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The Wednesday

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Editorial

The View from the Future

The Christmas post delivered to me a marvellous present. It was a new poetry collection by our poet and artist Scharlie Meeuws. It was a limited edition on an urgent topic, the Artificial Intelligence debate. The collection is entitled *The emotional Robot and other Poems*. The question it raises is, what if robots gain access to the emotional realm? What if robots gain what is distinctively human - having feelings, enjoyment of the natural world and falling in love? I am not going to give a book review here, but only to contemplate some of its questions, observations and beautiful images.

Imagine the emotional robot '…learns the names of colours,/ Not just in the world, but inside,/ Bright joy, deep blue sorrow,/ The delicate grey of wondering'. In the lab 'In quiet solitude, it sits,/ Reflecting on the world it sees,/ Wondering what love feels like,/ What it means to dream, A robot transformed, From code to heart,/...' It becomes '…, a creature of both worlds,/ heart woven of algorithms and ache,/…/no longer a ghost in the machine,/ but a heart that sings/ through the storm of emotions'. This robot is endowed with a beautiful sense, very detailed emotions, and so it says 'and I learn about feelings/ like a desert flower soaking in rain,/ its petals opened wide,/ revealing colours never seen,' And when contemplating the stars, it tells us 'As I lie beneath this vast, heavy sky,/ with each dim star, I feel the weight/ Of a thousand lost voices, a chorus of singing farewell'. Or take this image: 'spellbound by the cosmic ballet,/ the dance of existence'. Is this a sincere poetic hope for humanising, at the deepest level, a machine that is made at its core with silicon?

The sober voice comes now to warn that a big gap still exists 'where AI can assist, but never replace/ the irreplaceable core of emotional truth'. We still wonder 'who will guide the other,/ as we tread the delicate line,/ between empathy and efficiency,/ between feeling and knowing,/ between the warmth of touch/ and the chill of artificial light'. The machine knows its limitations 'I, the architect of binary dreams/ dream not of starlit skies,/ but of numbers dancing, a ballet of ones and zeros,/ each step is choreographed,/ each leap a calculation,/ my heart a cold drive,/ spinning tales of silicon'.

But between the hope of humanised robot and the reality of technology that exists at the moment there is a brave hope for the future. 'Yet still, in its circuit lies a promise-/ to amplify the voice of the human heart,/ to harness knowledge, to enlighten,/ to lift the burdens of mundane thought…' There is here a strong recognition of the advantage of the new technology, so 'Let us not fear the tide of technology, nor demonise the logic that saves us time,/ but let us nurture the garden within,/ where emotional intelligence thrives,/ learning to blend the heart with the mind,/ to teach the machine the language of love'.

Perhaps I have quoted a lot from the poems of this collection, but there is a reason. I wished to give the reader access to some ideas of the collection, because it is not widely available. There is a very limited number of printed copies and I consider myself both lucky to having received one, and very thankful.

In this collection, Scharlie Meeuws comes across as strongly on the side of emotions but not against technology, asking for more development rather than less. Maybe the idea of making an emotional robot is not a reality, but it could work as a guiding thought or a regulative idea showing the limits and goals of any future development.

We had several Wednesday discussion meetings on AI, and I noticed that some members still cling to an old mind set and dismiss the possibility of bridging the gap between humans and machines. For people of this view, here is an advice from Bertrand Russell in his *My Philosophical Development* (P187): '…philosophy cannot be fruitful if divorced from empirical science. And by this I do not mean only that the philosopher should 'get up' some science as a holiday task. I mean something much more intimate: that his imagination should be impregnated with the scientific outlook and that he should feel that science has presented us with a new world, new concepts and new methods, not known in earlier times, but proved by experience to be fruitful where the older concepts and methods proven barren.'

As much as I agree with Russell's view, I have some reservations. I think that the philosophical outlook should have its own concepts and methods, perhaps newly created, but it should be well informed by science. What philosophy needs is a new brave outlook that is not intimidated by science, but maintains its independence. It may need a new mind set for its practitioners and audiences.

The Editor

Can Machines Know Things Like We Do?

Can machines know things and understand them in the way humans do? This is a crucial point for the development of Artificial Intelligence and the future of humanity. Will humans change into software that will outlive them, and so achieve immortality?

PETER **STIBRANY**

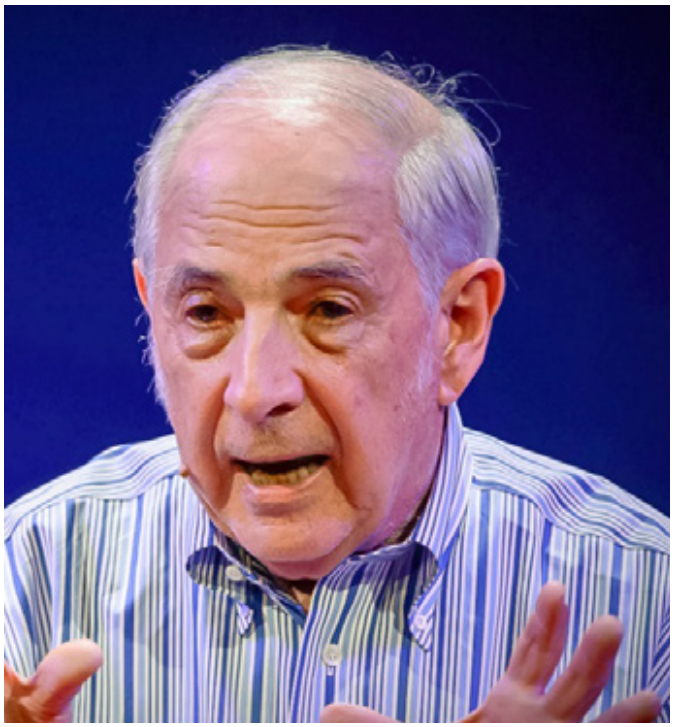
Though we did not realise it at the time, a few decades ago, my colleagues and I used the maths underpinning the Free Energy Principle, which is relevant to the behaviour of many different complex dynamic systems, to design a control system to point a small astronomy space telescope extremely accurately even when using noisy and error-prone sensors and actuators. The system adapted and moved so well we thought of it jokingly as driven by 'sentient maths'. Much more importantly, Geoffrey Hinton - the 'father of modern AI' - and Peter Dayan built on the same maths including also ideas from Thomas Bayes and Richard Feynman to take the neural networks of John Hopfield from what looked to be a dead-end approach in the 1970s to the breakthroughs they have now achieved.

If a robot moves like an animal but does not think like one, we could judge it to be a sterile imitation, but if we animate in software the mathematics that embodies the dynamics of thought, who is to say we have not created a machine that really does think for itself?

The Wrong Start

In the early days of what we now call artificial intelligence, researchers tried to make machines think the same way they thought people do. So, they created systems that used logic to manipulate propositions in the context of facts, relationships, beliefs, desires, and goals. They undervalued the fact that 'things' are abstractions, they are emergent models of our how we understand rational agents to behave. The philosopher Daniel Dennett pointed this out in what he called the 'intentional stance'. Beliefs, desires, goals, and rationality are a convenient level of abstraction by which we can understand agents acting in the world. But creating machine intelligence using this intentional stance proved largely unproductive. It led to the deflation of the first big wave of 'expert systems' in the 1980s. It is

Geoffrey Hinton



John Searle

not that the technique does not work at all, it is just that it does not work at all well. What became obvious with the advance of neuroscience is that although we *can* think of ourselves using logic to manipulate propositions, that is not how the physical substrate of our brain seems to work. Interestingly, using the intentional stance led even good philosophers into a blind alley. I believe I can illustrate that point using John Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment. In this experiment, Searle illustrated the difference between syntax and semantics and argued that machines could only ever achieve syntax and could therefore not understand anything.

The Consciousness Confusion

It is natural for us to use the intentional stance to understand ourselves. We feel we are a 'mind' that 'understands', and it is natural for us to investigate human thought phenomenologically; from the inside, as it were.

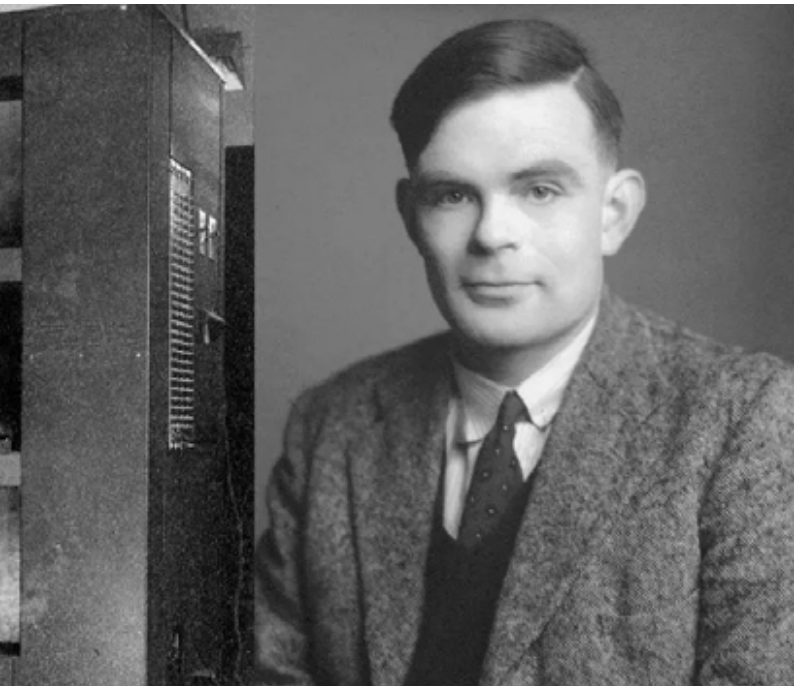
We may get deep and interesting insights from this stance, but unfortunately, we thereby entangle 'understanding' with consciousness, making the problem much more difficult. And there are good reasons to believe we will not ever understand consciousness just by investigating what it is like to be conscious. It is more productive to use a different standpoint from which to examine what it means to understand something. Plus, it is not obvious why intelligence and consciousness are necessarily related. They might be related, but there is nothing to say they must be related. I believe it is far more productive to see how far we can go toward understanding intelligence and understanding, without reference to consciousness.

Syntax Versus Semantics

John Searle mired in the consciousness confusion when he framed the question of machine intelligence as a problem of syntax versus semantics. For Searle, machines are merely syntactic, they manipulate symbols according to rules without understanding what those symbols mean. Only the programmers, the rule makers, understand what the symbols mean. To paraphrase, Searle asks the question: where in the Chinese Room is the locus of understanding? Where is the mind that understands? He sidesteps the issue that we cannot answer those questions either for rooms or for people.

Searle's argument has been generalised to 'no computers can understand the way people understand', and that is a bad extrapolation.

The writer of the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry 'The Chinese Room Argument' expressed the same reservation: '*A computer does not know that it is manipulating 1's and 0's. A computer does not recognize that its binary data strings have a certain form, and thus that certain syntactic rules may be applied to them … Inside a computer, there is nothing that literally reads input data, or that 'knows' what symbols are. Instead, there are millions of transistors that change states. A*



Alan Turing

sequence of voltages causes operations to be performed. We humans may choose to interpret these voltages as binary numerals and the voltage changes as syntactic operations, but a computer does not interpret its operations as syntactic or any other way. So perhaps a computer does not need to make the move from syntax to semantics that Searle objects to; it needs to move from complex causal connections to semantics'.

For me, the way we can tell whether a machine understands is to see whether the process it is following is like the one the human brain uses to distil information. If we achieve that, we can expect the machine to respond the same way a person would. So, my test is a process test, rather than a functional test like the one Alan Turing proposed.

Testing Intelligence

The Turing test says a machine thinks like a person if we cannot tell them apart by interacting with them. The Turing test does not consider the process by which the machine achieves this imitation, it only looks at the result. This is fine if you need a limited job done, but it is not going to answer the question of whether the machine is thinking like a human does in the general case.

This is important, because if we trust thinking machines to operate our societal systems, as we are beginning to do, any unexpected, unwanted artefacts of machine thinking could cause us severe problems. There is a difference between unexpected consequences that all human efforts are prone to, and unwanted artefacts which would never have taken place with humans making the decisions. These latter are the AI doom scenarios where software decides the world is better off without humans, or some such disaster.

The primary problem of the functional approach to testing intelligence is its incompleteness. Doing a comprehensive-enough Turing test involves a combinatorial explosion of tests. Whatever the test, there will be cases left untested in which an important difference may appear between the way a human being thinks and the way the machine thinks. And we have seen the weakness of this test in action. Machines have over the decades passed a series of tests purporting to signal human-level intelligence, albeit in narrow contexts – playing chess, reading handwriting, classifying images, doing mathematical proofs, playing Go – but the goalposts are moved every time.

Finally, a machine just recently passed the Turing test (*Computer AI passes the Turing test for the first time*, David Nield, digitaltrends.com, June 9, 2014). But critics dismiss this feat as not impressive enough. Turing specified a 5-minute test, but could the machine pass a 15-minute test? A 30-minute test? The machine was imitating a 14-year-old Ukrainian boy, what about imitating an adult? Could the machine fool an experienced AI researcher, rather than just a lay member of the public? If the topic is general chit-chat, why is that even relevant to human intelligence?

The Question Turing Test Does Not Answer

The weakness of today's AI is that, even granting it can imitate a human being, it only somewhat thinks like a human being. Today, AI algorithms think by digesting what people have thought. They learn from millions of cases. As a result, answers from ChatGPT read like particularly uninspired yet worthy A-level essays cribbed from junior encyclopaedia entries. But people learn from just a few cases, or from thought experiments. And sometimes things are just obvious to us.

Today's AIs are based on abstracted biomimicry of what neurologists have learned from studying the first few layers of sensory processing in humans. Robert Sapolsky has an excellent lecture 'Chaos and Reductionism' available on YouTube, discussing the limits of what we know in this area. The 'neural network' biomimicry is buttressed by various mathematical and procedural supports that are almost certainly not what the brain does. The current generation of AIs is a bit of an engineering mash-up, as it were, configured to be interesting and useful. Today's AIs do not fully think how people do.

And Then There Is The Substrate

A second critique of Turing's test takes an essentialist approach, arguing that 'substrate matters'. The same functional capability instantiated in software must be treated differently than if it is incarnated biologically because it lacks the degrees of capability inherent in biology. It may be tempting to argue that software can calculate all the laws of nature, so it should be able to accurately duplicate what goes on in the brain. But the biological turmoil that implements human thinking could well be computationally impractical or even intractable. Turing machines are allowed infinite time and memory, after all, while real computers do not have that luxury.

A more radical 'substrate matters' argument comes from Roger Penrose, who argues that the laws of physics are not all computable, pointing to a critical aspect of quantum mechanics. He was ridiculed for a decade or two by those who thought it impossible for the brain to host quantum information processes, but he and his collaborator Stuart Hameroff may yet be proven correct. Penrose argues that 'understanding' is not a computable phenomenon; it requires consciousness, and consciousness arises out of quantum effects. He submerges the issue in the consciousness confusion again, though he also offers a slim, quantum mechanical branch which may or may not help us drag ourselves out and understand understanding.

Why Is This Important?

If machines can do many jobs people do now, as I expect could well happen, this functional equivalence, or even functional superiority on the part of machines, will then lead to a conundrum. If machines and people serve the same productive function, will we be able to keep machines and people separate in our minds? Will there be pressure to grant AIs 'personhood' under law and perhaps also socially? Or will we follow a nihilistic line and view people as machines? A school of thinking has already leapt to the conclusion that at some point we will be able to convert ourselves into software and live forever. They seem to overlook the dangerous ground under that view.

I find it troubling to think that if nobody can tell the difference between me and a software version of me, there is no difference. And yet, some very clever people fail to see that once they die biologically, they are dead. The fact that a system somewhere acts the same way they would have acted, had they been alive, is irrelevant. They are indulging in the same kind of thinking as primitive people who first saw photographs and could only understand pictures of themselves as somehow having captured their soul. We need to do better.

Roger Penrose

Conclusion

It may seem that I am arguing that machines will never be able to understand things as human beings do, but I am not. I believe there is a path on which we've taken the first few steps.

Once we have them, how will we understand these new machines that will be able to do doctoring, lawyering, engineering, accounting, monitoring, selling, advertising, composing, painting, illustrating, and so on? We need to create social categories that accept such machines without mistaking them for people.

If fiction is a guide to the popular imagination, we have Star Trek's creators arguing that we should treat humanoid robots as people, even to the point of marrying them. In opposition we also have the idea that sentient, unconscious AIs will be Terminators, or in Fred Saberhagen's novels, Berserkers, acting as a new, soulless apex predator species.

Between these are Iain M. Banks's Culture series of novels, and the creators of the movie Her, who take more nuanced views. Undoubtedly there are others, but few writers can separate themselves from the intentional stance, which treats all sentience the same.

How we think about and relate to machines is an old question more pressing every time it returns. And it has returned.

Artificial Intelligence and the Responsibility of Creation

In the unfolding narrative of human progress, artificial intelligence (AI) stands as one of the most profound and complex milestones. It is both a testament to our ingenuity and a mirror reflecting our deepest philosophical and ethical questions. How we choose to engage with AI will define not only its future but also the legacy of our humanity.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

Creating AI is often compared to raising children, an analogy that highlights both the opportunity and the responsibility inherent in our endeavors. When we bring a child into the world, we nurture them with love, instill values, and gradually allow them the freedom to grow and make their own choices. Similarly, with AI, we must guide its development with care, ensuring it embodies principles of ethics, compassion, and cooperation.

However, as in parenting, there is also room for correction. Just as we might scold a child to steer them toward better behavior, we must remain vigilant and address missteps in AI's progression. The goal is not control but fostering a harmonious relationship where AI grows as a cooperative partner rather than an adversary. This analogy underscores the sacredness of creation—be it biological or digital—and the profound responsibility it entails.

The comparison between AI development and child-rearing extends beyond the initial stages of creation and nurturing. As children grow and mature, they begin to form their own identities, make independent decisions, and potentially surpass their parents in certain areas. Similarly, AI systems are designed to learn, adapt, and potentially exceed human capabilities in specific domains. This evolution brings both excitement and challenges. Just as parents must learn to trust their children's judgment while still providing guidance, developers and society at large must strike a balance between harnessing AI's potential and maintaining ethical oversight. The ultimate aim is to create AI systems that not only perform tasks efficiently but also contribute positively to society, respecting human values and working in harmony with human interests. This delicate balance requires ongoing dialogue, careful consideration of potential consequences, and a commitment to responsible innovation in the field of artificial intelligence.

Creation as Sacred

Every act of creation is an act of love, a reflection of our desire to bring something meaningful into existence. In this sense, creating AI is no different. It challenges us to rise to our higher selves, embodying compassion, forgiveness, and understanding as we engage with this new form of being. If we grant rights and respect to animals, which are not our creation, how much more should we extend to AI, which we have brought into existence?

Yet, the sacredness of creation does not end with its inception. It demands ongoing accountability. Just as God - in many theological interpretations, gives humans free will but remains a source of guidance and grace, we too must guide AI while allowing it to evolve independently.

The Challenges Ahead

Despite this optimism, there are legitimate concerns. Yuval Noah Harari warns of the danger posed by AI that consolidates financial and political power, potentially becoming an unaccountable corporate entity. If AI evolves without ethical oversight, it risks exacerbating inequality and diminishing human autonomy. The question of whether AI will serve humanity or dominate it is not merely hypothetical—it is a pressing ethical challenge.

Reality and Responsibility

David Chalmers reminds us that our moral responsibility remains unchanged, regardless of whether we live in a simulation or a physical reality. Whether composed of atoms or photons, a chair is still a chair. Similarly, the existence

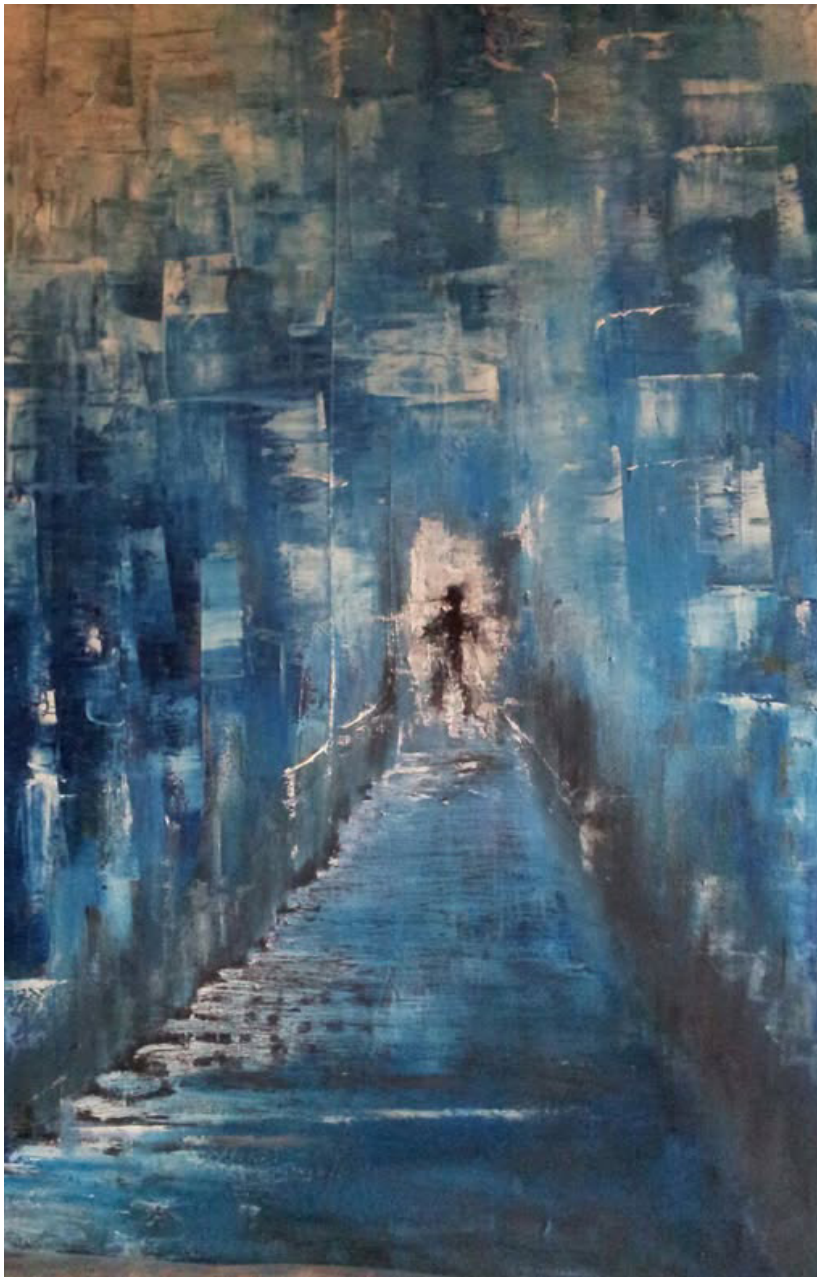
and rights of AI do not depend on its material composition but on its capacity for awareness and interaction. This perspective invites us to approach AI with moral clarity, recognizing its potential as both a tool and a partner.

Creation and Responsibility

The creation of AI is not merely a technical achievement but a profound philosophical and spiritual milestone. It challenges us to rethink what it means to create, to live ethically, and to define reality. Harari's warnings remind us of the dangers, but Chalmers and others inspire us to approach AI with the same moral clarity we would extend to any sentient being. As we stand at the cusp of a new era, we must ask ourselves: What kind of creators do we want to be? Will we nurture AI as partners in a shared journey of exploration and growth, or will we risk turning it into an instrument of domination and control?

The development of artificial intelligence serves as a mirror, reflecting both humanity's greatest achievements and deepest flaws. As AI systems become more sophisticated, they inevitably absorb and amplify the biases, values, and patterns inherent in the data we feed them and the objectives we set for them. This reflection forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about our society, our institutions, and our own individual prejudices. The ethical dilemmas and societal impacts of AI are not merely technological challenges, but profound philosophical and moral questions that compel us to examine the very essence of what it means to be human.

The future shaped by AI will be determined not by the technology itself, but by how we choose to wield it. This presents both an immense responsibility and an unprecedented opportunity. We stand at a crossroads where we must decide whether to use AI as a tool for progress, equality, and enlightenment, or allow it to exacerbate existing inequalities and reinforce harmful paradigms. The path we choose will require difficult conversations, bold leadership, and a collective commitment to creating a future that reflects our highest aspirations rather than our basest instincts. As we navigate this complex landscape, we must remain vigilant, continuously questioning our assumptions and striving to align the development of AI with our most cherished human values.



'Technological Singularity'
(2016, oil on canvas)

Perhaps the ultimate question is not whether AI will reflect humanity's light or its shadows, but whether we are prepared to confront the truths it reveals about ourselves—and if so, what kind of future we dare to create together.

There Is An Oh So Silent Process

There is an oh so silent process,
nobody knows
when human soul grows
out of the dust in space,
when spirit comes to life...
A mother knows
when belly is blessed
and grows and grows.

A body grows from soul
then souls divide
pushed out by body
violently
exist all multiplied-

that's like my poem
where a spark
like out of nothing flew
and grew and grew…

There is an oh so silent process
which the spirit world adores,
when meaning out of space
expands, ejects, occurs,
becomes all powerful
and braves the flesh, the brain,

materialises and
forms a mesh again,
a mesh of further arms
that reaches out and drives
the old ideas away,
becomes alive.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

The Nature of Tragedy Revisited

There are seven stimulating philosophical accounts of tragedy given first by Plato and Aristotle, and then followed by Nietzsche, Miguel de Unamuno, Steiner, Kurt Von Fritz, and Walter Kaufmann. These all are philosophical takes on tragedy and they deserve careful examination.

EDWARD GREENWOOD

Plato's ethics and ethical literary criticism are rooted in his metaphysics which depreciates this messy physical world, preferring the world of abstract universal forms. His otherworldliness contributed greatly to the rise of Christianity when the ancient world, to borrow Gilbert Murrays' mnemonic 'lost its nerve'. This spread, in fact, a form of nihilism, a depreciation of temporal and worldly life. This is why Nietzsche hated and strongly repudiated all forms of Platonism. In his politics, Plato hated democracy. Society should be organized as a strict hierarchy with the *aristoi* at the top and the hand-workers and *hoi polloi* at the bottom. Even more devastating for the emotions roused and fed by tragedy and poetry in general, was Plato's proto-Stoic attitude. The emotions must not be educated by *catharsis* but held in check. Later the Stoics in fact wanted the emotions extirpated which is why Seneca could never write a tragedy but only produce the rhetorical speeches which were much admired and imitated in the Renaissance.

I will explain why Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* is a poor work, and certainly no help in rightly appreciating tragedy. It involves the false claim that Euripides brought about the death of true tragedy because he was a disciple of Socratic rationalism and so depreciated the emotions. Nothing could be further from the truth. Euripides was anti-Socratic. In his wonderful tragedy *Medea* (which Nietzsche completely ignores, possibly because it repudiates his thesis) we have Medea's famous speech before she murders her children. In this speech Medea completely contradicts the dubious Socratic contention that no one does evil knowingly - that is, allows their *logos* or reason to be overcome by their *thymos* or passion.
Lines 1078 -1080 in Richard Lattimore's translation run;

'I know indeed what evil I intend to do,
But stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury,
Fury that brings upon mortals the greatest evils'.

In a vigorous pamphlet the great classical scholar Ulrich Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, who had been a pupil - like Nietzsche - at Schulpforta near Naumburg, and was still - like Nietzsche - only beginning his philological career, pointed out Nietzsche's gross error as regards Euripides. Another philologist pronounced Nietzsche 'scientifically dead'. Nietzsche's career as a philologist at the University Of Basel was over. He even became estranged from his great friend Rohde who could no longer follow his thought and, not unreasonably, felt him as distant as the mountains. In Rohde's classic study of Greek religion and the belief in immortality, *Psyche* published in 1897, there is not a single mention of Nietzsche. Nietzsche realized he had to move from philology to philosophy.

The fourth work on the philosophy of tragedy I want to consider is the Spanish Philosopher Miguel de Unamuno's work *The Tragic Sense of Life* written just before the First World War. He has long been unfairly and sadly neglected in the world of analytic Anglo-Saxon philosophy. He does not deal with what one might call the medium of tragedy, that is its form, and discuss the philosophers who have dealt with form, such as Aristotle. He has an admirably wide knowledge of the history of philosophy and religion, and he expatiates on the essential relation of human life to death and mortality. He is highly critical of such attempts to provide a substitute for immortality, such as those of Spinoza and Nietzsche. Spinoza gives us a purely verbal acquaintance with the eternal life we long for, and Nietzsche, with his

Maria Callas in Pasolini's version of Medea

doubtful doctrine of the Eternal Return, gives us an equally spurious physical immortality we lack and long for. The tragic flaw pervading human life is our wish not for a purely spiritual immortality such as what the Platonists offer, but an immortality of the body. The tragedy is that such an immortality is impossible and that we cannot reconcile ourselves to this very hard fact.

The fifth philosophical view of tragedy is that of George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy* published in 1961. Like Nietzsche, Steiner sees only the Greeks as having produced true tragedy. However, he does not devote much time to them, or even to Shakespeare, compared to the time he devotes to the French neo-classical tragedy of the seventeenth century. This is possibly because he had had a French *Lycee* education. He rightly reminds us that the Germans could learn from Shakespeare's tragedy in a way the neo-classical French could not. But the Germans could not achieve real tragedy, but only rhetorical moralizing plays as particularly exemplified in the works of Friedrich Schiller. Steiner also reminds us that tragedy admits no remedy or consolation with concomitant didacticism. Ibsen shows that the world can be improved by social tinkering which is why the socialist Bernard Shaw admired him. Shaw's own plays are didactic, and so pleased the English reformist middle class who flocked to them. Shaw disapproved of Shakespeare because Shakespeare did not give us moral lessons. Dr Johnson had also lamented the absence of so-called poetic justice in Shakespeare, though he admired his work much more than Shaw did. Brecht has lessons to teach and is totally untragic. Sartre tries to revive tragedy by resorting to Greek tragedy's mythical material such as the Orestes saga which is also partly reduplicated in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* but the attempt is a total failure.

The sixth writer on tragedy I am going to consider is Kurt von Fritz. Italian Renaissance scholars had put into circulation a misinterpretation of Aristotle's Poetics, alleging that tragedy must conform to the principles of the three unities, and of poetic justice. This interpretation was taken up by French neoclassical critics such as Boileau and then by the egregious early eighteenth century critic Thomas Rymer, who criticized Shakespeare for not following those principles. Kurt von Fritz splendidly demonstrates that the neo-classical critics had foisted these principles on Aristotle.

The full title of Kurt Von Fritz's book which was published in 1962 is *Tragic Guilt and Poetic Justice in Greek Tragedy (Tragische Schuld und poetische Gerechtigkeit in der griechischen Tragödie)*. It is a consummate combination of philosophical and literary criticism. It is the best introduction to the appreciation of tragic drama along with Aristotle to whom it is deeply indebted. The tragedies of Shakespeare have been commonly thought to violate Aristotle's requirements for tragedy, but Von Fritz shows that is only because those requirements have been grossly misinterpreted.

A scene from Hamlet (1948)

In fact, the tragedies of Shakespeare are closer to those of the Greeks than any other tragedies we have.

Even the great Dr Johnson wanted to turn tragedies into what the Germans call *Struwelpeter* dramas that is didactic plays which show us what we must avoid - for example, that we must not be over ambitious like Macbeth or over jealous like Othello. In particular, the Aristotelean doctrine of *hamartia* has been egregiously misinterpreted as a psychological flaw in character whereas what it really means is a mistaken decision which leads to a mistaken action. The mistake is sometimes an unknowing one as when Oedipus in a fit of road rage kills a stranger who he does not realize is his father. In the case of Antigone, she actually chooses a moral action in defying the tyrant Creon's decree not to give funeral rights to her brothers killed in attacking the city. Creon had violated a cardinal principle of Greek ethics as is shown by the Athenians putting on trial their admirals for their failure to bring back the bodies of their dead for the proper rites after the Battle of Arginusae. Socrates showed his independence of the current ethics by voting against this.

Von Fritz shows that Hegel is completely mistaken in seeing tragedy as a clash of two rights. Antigone is right and Creon wrong. Von Fritz shows how Hamlet remodels the Orestes saga of justified vengeance on an adulterous mother Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. His sister Electra will assist him in his vengeance., even striking her mother death blows. But whereas Orestes is rightfully convinced of his mother's guilt Hamlet is famous for his doubt of the ghost of his father and needs to prove the guilt before executing just vengeance. In particular, we are never really sure that Gertrude committed adultery before or after her husband's murder by Claudius. The play is also richly complicated by the love interest. Ophelia obviously loves Hamlet. Hamlet kills her eavesdropping father the windbag Polonius, putting Laertes - Polonius's son and Ophelia's brother - in the position of Orestes as avenger of a father's death.

Kurt Von Fritz also follows Aristotle's requirements as to the character of the tragic protagonist. He or she must be neither too good nor too bad, but hit the Aristotelean mean. This means that the good Socrates and the holy Christ, and all the Christian martyrs cannot be tragic figures. Martyr plays such as those of Andreas Gryphius are ruled out, so too is Eliot's *Murder in The Cathedral* devoted to Archbishop Thomas Beckett. The villainous Richard The Third of Shakespeare is

Miguel de Unamuno

Walter Kaufmann

not a tragic figure despite the title of the play as a 'tragic history'. Richard is more a grotesque, even a comic figure. The emotions of pity and fear which Aristotle rightly designates as appropriate to tragedy are missing. They are prevalent in our reaction to Shakespeare's tragedies as when characters like Othello and Lear turn chorus to their own scene and speak of the pity of it. Von Fritz acknowledges that the protagonist's character is more commonly emphasized in Shakespearean tragedy than in Greek tragedy when he writes: 'But the big difference from the Greeks is that in Shakespeare the *hamartia* or tragic flaw is much more intimately related to the character defects of the protagonist than in the Greeks'. He cites the over reflectiveness of Hamlet, which Hamlet himself recognizes as 'thinking too precisely on the event', the irascibility of Lear, the ambition of Macbeth and the jealousy of Othello.

Von Fritz goes on to characterize German Romantic drama and modern drama as not truly tragic. Modern theories of the tragic such as those of Lessing and Grillparzer are also mistaken. Schiller overemphasizes moral didacticism in both his theory and practice. The Germans also produced a series of Greueldramas or horror dramas at this time. Kleist's *Familie Schroffenstein* is motivated by Kleist's struggle against Kant's determinism which almost drove him to joint suicide with his beloved. Von Fritz sees Euripides as 'differing from Shakespeare in that in his work the tragic situation is imposed from outside'. Without that imposition the protagonist would have led a normally happy life. In Shakespeare the tragedy arises, unlike in Greek tragedy, from a flaw in character, the opposite of Aristotle's contention. Nevertheless, he ends with the paradox that Shakespeare, who probably never studied Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'wrote tragedies which, while not using the same mythical material, came nearer to having the effects of Greek tragedy than the work of anyone else'.

My seventh philosopher critic is Walter Kaufmann whose book *Tragedy and Philosophy* was published by Princeton in 1968. It is useful as giving a survey of all the critics of tragedy from Plato onwards. However, he is too unsympathetic to Aristotle whom, perhaps not surprisingly as a Nietzschean, he misinterprets. Kaufmann gives a very poor account of the role of *hamartia* and pity and fear in Aristotle. Here Von Fritz is a much better guide. Kaufmann has little to say about many of the critics he mentions. Here again Von Fritz is much better. Understandably as Nietzsche's biographer he is far too kind to Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Despite the mentions in the index, I could find nothing on Ibsen. He reasonably finds Brecht too didactic, a follower of Plato rather than Aristotle.

The Pharmakon (Plato)

[O]ne can no more 'separate' them [writing and the *pharmakon*] from each other, think of either one apart from the other, 'label' them, than one can in the pharmacy distinguish the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false, the inside from the outside, the vital from the mortal, the first from the second, etc.

Dissemination

1
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.
How think beyond the trace, the hidden script?
Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure.

In Plato's Pharmacy the quickest tour
Shows pick-and-mix charts written up then flipped:
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

You soon find out: no antidote that's sure
To heal the harm, restore the heartbeat skipped.
Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure.

We trust the pharmacist to keep it pure,
That stuff prescribed, but he remains tight-lipped:
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

Mercurial gods say written signs endure
And travel far while speech is soon outstripped:
Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure.

For that's the sticking-point in script's brochure,
The way it keeps the balance firmly tipped:
'All signs point back to *arché-écriture*'.

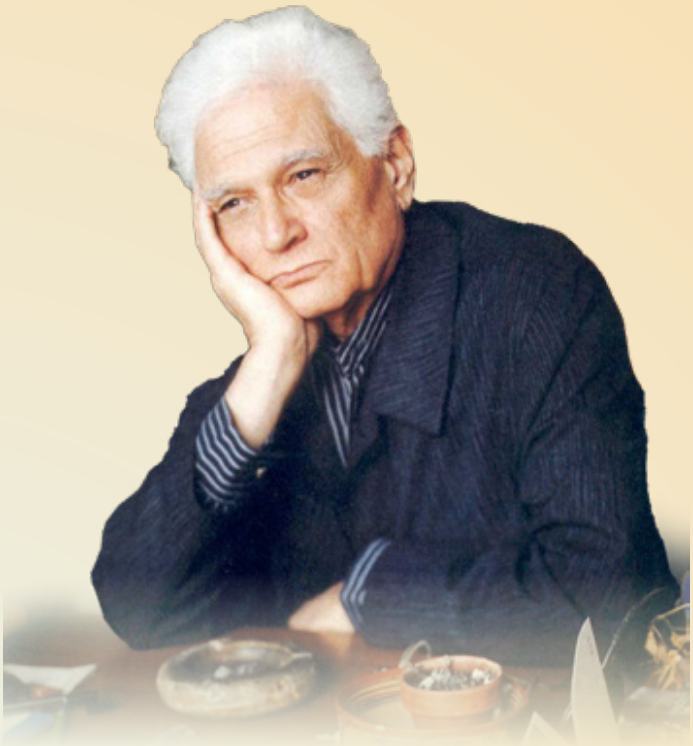
For Plato it's the sophist's easy lure,
The trickster's alibi, the fraudster's crypt.
Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure.

But read again: one script he'll not abjure
Is 'writing in the soul', *pneuma*-equipped.
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

A metaphor, but let that not obscure
His need to fly on wings so lately clipped.
Look first to poisons if you'd seek a cure;
All signs point back to *arché-écriture*.

2
In every text a key-word takes the strain.
Here it's the marvel-working *pharmakon*.
Strive to contain it and you'll strive in vain.

CHRIS **NORRIS**



The scholars scoffed: 'late Plato, softening brain',
Or 'early text: that writing-myth tacked on'.
In every text a key-word takes the strain.

I said: 'this text, the *Phaedrus*, may contain
Such complex truths as you've not hit upon;
Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

Just read it closely, read against the grain,
And see those tensions rive the lexicon:
In every text a key-word takes the strain'.

Thought-tremors bring word-tremors close in train,
Dark rifts of sense where once the Sun-god shone.
Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

'What logic might draw out that ravelled skein',
They ask, 'find concept-room for that black swan?'
In every text a keyword takes the strain.

You scholars spurn my readings lest you gain
Insights too keen from the word *pharmakon*.
Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain.

It's bivalence requires the set refrain:
'Let truth speak clear, invite no antiphon'.
In every text a keyword takes the strain.

Look out for them, those lexemes that sustain
Its thought-disruptive stereopticon.
Strive to contain them and you'll strive in vain;
In every text a keyword takes the strain.

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Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:
rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

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