base
Their claim on time-bound details that confute
The notion of a language somehow wrought
To such high ends. Read on, and they've begun:
Those tell-tale metonymic slides that mute
That crucial metaphor; the covert trace
Of allegory in symbols that, without
Its aid, would gesture vainly to embrace
The mystic state they strive to bring about.

Still best admit that parables can serve
The obscurantists and the mystagogues,
Those who, as with Mark's gospel, make a prime
Consideration of the need to swerve
So far from plain intent that one who logs
On as the handbook says, or deviates
Back into sense so insights come on time,
Will thereby end up way behind the curve
And apt to call down a new plague of frogs,
Or show they're stuck in some old paradigm
Whose literalism clearly indicates
A navigator tight-bound to the mast
Of allegory that, line by line, dictates
Old bearings, routes and sea-maps far surpassed
(Parabolists declare) as sense migrates
And classic readings find themselves out-classed.



Waiting for Godot

Acknowledge, then, the peril every oeuvre
Confronts in parable; how clever-clogs
Or wily exegetes can always mime
Its passage en abyme, keep in reserve
All the interpretative wheels and cogs
That allegory supplied, and see what waits
Beyond the next Omega-point, sublime
Or trite. Here Godot's messages unnerve
The shrewdest hermeneut and failure dogs
Ecumenists who'd have new readings chime
With old as love's text-ministry sedates
Odium scholasticum. No built-to-last
Consensus but some parable creates
Lacunae and enigmas fit to cast
All things in doubt, disturb the going rates
Of sense-exchange, leave no foundation fast.

Take them as parables, those tales of woe,
Of visions interrupted, dreams that fade
On revelation's cusp, prophetic tones
No sooner struck than forced to undergo
Some gross quotidian mishap, such as made
Poor Coleridge break his reverie and quit

The road to Xanadu (now mobile phones,
Back then the Porlock call). Just goes to show,
Like those semantic games that Wordsworth played
With his great keyword 'sense', how logic groans
Beneath the strain of finding syntax fit
To put across a pantheist doctrine bound,
Should it hold good, to heal the aching split
Of soul from body: paradise new-found!

Let parables instruct us: what we know
Most surely is how often we're betrayed
As much by visionaries who make no bones
About the wondrous insights they'll bestow
(‘One life, within us and abroad’), conveyed
Through symbol's agency, as by the writ
Of sober sense which runs: when language owns
No Porlock-share, denies what it must owe
To mere contingency, the daily trade
Of poetry with commerce in the zones
Of chance, metonymy, or mother-wit,
Then you'll find cracks in any vision crowned
By symbol's vain refusal to admit
What ties all thought to its material ground.



Xanadu

It's in the lifelong run-up to life's end
They draw apart, those symbolists who'd seize
A glimpse of the eternal at each stage
Of temporal existence and so lend
Their finite lives a vision fit to ease
Death-jitters; and parabolists who deem
It best to count their blessings, not assuage
Such fears by some false promise to transcend
Life's element, some angel-eye reprise
Of body's mortal span, but let old age
Pay its respects to both (the late-Yeats theme),
Count flesh a 'tattered coat upon a stick',
Bid soul to 'clap its hands and sing', yet team
Them up as body slows while soul stays quick.

A primal rift, not one that thought could mend
By taking body's part, or body tease
Adroitly out of thought by having sage
Reflection grant how sense may apprehend
Such truths as must elude the devotees
Of Geist, res cogitans, or the old dream
Of some panpsychist ruse to disengage
From such disputes by having mind extend
Beyond the human skull. How then appease
Soul's yearning for its rightful appanage
If not by parable's benign regime?
No false epiphanies; accept the tick-
Tock pace of time; and let no punctual scheme,
Like allegory, have scholars cherry-pick.



This bas-relief is entitled “SPES– or hope–” (mixed media 30x30 2023) because without hope there cannot be a vision for a better future for the world. Part of the ongoing exhibition “*In Varietate Concordia*” at the European Court of Justice, Luxembourg.

A Philosophy Of Hope

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

Discussions of hope can be found throughout the history of philosophy and across all Western philosophical traditions, even though philosophy has traditionally not paid the same attention to hope as it has to attitudes like belief and desire. However, even though hope has historically only rarely been discussed systematically—with important exceptions, such as Aquinas, almost all major philosophers recognise that hope plays a significant role in regard to human motivation, religious belief or politics. Historically, discussions of the importance of hope were often embedded in particular philosophical projects. More recent discussions of hope provide independent accounts of its nature and its relation to other mental phenomena, such as desire, intention and optimism.

The philosophy of hope centres on two intertwining sets of questions. The first concerns the nature, (or

essence) of hope. Specific questions here include how to analyse hope, how hope motivates us, and whether there is only one type of hope. The second set concerns the value of hope. Key problems here include whether and when it is good to hope and whether there is a virtue of hope. Philosophers of hope tend to proceed from the first set of questions to the second. This is a natural approach, for one might expect that you must develop a basic understanding of what hope is before you can determine its value.

In the following few lines one cannot possibly tackle these questions let alone give any workable answer. The idea here is more to outline the very general thinking behind this work of art.

Whether one believes it or not, hope also plays a crucial role in political philosophy. Hope can play

three distinct roles in politics: It can be instrumentally valuable insofar as its motivating influence makes it more likely that people achieve politically desirable goals. It can also be constitutive of politics, in that it is necessary for certain hopes to be present for the space of the political to emerge at all. For example, Baruch Spinoza argues that citizens can only act together politically if they have ‘civic hope’, through which they see each other as sources of prospective benefits. Lastly, hope can also play a justificatory role, insofar it is possible that certain policies can only be publicly justified by reference to hopes that those promoting them reasonably entertain.

While most contemporary political philosophers acknowledge that many of our political hopes are rooted in reality, few go as far as Bloch to also see a general attitude of hopefulness as justified by metaphysical considerations. Moreover, in *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls, for example, holds that political theories need to develop a ‘realistic utopia’ of justice to reliably guide our political agency and to ‘support and strengthen’ our political hopes. In similar terms, some contemporary authors think of a disposition to have certain hopes as a democratic virtue that can be fostered or undermined by states.

While the authors surveyed so far all agree on a positive role of hope in politics, there is also a more skeptical tradition in political thought that either questions whether hope in the standard sense is always available to political agents or argues that, at least sometimes, hope ought to be abandoned for political reasons. One set of arguments revolves around whether the positive aspects of political hope are accessible to everyone as classic liberal accounts of hope seem to assume. A second, skeptical argument is concerned with the objection that hope in politics might serve to encourage wishful thinking or undermine a realistic, critical evaluation of social reality. A third argument finally confronts the fundamental issue of whether hope and hopefulness are always as desirable in politics as much of the preceding arguments have assumed.

As M. Milona concludes her book *Philosophy of Hope* (2020): ‘When it comes to the value of hope, the difficulty rests in the diversity of ways in which we can hope and the impact that those different ways of hoping can have in our lives. While philosophers continue to map the various benefits and dangers of hoping, it will take a great deal of practical wisdom to know when hoping is appropriate. Philosophers seeking such wisdom benefit by stepping outside the boundaries of their own discipline, looking to the wisdom of history and lived experience’.

What is certain is that at this moment of human history the world needs hope, and what better message of hope can any philosopher wish, if not that brought into this world by the divine light of an infant that changed the world. As Hannah Arendt would certainly say at this point: ‘A Child Has Been Born unto Us’.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all!

The Wednesday

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Soon I'll Be Ninety



Soon I'll be ninety like my favourite thinker Hobbes
On whom, I love to meditate and dwell,
He too still fell in love and, strange to tell
How even when we're aged Cupid robs

Our time and fires us into amorous verse
Such as old Aubrey carefully preserved.
What else can I appropriately rehearse?
There's Rahim's friendship, more than I've deserved.

And then of course there is the Wednesday group,
Since Plato's own Academy there's never
Been such philosophizing in a troop.

At times it's true the pace is somewhat hectic,
As we move on in vigorous dialectic
While reaping rich rewards from the endeavour.

Edward Greenwood

