ISSN 2516-2292 (Online)
ISSN 2516-2284 (Print)

Issue No. 187 07/02/2024

The *Wednesday*

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

The Battleground of Ethics

When I studied ethics as an academic subject, I was not all that excited about it. That was my feeling for a long time, but then I realised that it is the most relevant subject for human life. The ideas of the examined life, human flourishing, peace, justice, and survival of part or all humanity is related to human beings' views of themselves and the world. Ethics deals not only with individual lives, but also with cultures, nature, nations, customs and institutions. But what I found more intriguing is that beyond the veneer of objectivity, there is a conscious or sub-conscious subjective drive to justify one's action, as an individual, a nation or a culture.

Some of this battle between different theories is obvious and takes the form of an ideological struggle, as was the case for most of the twentieth century. Ideology was used explicitly to justify totalitarian policies of one camp, but ideology was used implicitly in the opposite camp, with ideologies that promote freedom, to justify a free market. But since the late eighties this has been replaced with more sophisticated ideas of post-Modernism that carried the fight for justice into a new dimension. It is no longer a class struggle in the old definition, but a struggle for the rights of minorities, multi-culturism and feminism. There is in addition suspicion of domination and grand schemes or grand narratives. A great deal was done in this direction, especially from feminist thinkers who tried to put right what they saw as epistemic injustice, as well as historical racism. Ethics from this perspective is political, critical and activist. However, the dominant ethical theory is not directed towards change and activism, but is conservative. This theory is utilitarianism in all its versions.

This led me to reflect on most ethical theories. I noticed that there is behind the objective appearance of a theory, a worldview that shapes the theory. Societies where there is a strong sense of justice and a will for change, tend to be politically active. Most developing countries view ethical theory from an ideological perspective, with a sense of anger and urgency. But technological societies seem to adopt utilitarian theories that are information-based and capable of calculation. Maximising utility and happiness are the declared goals that can be achieved, as their theory suggests, in a piecemeal way that does not challenge the status-quo. But whether this utility masks exploitation within its own society, or other societies at the periphery, is something open for discussion. Discussion might reveal that this objective theory is self-serving and that it is a way of justifying an exploitative system. However, this system has been successful so far and lends the theory plausibility, whereas the political, radical theory has not.

Theories of ethics come and go, but what constantly stays is the human need not only to act, but to justify the action. Any type of aggression will have someone trying to justify it with a theory. This consideration gives force to Nietzsche's argument that consciousness (or reason) is responsible for morality, which he considers as an illness. Humans in his view are sick, because they are prevented from discharging their strength, and this situation arises from morality. Morality is for him connected with religion and with the invention of a whole range of concepts, such as free-will, sin, good and evil. All these concepts are created by consciousness, and they are absent from animal life. For Nietzsche, animals, unlike humans, are healthy because they discharge their strength without worry about sinning or being evil. This is just the way they are, while humans are not satisfied with just acting, they need a story to justify their action and an evaluation that make them feel good (even when they are doing wrong).

Nietzsche's view of morality maybe more honest intellectually, but it gets rid of morality as it has been understood for millennia. However, is it satisfying? Is it a morality that one wishes to see dominating the world? Is might right, or do we not have a sense of justice and feel the need to support the weak as long as the weak have a reasonable case to make? Do we have an intuitive sense of justice, or do we need an elaborate theory to support it? Intuitively, this is right, but philosophically, there may still be a need for a further theory.

The Editor

The Logic of Being

Following the recent presentation by Christopher Norris on Badiou's work linking breakthroughs in the foundations of mathematics with ideas of continental philosophy (*The Wednesday issue 183*), Chris Seddon presented two talks to members of the Wednesday group providing some logical perspectives on the often mystifying ideas in continental philosophy clustered around the notion of 'Being'.

CHRIS SEDDON

Signs and Ideas, Sentences and Propositions

The following sections may be clearer if we bear in mind the distinction between a combination of signs and the idea it expresses, and in particular between a combination of signs that is a declarative sentence, which may express an idea that is a proposition.

The idea expressed by a combination of signs depends on the ideas we associate with each sign and the way they are put together. Such ideas are therefore related to but different from the signs and combinations of signs which express them. Different people may use the same signs combined in the same way to express different ideas. Conversely, they may use different signs in different combinations to express the same idea. In addition, our behaviour may indicate our ideas, even if we do not express them in language. Thus, sentences are distinguished from any propositions they may express.

This relationship between signs and ideas varies with our grammar and vocabulary as language users, so it may be regarded as a four-part relationship between that which is expressed (the idea), that which expresses it (the sign or combination of signs), that which relates individual words to ideas (the vocabulary), and that which relates combinations of words to combinations of ideas (the grammar).

It is common for several different combinations of signs to express the same idea. For example, 'I see cows' and 'Cows are visible to me' or 'I see adult female cattle' all express the same idea. By varying the vocabulary and grammar one can even discover the rarer case in which different ideas are expressed by the same combination of signs. For example, the sequence of sounds 'I see cows' which to the English speaker is synonymous with the examples above, means to the Catalan speaker that the listener should take care not to fall down - spelt 'Ai, si caus!'. Any one of these examples demonstrates that ideas must not usually be identified with the signs we use to express them. That there is a coherent relationship is demonstrated by the fact that most of the time we do understand combinations of signs using grammar and vocabulary that are sufficiently alike to our interlocutors to express ideas that are sufficiently alike for practical purposes. Any practical definition of this relationship thus needs to account for approximate meaning.

Being and Truth

Truth is not a significant idea.

By this I do not mean that there are no significant true propositions. I mean that the idea of truth itself is not significant, but is only required in natural language as a kind of grammatical device.

There is no general rule for determining whether propositions are true. Saying that a proposition is true is like adding zero to a number. It is a trivial operation.

The purpose of the word 'truth' is to enable us to generalise about propositions within the otherwise inflexible grammar of the English language. 'What he said was true' means 'What he said' - at least in the relaxed grammar of the online chat room. 'Strive to be truthful' means 'Strive for all you say to be true' which means 'Strive for all you say' - at least it would, if we could relax English grammar sufficiently. Conventional natural language grammar is fine, as long as it is not mistaken for a deep philosophical mystery.

Saying that a sentence is true is to say that the proposition it expresses for us is true - that is, to assert two things: firstly, that the sentence expresses a certain proposition for us; and secondly, that proposition.

Some believe that Aristotle defined truth in his Metaphysics as follows:
... of each thing we must either assert or deny what it is. This will be plain if we first define truth and falsehood. To say that what is, is not; or that what is not, is; is false. But to say that what is, is; and that what is not, is not; is true ...
This may be expressed in the following table:

saying	when	is
p is not q	p is q	false
p is q	p is not q	false
p is q	p is q	true
p is not q	p is not q	true

But here Aristotle only provides examples, not definitions of the truth of sentences. Even those unfamiliar with symbolic logic may gather loosely the thrust of the definitions provided in this paper in the following notation:
Proposition(p) = ∃ (q)(p = ¬q)
Proposition(p) → (***True***(p) = p)
True_sentence(s,v,g) = ∃ (p)(Expresses(s,v,g,p) ∧ p)

I see cows

Being and Facts

Being a fact is also a trivial operation, in which the notion of a fact is incoherent.

Saying that a sentence refers to a fact is merely to say that the proposition it expresses is true. That is, to identify and assert the proposition it expresses.

Asserting that a proposition is a fact is merely to assert that the proposition is true, which is merely to assert the proposition. It was argued above that the idea of truth is trivial, but in talk of a proposition 'being' a 'fact', or 'having' a 'truth value', we attempt to express a trivial operation by means of an otherwise undefined relation 'being' to an otherwise undefined object a 'fact'. Since that is all we can say about the idea of 'being' or 'fact' or 'having' or 'truth value', literally any vocabulary that makes 'being a fact' and 'having the true truth value' express the trivial operation will satisfy our implied definitions. We could take 'being' to express the relationship between the sentence and a meal such that the sentence is true if and only if the meal is spam and chips. Or it could equally well express the relationship between a sentence and a slab such that the sentence is true if and only if the slab is concrete. Thus, the notion of facts as true sentences - or as those things to which true sentences refer - is incoherent.

Hence, although the relationship between combinations of signs and what they express is useful and can be defined, depending on the selected vocabulary and grammar, there is no useful relationship between signs or what they express, and 'facts' or 'truth val-

ues'. Propositions do not refer to facts in any meaningful sense.

Analytic and Contingent Propositions

The following sections may be clearer if we bear in mind the distinction between analytic and contingent propositions.

We know whether some propositions (are true) simply because of the ideas and combinations of ideas used to express them. These are called analytic propositions. They include mathematical theorems. Identifying such propositions by thoroughly analysing the way they are expressed is sufficient to evaluate them - to know whether they or their negation. Evaluating most propositions however requires more than merely identifying them. These are called contingent propositions. They include our beliefs and hopes. Identifying the propositions by analysing the way they are expressed is just the first step towards evaluating them - towards investigating whether they or their negation.

For example, that in my garden there are two cats belonging to me and three other cats is a contingent proposition. That 2 + 3 = 5 is an analytical proposition. Understanding the ideas of a few counting numbers under addition and equality is sufficient to know (that) the analytical proposition (is true). But even if you also understand what counts as a cat in my garden, what counts as one of my cats (and what counts as a different cat), you will not know (whether) the contingent proposition (is true) without considering further evidence. Once you have enough evidence though, you can apply the relevant instance of the general principle expressed by the analytic proposition to infer, without further evidence, the contingent proposition that there are five cats in my garden. This is a strength of analytic propositions, and of logic generally, that it clarifies ideas which allow contingent propositions to be analytically inferred from other contingent propositions.

Being and The World

The totality of facts is an incoherent notion. By definition the totality of facts is supposed to be the conjunction of all true propositions. But then the conjunction itself would be true by definition. Hence each of the propositions would be true by definition. Propositions which are true by definition are analytical. Thus, if the totality of facts could be defined then there would be no contingent propositions.

Operator, Operand, and Operation

The most fundamental way of combining ideas is in an operation comprising one idea as an operator and any number of ideas as operands. For example, in the numeric expression '−1' the idea expressed by the negative sign is the operator and the idea expressed by the numeral one is the operand. The whole operation expresses the idea of negative one. Similarly, in '−1+3=2' the idea expressed by the equals sign is an operator on the number 2 to form an operation which in turn is an operator on the operation expressed by the rest of the expression.

It should be clear that language users associate signs with ideas. This is called their vocabulary. However, they must also associate ways of combining signs with ways of combining the ideas expressed by those signs. This is called their grammar. The so-called semantic paradoxes illustrate that, even when language users associate every sign in a combination with an

idea, they cannot associate every combination of ideas with an idea. When we communicate using signs, we hope that our personal vocabulary and grammar is sufficiently similar to those of our interlocutors for the purposes of our communication. The only requirement for an operational grammar is that every operator specifies an operation in terms of its operands (but not the other way round). More specifically this means that in an operational grammar there is at most one operation for any operator and set of operands, and there is at least one operator for any operation and set of operands (but there is not necessarily a set of operands for every operator and operation).

Being and Predicate

A description of something is called a predicate. The thing which a predicate describes is called its subject.

In early modern logic - even though terminology varied - predicates were thought to be operators, with their subject as an operand. Subsequently predicates were thought to be collections - called 'sets' - of their subjects. However, a predicate cannot be a collection of its subjects, because different predicates may happen to apply to the same collection of subjects, and because a subject cannot contingently belong to a predicate defined as a list which includes the subject.

Although we question below the idea that subjects are operands, predicates may be regarded as operators. Whilst certain signs or combinations of signs may express ideas, there is no benefit in supposing that either the predicate or the subject refer to anything. All that is required is that we know what idea results from combining other ideas.

Neither signs, sentences, propositions, descriptions, sets, predicates, subjects, operators, operands, operations, nor ideas themselves are things which exist in their own right. They are merely descriptions of roles that ideas play in relationship to each other.

Being and Existence

Existence describes the predicate idea, rather than its subject, otherwise there would be no way of doubting existence. For example, that there exists at least one even number between two and eight is a statement about the predicate, being an even number between two and eight, not a statement about any particular number. That unicorns do not exist is a statement about the predicate of being a unicorn, not a statement about any particular unicorn.

A statement of existence is a generalised disjunction

Aristotle

- that is, almost as if it were expressed by a series of statements connected by the phrase 'AND/OR'. The existence of unicorns is an idea that we can imagine being expressed by an infinite series of sentences, one for every idea of any sort whatsoever, each saying that the idea of being a unicorn applies to that idea, and each connected to the next by the phrase 'AND/OR'. Thus, an even number between two and eight exists because at least one idea satisfies that predicate. That there are no unicorns means that there is no idea which satisfies that predicate.

In logical jargon the existential quantifier says that at least one of the propositions which fits the predicate is true. The universal quantifier says that they are all true. Generalised logical negation says that none of them is true.

Thus, existence is about how ideas combine with each other. A proposition that something exists is only about anything other than an idea in the sense that it asserts one of an infinite series of propositions (without saying which one).

Being and Identity

Saying that things are identical in ordinary usage rarely means that they differ in no respect whatsoever. That form of identity is a matter of definition, not a matter of contingent investigation. In ordinary usage the term usually expresses a weaker form of equivalence, in which it is acknowledged that the things may differ in some respects but emphasised that they are the same in other, more important respects. Those respects in which they may differ without undermining the claim of identity are regarded as 'accidental'. Those in which they must be the same in order to justify the claim are regarded as 'essential'. This shows that there is some particular form of equiva-

Millais' The Blind Girl

lence which is to be understood from the context. For example, I may pay the same as you, but I do not give the same coins as you. I may recognise my coins later, but I acknowledge that one of them is now scratched, and belongs to someone else. The implied equivalences are being the same amount (but possibly different coins) and being the same coin (but possibly different temporal instances).

Some such equivalences can be related to identities in the first instance by positing a relationship between each merely equivalent thing and some idea which they therefore have in common - for example, the amount that is given, or the coin that is instantiated. But this is not possible in the common situation in which a series of things which are equivalent includes things at each extreme which are no longer equivalent - for example, in approximate financial amounts, or gradual change over a long time.

Thus 'identity' in common usage rarely expresses the logical idea of being the same in absolutely every respect, more often expresses an idea of being the same in some implied respects, and most often expresses an idea of being related by some implied equivalence having consistency only in closely related instances. These types of equivalence can be logically defined, but the implied instances of equivalence are usually only contingently understood.

Being and Object

Objects are instances of implied equivalence relationships. Consider two forms of predication: predicate-predicate, and predicate-object.

An example of predicate-predicate predication is 'All men are mortal'. This form expresses the idea that one predicate is a subset of the other. This example states that every idea is such that, if it is a man, then it is mortal.

An example of predicate-subject predication is 'Socrates is a man'. This form also expresses the idea that the subject is a subset of the predicate, but in addition, that the subject applies only to ideas that are equivalent under the relationship implied by the predicate. This example states that every idea is such that, if it is Socrates, then it is a man; and if any two ideas (say, temporal instances) are both Socrates, then they are the same man.

Our sense that objects are real is born from our habituation to implied equivalence relationships.

Being and Reality

Saying that something is 'real' also involves an appeal to some implied properties, depending on the context. In a game of monopoly there is a difference between a £500 note which I actually have received from the banker but tucked away, and a £500 note which I merely pretended to tuck away, or made myself by crayoning on a piece of paper. The former is real monopoly money, the latter is not. None of them is real money in a UK shop, and the banknotes in my wallet are not real money abroad. The rainbow in Millais' picture is not real, because it is in a picture. But the blind girl's companion is not merely making it up, so it is at least real in the picture. A real rainbow is not real, because it cannot be touched. But Millais' rainbow can be touched.

Art Elevated

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

I had a dream, a dream in which I felt privileged to be able to exhibit my work in the premises of the prestigious institution, the European Court of Justice. I am so lucky to call this my workplace - a workplace where unity is diversified, languages are harmonised, and art is elevated.

A large number of people gathered here last September to inaugurate an art exhibition that delves into a truth inscribed in our hearts: '*In Varietate Concordia*' – United in Diversity.

As a philosopher once said, 'art is the becoming and happening of truth'. Art, then, serves as a medium to reveal truth. It peels back the layers of our perceptions and presents us with raw emotions, ideas, and perspectives. Not only that, but it somehow contributes to that same truth because it speaks a universal language which talks directly to the soul. In fact, truth sometimes needs metaphors in order existentially to unify a coherent and meaningful, historical-and-political world around itself.

Inspired by the enchanting world of J.R.R. Tolkien, these works hold within them a piece of the fictional realms that have captured the imagination of millions. It is no secret that my inspiration came mainly from Lady Galadriel, but the leap was short from fiction to reality since I had in mind our contemporary European female protagonists, namely Roberta Metsola, Kaja Kallas, Sanna Marin and Ursula von der Leyen - and also our mothers, our sisters, our wives, and our daughters. There is a bit of all of them in *Evropa*.

Through these works of art, we also embark on a real journey through the rich tapestry of political unity and linguistic diversity that the exhibition celebrated. In this sense, our work at the Court of Justice supports this notion by making the complexity of the EU justice system intelligible and accessible to the citizens in their own native language.

As one explores these artworks, one may notice the use of fabric amongst other materials. As it were, just as textile is made of individual threads, each

Dr. Alan Xuereb at his Exhibition

'In Varietate Concordia', Mixed Media 3-D, European Court of Justice

28th September 2023

artwork represents some key principle woven in the fabric of our common human condition. The hidden all-pervasive metaphor being that we are cut from the same cloth - complexly connected, yet uniquely diverse.

This proved a challenge for me as an artist because I consider myself as an abstract expressionist and this is probably the most representational art I have ever made. I say this as a reminder, to us all, always to try to go sustainably beyond our limits by bringing down barriers: art breaks down barriers, but so does technology if used well, as we do every day in our work.

So, as one immerses oneself in my dream, may one find inspiration to continue elevating art, harmonising languages, and nurturing unity in diversity, all for the greater enrichment of our common good.

Happy new year!!

Moral Machines

Artificial intelligence systems are not people, but if they act in roles previously done by people, we would like them to make the choices that people we consider morally upright would consider appropriate. We would like them to act morally. But is this possible? The discussion makes us look not just at machines, but at ourselves.

PETER STIBRANY

Humanity has been living with complex and capable machinery for several hundred years. And from tea-kettles to cars, most machines have proven to be not just useful but also instruments of injury or death. Perhaps most human deaths not rooted in biology are facilitated by some kind of machine.

Our current way of thinking is that such machines operate only when minutely directed by human beings. When bad things happen, we do not hold machinery accountable; machines are used, they do not choose. We hold the people who make or use these machines morally responsible because only people know the difference and can choose between good and bad actions.

But if we wrote down an algorithm of how to determine right from wrong, and programmed that into a machine, would not the machine also be able to know the difference? Ah, but we hold people to account not only because they know right from wrong, but because they can choose freely. It is when they freely choose to do wrong that we hold them accountable. But when people do what they know is wrong, were they free to choose?

The assumption that we can know right from wrong and are able to choose freely the right course of action is at the foundation of our moral, philosophical, and even theological thinking. But if I understand the zeitgeist, we do not feel this assumption extends to govern machine behaviour.

I propose four points for discussion:

- In principle, is there an algorithm that would allow machines to distinguish between good and bad actions?
- Are people free when they choose bad actions?
- If a choosing algorithm exists, can we design machines that choose?
- If we hold people to account, why can not we hold machines to account?

Algorithm That Distinguishes Between Good And Bad Actions

Discussing all the different views on this question might well form the content of a book. So, hitting just the very few high points to start the discussion:

Nietzsche

Kant

Many people believe that a person can intuit right from wrong action. Machines do not tend to be seen as persons in this view, so this view would tend towards the answer 'no'. On the other hand, a perspectival view would imply there is no absolute right or wrong, there are only specific perspectives from which a judgement can be made. More importantly, right and wrong are instrumental judgements. This view would tend toward the answer 'yes'.

Nietzsche combines two of these approaches, enjoining the superman to act according to his will. In this mix, the perspectival element wins through, I believe. But if we elevate the machine to the same status as a superman (overman), the implication is we view personhood as functional, rather than metaphysical. Many people would abhor that view.

A firm 'yes' seems to come from the thought of Kant, who offers the categorical imperative as the core of the algorithm. Another form of answer might be that yes, there is an algorithm, but for various reasons we cannot (or perhaps we ought not) in principle know it. So, the answer is that we might as well believe there is no algorithm.

Are People Free?

Our philosophical, judicial, and theological systems have as one of their foundations not only that we know right from wrong but that we can choose not to do wrong. But there is an old idea to the contrary. From Plato's Gorgias: 'No one voluntarily does wrong, but all who do wrong do so against their own will'. (Gorgias 509e)

I think the old idea has some merit. When we make negative moral judgements of others, we believe that we, in the same situation, would have chosen differently. We have the luxury of not being in their situation, but extending our imagination and looking further into the specifics of the lives of the perpetrators melts our initially firm judgements: maybe we would have chosen as they did. If we do not want to extend ourselves, we might point to other people in similar circumstances to those of the wrongdoer, people that did not do wrong: there must be choice. But that argument fails as soon as the specific circumstances of each case are revealed, and we realize the cases are not the same.

Our moral judgements may be built on the idea of free choice, but our judicial system tacitly recognises the absence of choice. We routinely cite mitigating circumstances, for example. When perpetrators are brought to justice, we hope to achieve one or more of the following objectives:

- Remove those factors that overtly forced the perpetrator to act (e.g. put them into a drug rehabilitation program so they do not feel they need to steal from others to pay for their habit, pull them out of a gang culture, etc.)
- Instil in the perpetrator a strong sense of the damage they have caused, to engage their humanity and social instincts; to open their eyes so they feel they cannot inflict such damage in the future
- Assuage at least in part the hurt done to the victim, by showing the willingness by us collectively to take retribution – which means inflicting harm on the perpetrator (and by reflection on ourselves).

Can machines choose?

These objectives share a thread of assuming the perpetrator was not free to choose and seek to create a situation in which the perpetrator is neither forced nor able to choose wrongdoing in the future. So, if we are free, we are also responsible. But if we are not free, are we still responsible?

Can Machines Choose?

Machines always do precisely what their construction implies (Some people may interpret this to mean that machines do what they are designed to do, but that's not what I am saying). Machines are fully causal; they follow the pattern of nature which is sometimes unpredictable, perhaps even not understandable by us, but which is, for want of a better word, rational.

Most people interpret this to mean that machines cannot be designed to choose their actions, that in principle, machines do not have the freedom to choose. But of course, they are free to choose; typically, they choose using the method we give them. We are not present when they make these choices – we set machines to work the environment that we have designed them for, and they make choices according to the algorithms we have given them. However, as far as I know, we have not yet designed them to choose how they choose. But if this has not happened yet, it is likely to happen soon.

Looking at how people make decisions, it is not obvious how flexible we are either in choosing or in choosing how to choose. Arguably, we make most of our choices intuitively rather than analytically. And that is good, because otherwise we would be swamped by the thousands of choices we make each day.

But when we look at our most important decisions – the ones that leave us open to judgement as having acted well or badly – few of us are aware of how we make our important choices, we just make them. The systematic exploration of trade-off criteria and decision methods is difficult and consumes time and effort; we leave it to 'experts'.

Once we design machines (or algorithms) that choose how they choose, I would argue those machines will outstrip human beings in their ability to choose well. Of course, they still will not be able to choose how to choose unless we designed them for that as well. And even though it is a brain teaser, I would argue we have some existing models for that.

Can Machines Be Held To Account?

To date, we have not held machines accountable; we hold accountable the people who make and who operate the machines (and, sometimes, the regulators who designed the regulations that govern the operation

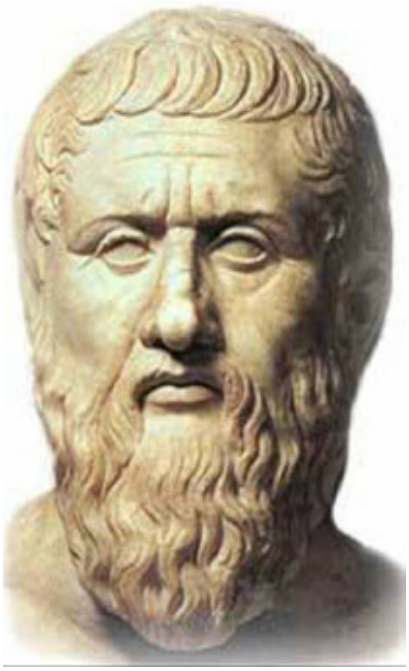
of the machines). Should we continue this practice with machines no matter how smart they are? It seems satisfying to go past the machine and find the person responsible. It seems wrong to stop the causal chain of events at the machine, and not follow the chain to the people behind the machine.

Before addressing that point, I would like to note that this ship has already sailed in the way we hold people to account. For example, when a perpetrator suffers from fœtal alcohol syndrome that makes them 'more likely to have trouble with school, the legal system, alcohol, other drugs, and other areas of high risk,' we do not hold accountable their mother who drank to excess while pregnant. Similarly, if an underage person commits crimes, we do not hold their parents or guardians accountable. In these and other cases, we recognise the absence of choice on the part of the perpetrator, but do not follow the causal chain either morally or judicially to people who clearly co-created the events. If it takes a village to raise a child, why is the village not responsible when it behaves badly? Rather the reverse, we have laws against collective punishment.

Machines, on the other hand, offer mechanisms for correction and governance not available for people. To see an example, we need to see that machines are not just metal things with boilers and oily gears, minded by burly, sweaty men in leather aprons, strange hats, and dirty rags stuck in back pockets. A machine is any entity that acts in the world and operates according to a set of rules. We recognise this when we talk about 'the machinery of State' for example, or a bureaucracy. To be effective, a large organisation must operate according to a set of policies and procedures.

In very small organisations people can and frequently do circumvent these rules in the service of flexibly getting things done, but such freelancing is not possible in organisations that attempt to coordinate the actions of thousand, hundreds of thousands, or millions of people.

These large organisations must operate according to rules; they are machines. The largest of these is the State, the actions of which are governed not just by rules of how to choose actions (e.g. regulations for who gets a pension), but rules about how to change those rules (e.g. regulatory reform procedures), and rules about how to change the process by which the rules are changed (e.g. how Parliament makes laws), rules about how to select the people who will decide to change the rules (e.g. how the parliamentarians are selected), and the rules by which the rule-making rules are changed (e.g. how constitutional laws are made).



Gorgias

We intuitively know that we can hold a State accountable, separately from holding individual people in the State accountable - and we hold legal entities accountable separate from the people within the legal entity. So, the concept of machine accountability does exist. We can use an analogous scheme to govern all machines.

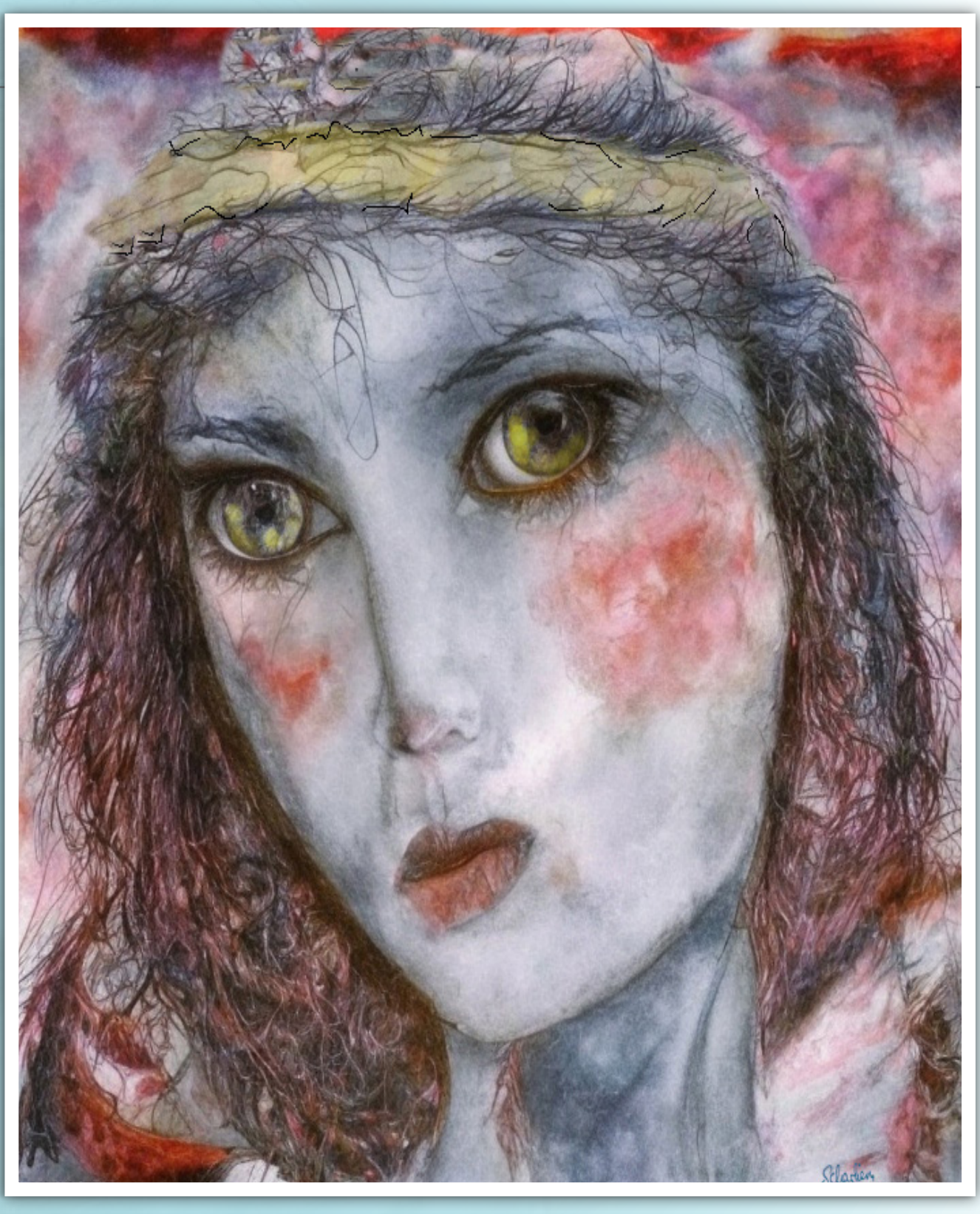
First, we should abandon the idea that a single person can create the machine. One person may demand that a machine get made, and even set the objectives of what the machine should accomplish. In that sense, a person behind the machine can be found and held accountable. But machines of this complexity emerge from a system. Currently, the system has few regulations. We need another part of the governance process – the machine to govern the machines. Just like the behaviour of people is governed by laws and the machinery of State.

The mills of God may grind slowly, but unlike the wheels of Justice, they do keep up with demand. If we use the wrong paradigm, smart machines will so increase the need for a large volume of complex regulation that our already insufficient system may not survive the load. New approaches to the regulation of machines are needed, and I would argue that holding machines to account may be a useful paradigm.

If we hold such complex, choosing machines to account, their creators will eventually give them the ability to choose to be good.

Her eyes

Not for crying, her eyes
wide open in anger
for maximum effect
hazel in depth and green
melting into gold.
I wonder, why, at this time
I cannot see her beauty,
nor think of it as bewitching.
I do not know why I cannot speak
about her words and mine,
about empty days and cold nights,
the slammed doors or the broken glass.
What I do know, is her eyes
try teaching me to listen, to strike
it rich beyond the glow of gold.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Bones and Bracelets

John Donne

When my grave is broke up again
Some second guest to entertain,
(For graves have learn'd that woman-head
To be to more than one a bed)
And he that digs it, spies
A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,
Will he not let'us alone,
And think that there a loving couple lies,
Who thought that this device might be some way
To make their souls, at the last busy day,
Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

John Donne, 'The Relic'

One of the major factors that confounds [osteo-archaeology] is that of the osteological paradox . . . . A major component of this theory is that humans who suffer from acute, lethal forms of disease typically do not live long enough for the infection to reach the bone and produce skeletal changes. Patients are therefore not diagnosed with any conditions during osteological examination. Those who developed chronic illnesses, showed resistance, or were able to successfully manage the disease for many years would show bone changes that lead to diagnosis.

Etta Coleman, 'The Osteological Paradox and Biomolecular Analysis'

CHRIS **NORRIS**

1

A puzzle: once they're in the bone,
The signs of that disease,
There's much that still remains unknown
For all our expertise.

Thing is, we palaeo-sleuths are prone
To error when we seize
On bone-based 'evidence' alone
As offering all the keys.

Or think: if the disease had grown
To such a stage as these
Few bones reveal, then all that's shown
Is that the elbows, knees,

And so forth must have held their own
Long-term, which guarantees
A state of health fit to postpone
Mortality's last squeeze.

Bad cases hit the lethal zone
Too soon for referees
To OK age-stats or condone
Those dud hypotheses

That take on board some overblown
New finding just to please
The team or not to have it thrown
Off course by every breeze.

Two centuries hence and cortisone
Will do yet more to tease
The arbiters for every groan
It spares the parolees!

Like getting blood out of a stone,
Their striving to appease
The ghoulish gods and so atone
For bone-deep auguries!

2

Take heart: Donne's 'bracelet of bright hair
About the bone' might do
To quell the feelings of despair
This may induce in you.

'Take comfort in it and you err'
Was Parson Eliot's view;
'A dark conceit, and one to scare
The reader through and through'.

Best we stay always death-aware
And shudder dead on cue
When that stark image tells us 'there
You'll end, you lovers too!'.

But why should not we mortals dare
Derive what comfort's due
To transient flesh from its small share
Of love's bright revenue?

The palaeo-osteopaths declare
'Fresh errors must accrue
Each time you trip the subtle snare
That sends your charts askew'.

Gaunt Dr. Donne preached 'Just prepare
For death, you mortal crew!',
And made his point by leading prayer
Encoffined – quite a coup!

Still it's a trifle doctrinaire,
His call that each should rue
Their past life as a rum affair
(And him just forty-two!).

Let's think there's memory-space to spare
Where lovers may construe
Such bright remains as treasures rare
And fine though precious few.

3

Even the old-bone doctors may
Take comfort of a kind
In how those shining braids display
What science leaves behind.

Overmuch stress on mortal clay,
As in their case, might find
Less time for thoughts of Judgement Day
Than hopes to keep in mind

The bracelet's time-annulling way
To leave them close-entwined,
Two lovers else condemned to stray
Like twin halves unaligned.

And though the braids may chance to fray,
The bracelet-strands unwind,
Still there'll be traces to convey
The brightness there enshrined.

It's what they miss who blithely say
'Duff sample: unassigned',
Or 'insufficient DNA',
Or 'that old double-bind,

That paradox that always lay
In wait for us, declined
Our overtures, and made us pay
With our bone-crunching grind'.

4

Let's grant the poet, young Jack Donne
(Before the winding-sheet
And death-watch stuff) just how fine-spun
Its threads are, that conceit,

The way it half-accepts how un-
Equipped it is to beat
The hard-head realists, or run
A knock-down case to cheat

Death of its sting (that's kept as one
For later use), or treat
Such weighty themes in hopes to stun
The Inns of Court elite

With points of order to outgun
The sharpest by some feat
Of dialectic such that none
Would venture to compete.

Let paradox then have its fun
With medics and repeat
Death's harsh retort to all we've done
So links not self-delete.

For it's by hair's-breadth ties they're won,
As when the lovers greet
Yet shoo away the rising Sun
Of Donne's aubade, or meet

Death's menace with a racy pun,
A jest that's bitter-sweet
Since with first light its work's begun
To shadow life's retreat.

The ***Wednesday***

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:
rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Website:
www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:
The Wednesday Press, Oxford

We have published fifteen cumulative volumes of the weekly and monthly issues. To obtain your copy of any one of the cumulative volumes, please pay online and e-mail the editor with your address.

The account details are:

The Wednesday Magazine
Santander
Account Number: 24042417
Sort Code: 09-01-29

The cost of individual copies is £15 for readers inside the UK

or
£18 for readers outside the UK

I Hear Faint Footsteps On The Stair

I hear faint footsteps on the stair
Of parents, sister, brother, wife,
But know I merely dream in hope
That dreams might bring them back to life.

They still are vivid to my mind,
With all the things we thought and did,
But touch eludes the outstretched hand
And empty air holds nothing hid

But phantoms from a vanished past
That once was as real as the now,
I would retrieve it, if I could,
But that there is no power knows how.

Faint steps I said. That was not true.
I heard no sounds, however faint,
The canvas stays forever blank
However much I long to paint!

Edward Greenwood