Annual Philosophy Lecture 2024

The Democratic Brain
Body, Soul, and the Politics of Listening

Guest Speaker
Matt Qvortrup

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Grand Hotel Excelsior Malta
We invite any person to submit an article on SHARE. Any subject matter may be dealt with, but articles must be of a philosophical nature, in English and no longer than 1,000-1,500 words. References, if any, are to be placed with the text. It shall be the sole prerogative and responsibility of the Editor to determine which contributions to include or exclude from the magazine. The ideas expressed in the authors’ articles represent their views and may not necessarily reflect or concur with the views of the board members of the Philosophy Sharing Foundation.
Everyone must have experienced the disappointment of sharing the experience of a piece of art, only to encounter a lack of reciprocal enthusiasm or indifference. Art, being always subject to individual tastes, emotions, appeal, and fashion trends, is inevitably shaped by the historical and cultural context of its time. Yet amidst this subjectivity, certain works stand the test of time, prompting us to ponder how humanity reaches a common understanding of what constitutes a great work of art. In this quest, philosophy provides relevant and valuable tools in addressing the complex questions that are raised by art.

Louis Groarke proposes an Aristotelian definition of art grounded in two elements. Art is something that involves skilful craftsmanship and has the power to evoke a delightful experience to the spectator. Groarke’s perspective challenges the prevalent contemporary notion that anything created by humanity can be considered a work of art.

Joe Friggieri contends that the best poets convey profound truths about life, emotions, and experiences. Friggeri argues that poetry through its language of imagination, employs concrete images to evoke new thoughts and reflections that other form of communication may struggle to convey. This line of reasoning can indeed be extended towards other various art forms such as paintings, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, literature, and cinema.

But when it comes to cinema, Mario Cordina draws parallels between Plato’s allegory of the Cave and the cinematic experience, as he highlights the captivation of the audience to the illusion of reality and suspension of disbelief. Does this observation support Plato’s claim that art remains a powerful vehicle for the distortion of truth? Cordina argues that cinema evolved from philosophy through its similar questioning stance on human existence. In the process, cinema contributes to the continual evolution of philosophical thought.

This point is reinforced by four additional contributors – Ian Rizzo who views Pink Floyd’s rock music album The Dark Side of the Moon as a great work of art aligned with existential and phenomenological themes; Inger Cini’s appreciative article on Werner Herzog’s documentary Fata Morgana which
also embodies existential themes and links to Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Guillaume Collett’s observation of the recurring use of ‘there’ in the lyrics of music band Radiohead that symbolises de-personalised feelings leading to transcendence of individual subjectivity; and Kyle Galea’s illustration of how science fiction through its blend of art and philosophy inspires technological innovation for future prosperity while fostering dialogue on ethical and social implications.

Yet, as art grows out of philosophy and shapes it in return, Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci expresses concern about the complex relationship that has now developed between them. He delves into issues such as the fusion of contemporary art with philosophy, the impact of artificial intelligence on art and the role of traditional aesthetic elements. Schembri Bonaci emphasises the need for philosophy to reintroduce the act of reading into the understanding of paintings.

Within a somewhat different perspective, artist photographer, Jamie Fettis advocates for a pre-cognitive, non-verbal approach to art, that offers instantaneous perception and aims for the shock of the new.

Perhaps it is appropriate to conclude our reflection on art with another realistic observation on the dual nature of humanity – its creative powers to produce great works of art, is matched by an equivalent genius capacity to destroy. Adrian Camilleri Chiaro, questions whether acts like the protest campaign of Just Stop Oil that target iconic artworks to raise awareness of environmental degradation, lead to meaningful changes or merely serve as alarming spectacles.

Alas, humanity’s expression of feelings, the driving force behind artistic endeavours, always remains the hardest act to comprehend.

The other articles, briefly.

Professor Matt Qvortrup is interviewed by Ian Rizzo wherein he shares his Kantian perspective on political philosophy, emphasising the importance of reason and open debate in democratic societies. The interview also touches on democracy’s global challenges, the rise of populism, and the role of political philosophy in addressing contemporary issues such as climate change and artificial intelligence (AI).

Colette Sciberras explores the dichotomy between nature and technology, focusing on the idea that technology, often driven by economic and political forces, has the potential to enslave humanity. Encouraging readers to adopt a non-dualistic perspective, the author emphasises the crucial principle ‘know thyself’ when questioning humanity’s relationship with nature and technology.

Peter Mayo commemorates the 100th birth centenary of Lorenzo Milani, an influential Italian pedagogue known for his contributions to critical education and social justice. Milani’s teachings address issues such as social class, collective learning, and an anti-war pedagogy. Despite his religious background, Milani advocated for a secular, non-denominational education focused on raising the critical educational level of the marginalised.

Christopher Fenech examines the relevance of transhumanist movements, tracing their origins to Julian Huxley in the 1950s. He highlights the diversity within the transhumanist movement that encompasses various perspectives on human enhancement though science and technology. While acknowledging the importance of transhumanist ideas, the author stresses the need for a broader reflection on emerging technologies that consider socio-economic disparities, ecological concerns, and philosophical questions.

Steven S. Gouveia explores the transformative effect of AI on medicine, emphasising improved reliability, precision and operational efficiency compared to human expertise and manual data analysis approach. The author raises, though, ethical considerations that are exemplified by concerns about potential biases in AI models.

Alexander Lazarov, in a similar vein, explores the challenges and necessity of integrating AI into healthcare, highlighting the crucial role of the philosophical perspective in this discussion. The author contemplates whether the relationship between AI and humanity will result in a battle of supremacy or whether it will be a journey with shared successes and learned failures.

Valdeli Pereira, in his book review on *Plato at the Googleplex* by Rebecca Goldstein commends the book for its innovative exploration of Plato’s philosophy in a contemporary context. Goldstein’s clever use of dialogues fosters a connection between ancient wisdom and current issues, and thereby showcases the enduring relevance of philosophical inquiry for both scholars and general readers.

The philosophical manifesto now in its fifth series, drafted by Ian Rizzo, delves into the complex nature of justice. Advocating for full transparency and independence in the legal system, the manifesto emphasises a restorative justice approach, that addresses the causes of crime. The manifesto acknowledges ongoing challenges to secure justice for minority rights, non-human animals, and the environment while emphasising the importance of economic justice.
What Is Art?
A Contemporary Aristotelian Suggestion

By Louis Groarke

It may seem counter-intuitive to some that as ancient an authority as Aristotle might provide an answer to a contemporary philosophical conundrum. If, however, contemporary philosophers who specialize in aesthetics have been unable to define or explain what art is, rigorously applying Aristotelian principles offers a more positive perspective.

Going at least as far back as Marcel Duchamp’s 1917 *Fountaine*, a urinal included as a readymade sculpture in an avant garde New York exhibition, modern artists with an *épater la galerie* aesthetic have proposed a bewildering array of objects, performances, events, and environments as art. Cans of artist’s excrement (Manzoni), an empty gallery (Klein, Barry, Irwin, et al.), a pile of bricks (Andre), an unmade bed (Emin), a stuffed shark in formaldehyde (Hirst), a dinner of dog-meat (McGowan), an actual medical operation (Recht), an “artist” masturbating (Acconci): all these have been presented to the public as art. Whether this creative effervescence marks a bold new experiment or a tiresome repetition of anti-authority clichés, I will leave for the reader to decide.

In the face of such polymorphous diversity, many, if not most philosophers working in the field of aesthetics, have accepted something close to defeat. Art cannot be defined, they think; art has no fixed nature; there is no stable or unchanging features common to all art-objects. The best one can do—according to this conventional way of thinking—is to defer to something like Wittgenstein’s family resemblance theory of meaning. According to this way of thinking, art is but a loosely scattered group of objects that resemble one another partially and incompletely like different members of the same family. We can pick out resemblances here and there, but there is no shared essential nature.

George Dickie, with his “new institutional theory of art” left it open for the “art-world,” an amorphous conglomeration of galleries, museums, art critics, art departments, etc., to declare anything as art. Arthur Danto, confronted with Andy Warhol’s *Brillo Boxes* and inspired by Hegel, felt compelled to announce “the end of art.” Like Dickie, Danto thought that modern-day artists could make anything into art. It follows, he reasoned, that any narration that focuses on art as something different or unique from other things is impossible. Given that nothing can be excluded from art, this frees the artist to make of art whatever he or she deems it to be. It is up to the artist to determine what the nature of art is—with no restrictions at all.

For an Aristotelian, much of this discussion is beside the point. The fact that someone (artist, museum director, or art critic) asserts that something is art does not decide the issue. Current usage of the term “art” may be endlessly variable, maybe even incoherent, but fixing on a lexical (or dictionary) definition of art is not what the philosophical project of Aristotelian definition is about. Aristotelian
definitions aim to group objects that share the same nature in a single category. How people use a particular word in familiar speech is a different issue.

Most contemporary theorists reject outright Aristotelian ideas. Some seem to be worried about the dreaded specter of an outmoded essentialism that would cut off the legs of art to make it fit to some rigid Procrustean bed. But Aristotelians do not believe that art has an essence, at least not in any strict technical sense. In Aristotle’s system, ants, goldfish, and bald eagles have essences, but art is a matter of human production; it is something artificial—it is not a natural kind. There is no metaphysical “essence” of art in any rigorous sense. We should not confuse metaphysical distinctions with distinctions we make about human-made objects. We use the term “art”, I am going to suggest, as an evaluative term to pick out human-made objects especially deserving of attention.

Philosophers who study visual art often complain that Aristotle’s imitation theory of art cannot make sense of abstract modern art. (Art critic Clement Greenberg and the formalist Clive Bell typify pro-abstract-art attitudes.) If, however, Aristotle identifies art with μιμησις (usually translated as “imitation”), he never argues for any literal realism in visual art. Extrapolating from his Poetics, it is clear that Aristotle believes that art aims, first and foremost, at emotional expression (including catharsis), not at any literal representation of things in the world. Art imitates nature (Physics, II,2,8) insomuch as human craft (τεχνη) produces wholes (not heaps) with an identifiable purpose united by a characteristic form. There is no reason why abstract painting cannot be understood in thoroughly Aristotelian terms as presenting a human-made unity that is intended to produce a certain kind of experience.

Bernard Suits, of “Grasshopper” fame, provides a useful methodology for the definition of controversial terms. The way to begin a definition, he recommends, is to ignore marginal cases that spawn controversy and examine paradigmatic individual cases everyone would have to accept as exemplifying the species in question. Everyone would accept, for example, that Michelangelo’s Pietà, a Byzantine Icon, or the Nike of Samothrace are works of art. What, then, are the features that these objects share that makes us call them “art”?

I want to suggest, in line with traditional theories, that these objects satisfy two necessary criteria. First, they provide a fitting occasion for delight and, second, they are examples of great skill. What, then, is art? It is something made skillfully that produces an experience of delight in a spectator (capable of appreciation). Taken together, these two features constitute sufficient and necessary grounds to call something art.

But the careful philosopher has to be wary of oversimplifications. What I mean by delight is an experience that is intrinsically valued; i.e., an experience we want to have, not merely as a means to something else, but for its own sake. We delight in Monet’s paintings of lily-pads as a sensuous experience that is worthwhile in and of itself.
But we also value, within the right context, even intense experiences of suffering and sorrow. Think of Grünewald’s Isenheim Crucifixion, for example. Or Goya’s wartime etchings.

Except that an experience of delight is not enough to make something art. We can delight in a blaze of sunlight illuminating Mount Robson in the Canadian Rockies. But this appealing mountain scene is not art because it was not skillfully made by a human being. The term art refers to something produced by human genius. But, here again, one must be careful about oversimplifications. To claim that art requires skill is not to insist that art necessitates virtuoso, showy technical performance. A cartoonist capturing a face in a single fragile line might involve a great display of skill. Spontaneous watercolor splashed in a seemingly hit-and-miss composition that expresses a mood might involve a great deal of skill. Skill is the mind and the hand working together to produce the desired effect; it a matter of mastering an efficient method of expression.

Much more could be said, but here, then, is the beginning of an Aristotelian definition of art. Art critics will argue, of course, about which objects or performances embody the proper level of skill and delight. We can leave them to their debates here. The definition is in only intended to provide a general rule we can try to follow when determining which objects belong in the same group.

Because people who have appointed themselves as “artists” point to an object and call it “art” does not make it art, at least not on this Aristotelian scheme. Such objects may be valuable for many different reasons, but it need not follow that they possess the same nature as for example, Rembrandt’s Night Watch. Expanding the term “art” to include anything and everything is imprecise and unhelpful, at least when it comes to matters of rigorous philosophical classification. The philosopher’s job is to use sharpened analysis to critique current usage not to simply accept whatever the received wisdom would have us believe.

References

Louis F. Groarke is Professor in the Department of Philosophy at St. Francis Xavier University. He specialises in Aristotle, ancient philosophy, logic, ethics, and aesthetics. Recent publications include: Uttering the Unutterable: Aristotle, Literature, Religion (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023).
Poetry and Truth

By Joe Friggieri

Poetry and truth are related in this way. Poetry teaches us things we cannot learn from other sources. It speaks to us in a language that is different from the language of mathematics, logic and the natural sciences. And it puts us in touch with features of our life and environment – the inner and the outer world – to which we would have no access if it did not exist.

The language of poetry is the language of the imagination. It is a fact of human psychology that even the most abstract thoughts are accompanied by concrete images. By creating new images, poets enable us to think new thoughts, to reflect imaginatively on important aspects of our experience.

Not all poets succeed in doing this, but the best of them do. They convey important truths about life and death, joy and sorrow, childhood and old age, war and peace, love in all its forms, solitude, memory, and the complexity of human emotions. And they convey these truths poetically, by using language in a special way, varying the patterns and rhythms of ordinary, everyday conversation, employing rhyme, assonance and alliteration, but above all by using simile and metaphor to create striking and memorable images.

A simple example of the way thought and image are woven together in poetic texts is this Old Testament reflection from the Book of Job on the ephemeral character of man’s life:

‘Man wastes away like rotten wood, like a garment eaten by moths... He rises like a flower, and withers away; he disappears like a shadow, never to be seen again.’

(Job 13, 28; 14, 2).

There are four images in this short passage, where man’s fragile existence is compared to rotten wood, a moth-eaten dress, a flower withering away, and a fleeting shadow. A few lines later the poet uses yet another image:

‘As water evaporates from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man goes to sleep and does not rise again.’

(Job 14, 11-12).

It is by such accumulation of images that the poem succeeds in conveying its truth. Shorn of those images the central idea loses much of its force.

A similar strategy is used by the author of the Song of Songs, a collection of love lyrics in which, as Marcia Falk has shown, vines and vineyards, gardens, the wild and remote natural landscape, interior environments and city streets are used in a tapestry of striking images meant to illuminate the intellectual/emotional fabric of the poems, where the relation between tenor (the object described) and vehicle (the image used to describe it with) is so close that any attempt at paraphrasing the content of the text would either result in repetition or risk losing sight of the idea completely. The intricate and inseparable links between image and thought characteristic of the Songs can be seen in the following lines, which come towards the end of the cycle and are clearly meant to convey the central truth of the whole collection.

‘For love is strong as death, harsh as the grave. Its tongues are flames, a fierce and holy blaze.

Endless seas and floods, torrents and rivers can never put out love’s infinite fires.’


2 *Song of Songs*, 8, 6-7, translated by Marcia Falk, op.cit., 47.
In all these passages one cannot fail to notice the part played by the natural environment in the expression of the speaker’s thoughts and feelings. It has been claimed that poets were the first ecologists and that all great poets, including the authors of the earliest sacred texts in both eastern and western cultural traditions, have found in the natural environment a constant source of inspiration. Whether it was itself the subject of their poetic output, or whether it served as a backdrop to it, Nature always featured prominently in their works. Before the great social upheavals brought about by urbanisation in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, people’s ties to the natural environment were very strong – much stronger than they are today. But it would be wrong to think that such ties were severed for good, or that the poetic practice just referred to came to an abrupt end or was no longer possible. Living in the middle of the urban jungle, contemporary writers can still borrow their imagery from Nature and use it to good effect. In his famous two-line poem ‘In a Station of the Metro’ Ezra Pound compared the faces of people inside a subway station to petals on the branch of a tree:

‘The apparition of these faces in the crowd: petals on a wet, black bough.’

As these lines show, poets do not limit themselves to describing Nature, they see psychological attitudes and states of mind reflected in it as they project their own moods and emotions onto it.

In a sweet little poem by Serbian poet Branko Miljkovic (1934-1961) called ‘A little flower’ (‘Jedan maleni cvet’), the poet attributes to the flower a kind of unity and harmony with the rest of its environment and an instinctive sense of the meaning of life which, by implication, many human beings seem to have lost – even though they can do many things the flower can’t, like reading and counting.

‘A little flower
had just opened its eyelid,
but it already knew the sun’s secrets
and what the Earth hid.
This little flower
didn’t know how to walk in line,
but it knew how to feed itself
with water, air and sunshine.
This little flower
doesn’t know how to read or count,
but it knows what life means
and smells so nice.’

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3 Quoted in Falk, op. cit., 82.
4 Translated by Dragana Konstantinovic and published in a special issue of Natuvropa (Landscapes through Literature), Council of Europe, n.103, 2005, 75.
Iris Murdoch once wrote: ‘You may know a truth, but if it’s at all complicated you have to be an artist not to utter it as a lie.’

As is well known, Plato and Aristotle held contrasting views about poetry. In what he called ‘the ancient quarrel’ between poetry and philosophy, Plato sang the praises of philosophy as a search for the highest form of knowledge (episteme) and relegated poetry to the world of shadows, illusions and dreams (eikasia). Poets were purveyors and pedlars of untruths, they told false stories about the gods, which the young were ready to believe, so there was no place for poets in kallipolis, Plato’s ideal state. Against his former teacher, Aristotle defended the claim of poetry to tell the truth; and there were other reasons for their disagreement.

While Plato felt that the emotions belonged to the irrational part of the soul and wanted them suppressed, Aristotle saw them as forming an integral part of the personality and considered an emotionless character as not really human at all. For him poets in general, and dramatic poets in particular, played an important role in ‘directing the mind’ to a better understanding of the emotions. We can learn important truths about ourselves by watching Antigone or by reading Hamlet. In highlighting the role of action in the theatre we must not lose sight of the importance of the poetry; for unless we understand the words, the work loses much of its significance and will not produce its intended effect. Catharsis or purification has a conceptual component to it. It is by what they say, and not only by what they do, that Oedipus or King Lear reveal their inner turmoil to us.

‘Blow winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow! You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!

You sulphurous and thought-executing fires, Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,

Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder, Strike flat the thick rotundity o’ the world!’

(King Lear, 3, 2, 1-7).

It is the poetry that conveys the rage of the disgraced protagonist in King Lear; and it is the quality of the language, the imagery, and the rhythm of the verse that enable him to express his anger and grief at Cordelia’s death with such poignancy and vigour:

‘Howl, howl, howl, howl! O! You are men of stones: Had I your tongue and eyes, I’d use them so That heaven’s vaults should crack. She’s gone for ever!’

(ibid., 5, 3, 259-261).

We live in a world that’s full of surprises, and our emotions are extremely complex. That complexity, as Martha Nussbaum has emphasised, ‘cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose – a style remarkably flat and lacking in wonder – but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars’ – precisely the language of the poet, the novelist, the artist. In our search for the truth, in every attempt on our part to understand in some way the world’s infinite variety and the complexity of the emotions, poetry plays a crucial role. Poets widen our perceptual field, they make us look at things in a new light, illuminating important aspects of reality and deepening our knowledge of the human condition. They evoke situations with which we can identify, and provide us with images that stimulate fresh thoughts and from which we can learn. Contrary to what Plato claimed, poetry can be – and quite often is – a vehicle for truth.

Joe Friggieri is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Malta. He is also a poet, playwright, short-story writer and theatre director.

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6 The phrase is used by Gordon Graham, and forms part of his central thesis about the arts and of his defence of cognitivism, the view that, at its best, art significantly enriches human understanding. See Gordon Graham, Philosophy of the Arts, Routledge: London and New York, 1997, ch. 6.

7 M. Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, op. cit., 3.
I must admit that I find any line drawn or any distinction made between Theory and Philosophy to be wafer-thin. In my view, cinematic use of technology, textual analysis or other concepts are not strictly inherent to other sciences and arts but also to Philosophy. This perspective understands that all disciplines stem from and contribute to philosophical endeavour.

Prisoners enter a cave. Behind them a fire is lit, and certain objects cast their shadows on the wall of the cave. Although cinema would not be around for the next 1,500 years, Plato’s depiction in Book IV of The Republic came extremely close. Fast forward to 25th January 1896, when spectators entered a theatre and a magical machine projected a train gushing right at them on a screen. Lumière’s train featured in L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat, seemed so real that the spectators ran out of the cinema in panic. The fire may have been replaced by the projector, the cave wall by a screen and the prisoners by what Thomas Elsaesser calls an ‘immobile audience,’ but Plato’s claim to human gullibility and therefore the need for philosophical quest stands firm. Film represents an illusion of reality whereby in Plato’s own words, an audience ‘suspends disbelief’ and accepts the shadow or the moving image as a reality. It is only the enlightened philosopher who understands the illusionary quality of these shadows. It follows, therefore, that real knowledge or the real source of these shadows can only be found if one manages to escape from Plato’s cave. Once again, some might argue that this connection between Plato’s allegory and cinema is conceptual rather than philosophical and yet they both explore the same triangular relationship between reality, illusion, and perception.

Early cinematic argument was built on the above mentioned Platonic triangular relationship in the form of Lacan’s three stages, namely: the Real (the unknown source), the Imaginary...
(or illusionary) and the Symbolic (or the perceived message) as received by its audience. The works of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes and others were mainly concerned with Film’s hidden source or truth, its distorted, edited, and refracted manifestation and the audience’s incomplete understanding or reception. The only technological advance on the Platonic allegory was the fact that film was a captured image, and its projection was a mirror reflection. Nonetheless, the idea of film mirroring or distorting reality and the human condition is akin to a philosopher trying to unravel the source of the real object by deciphering its shadow reflection. Lumiere’s train becomes the perfect example of a mirrored reality, the imaginary projection of its captured image on a screen and the symbolic interpretation or effect on its audience.

It soon became apparent to Russian formalists like Viktor Shklovsky that the capturing of an image implied a defamiliarization of reality and Lev Kuleshov introduced montage as a key player in Cinema. Pioneers like Eisenstein therefore laid out the rules of montage whereby editing should be formalised and not intuitive. One perfect example of this is Dziga Vertov’s *Kino-Eye* which demonstrated how the lens can capture a new reality, possibly, one that served ethical, political, and philosophical interests. This betrays the cinematic image as a manipulation or illusion of reality rather than a mere reflection of it. So far, the Platonic allegory still holds because the objects held before the fire or the projector’s images are perceived as being wilfully and masterfully manipulated for an audience to witness half shadows or semiotic signs and symbols on a wall or screen.

There were probably two factors that drove film academics to seek an alternative to the Platonic allegory. The first was the change and innovation in technology involved in both the capturing, editing and manifestation of the image. The second was a quest to draw the line between Theory and Philosophy. This is perhaps, what urged David Bordwell to reject the above-mentioned SLAB or formalist theories, on the grounds that they are as antiquated as the silent films that inspired them. Theory obviously needs to cater for a contemporary audio-visual, multimedia environment where the projector may become obsolete as domestic flat screens threaten the closure of cinema theatres. Yet, the line remains wafer thin because Philosophy also must take changing technologies and their influence on ideologies into account. Notwithstanding, Daniel Frampton’s insistence in his book, *Filmosophy*, on film having ‘its own kind of thinking,’ only serves to underline how this artistic medium uses technological innovation and challenges its own ideas to find its essence; which is essentially a philosophical exercise.

Rather than reject Plato or earlier theorists, Gilles Deleuze sought to answer Béla Balázs’s cinematic “otherworldliness” and its impetus for Ovidian metamorphosis by quoting Henri Bergson’s concept of “Élan vital.” In two monumental books *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2*, Deleuze reworked and expanded on Bergson’s *Matière et mémoire* to find a more fitting allegory or description for our times and technology, not by finding a film specific argument, not by drawing the line but by weaving Philosophy and Theory together. The concept of matter and its origins may be a more suitable description or metaphor for today’s scientific age then a group of prisoners chained in a cave watching shadows lit up by a bonfire.

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1 SLAB is an acronym of Saussure, Lacan, Althusser and Barthes.
Deleuze therefore saw Cinematic Theory and Philosophy as both being part of an evolutionary process whereby one analogy should fit both. The analogy of choice needed to be the product of an evolutionary process. This led Deleuze to a Bergson inspired Crystal Image that compressed past, present, and future matter and memory; An image that like an organism is continually growing and evolving. Symbiotic of the cinematic lens, the filmic image as a crystal is in constant motion offering different refractions and dispersion of light. In this move from Platonic allegory to a chemical, physical, and organic crystal, the image’s aptitude for a manipulation is evidently meant to challenge the viewer to embrace new ways of seeing and understanding. This process of perception is one that pushes the enlightened to traverse the fragmented and layered nature of time and image. One may have wandered away from the Platonic cave but the crystal’s ‘despotic wall’ or boundary still leaves us blind whilst its “black holes of absorption” still leave one with an incomplete ‘shadow’ or glimpse of the true image.

The drawing of a line or distinction between Philosophy and Theory implies such a line and distinction. It means that Theory is on one side and Philosophy is on the other. It implies an eternal truth at specific moments in time. A line means that there is a stasis. This idea of stasis comes from Plato’s Parmenides where the latter’s conclusion is that movement is illusory. Bergson’s reading of these Zeno paradoxes is completely the opposite. Stasis is an illusion because there is no stasis in a crystal fed by chemicals and matter. Bergson believes in a changing and moving world where nothing is static. In Bergson’s world, border lines fluctuate and therefore any line is an illusion.

There is another side to Bergson’s liquidity of thought and movement. The world cannot be paused and any void that we think we see is already filled, so Bergson’s approach to film frames is negative. He sees them as immobile sections creating an illusion rather than actual movement. Imaginary instants with a void in between are a lie because it is as if the world has paused. ‘The inner life is all this at once: variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction. It cannot be represented by images.’

This time it is Philosophy in the shape of Bergson that is drawing a line between its own essential search for the

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1 The face in faciality is a system that ‘brings together a despotic wall of interconnected signifiers and passionate black holes of subjective absorption.’ Deleuze 1987 p. 167.

truth and the arts. Deleuze, on the other hand, looks at the technical side of cinema and uses Bergson’s claim to perpetual movement for film itself. Deleuze argues that film with rests as Bergson believed, would look like a slideshow with Zeno’s arrow at rest in successive positions. Chris Marker’s La Jetée featured 40 slides where each image was visibly frozen before moving onto the other. This cult film shows that cinema is not a slideshow or an illusion of movement because each single frame is visibly single. And yet each single frame is a fusion of a multiplicity of shots, camera angles, colours, characters, sound and setting independently and simultaneously moving in different directions. La Jetée and many other films that followed, strengthened Deleuze’s argument that the world does not pause in the cinematic world. Our minds may linger on a specific image, that of the perceived crystal, but there is continuous motion within it whether we perceive it or not.

Instead of drawing lines and distinctions between Theory and Philosophy, Deleuze presents the unique visual and sensory experience provided by filmic crystal as the potential for new philosophical thoughts and concepts. The crystal’s visual haptic movement and sonorous sound capture what Deleuze calls a ‘becoming’ in touch with the dynamic essence of nature. It is therefore in this light, that I believe that such a metamorphosis or evolutionary nature of film cannot be wholly restricted to the field of film studies, because by presenting alternate worlds and by challenging established norms, it is continually raising questions about time, identity, perception, and existence. Deleuze argued that these questions are at the very heart of Philosophy, and that Cinema is the launching pad for new areas of philosophical exploration and endeavour. Like all the other arts, Cinema grew out of Philosophy and in turn nurtures it with its evolution. A veritable crystallised past, present and future of Cinema and Philosophy sharing the same interpretation of the Greek term Philos-sophia, as an attempt or questioning of human existence, but with the added value of continual evolution.

References


Films


Mario Cordina is currently a PhD student in Film Studies at the University of Malta. Mario Cordina has lectured in Film Schools, Educational Institutions and Universities in Szczecin Poland mainly in the fields of music, literature, film, and the arts in general.
What Makes The Dark Side of the Moon by Pink Floyd a Great Work of Art

by Ian Rizzo

The Dark Side of the Moon, a rock album released by Pink Floyd in March 1973, 50 years ago, embodies the qualities that define a great work of art. It was a groundbreaking and innovative album for its time, pioneering the concept of a unified theme throughout the entire album—the pressures of modern life. The collaborative effort of the four band members, Roger Waters (bass-vocals), David Gilmour (lead guitar-vocals), Rick Wright (piano-keyboards-vocals) and Nick Mason (drums), was unparalleled in subsequent albums.

Waters' in-depth lyrics, seamlessly combined with Gilmour's mournful guitar tone and Wright's keyboards, created that distinct Pink Floyd sound. The album also experimented with sound effects and voice overs, enhancing its thematic coherence.

Waters' songwriting displayed a universal appeal, touching on many fundamental human experiences that transcended cultural and temporal boundaries. It is not surprising that the album, with its estimated sales of 45 million copies to date, consistently ranks among the top five greatest albums of all time, according to rock music authorities.

However, the success of The Dark Side of the Moon raised expectations that proved challenging for the band members to sustain in future albums. Creative rival differences between Waters and Gilmour came to the fore as Wright felt increasingly disengaged from the band. Waters, who took over all songwriting responsibilities from The Dark Side of the Moon onwards, assumed more control, projecting his ideas and personal beliefs that railed against war, the capitalist rat race and the Establishment’s imposition of morality and conformity. Waters eventually served notice of his departure from Pink Floyd in 1985, assuming that Pink Floyd was a spent creative force. Only sometime later, he learnt, to his dismay that the remaining Pink Floyd members regrouped without him and were recording a new album. Waters initiated legal proceedings to dissolve Pink Floyd but later reached an out-of-court settlement for the sharing of rights and royalties.

Nevertheless, bitter feelings, resentment and open hostility between Waters and the rest of the band persisted. There was a brief hope that the band could be reunited when Waters appeared on stage with the other band members in June 2005 to play four of their classic songs during Live 8. Unfortunately, Rick Wright died three years later in 2008, and open disagreements between Waters and Gilmour remain.

Figure 1. Pink Floyd, at the time of the release of The Dark Side of Moon (from left, Richard Wright, Roger Waters, Nick Mason, and David Gilmour).

to this very day. It is indeed a sad irony to witness the band’s history marred with such hostility when the first song of The Dark Side of the Moon album ‘Speak to Me’ (with its introductory overture of sound effects that overlap with the next song ‘Breathe’), emphasises the importance of communication in its self-title. Cynics could easily scoff at this point that art serves no other than an illusionary dream for humanity when conflicts, jealousy, self-interest, and ego preservation always remain the true essence of the human condition.

But The Dark Side of the Moon remains a great work of art because it challenges listeners to contemplate deeply philosophical, political, and social issues. That is indeed what inspired me to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the album by holding a talk on the 23rd of March 2023 through Philosophy Sharing. A repeat of the talk was held at the Art Hall in Gozo, on the 21st of April 2023.

Incidentally, as I was preparing for these talks, I learned that Roger Waters was re-recording the album because he felt that the message of the album was not yet widely recognised. The album, which was named as The Dark Side of the Moon Redux was released on the 6th of October, 2023. This new version does away with the guitar solos and sound effects of the original album and incorporates more personal narratives in every song. The album sounds more sombre and darker than the original one, but the core music is preserved, and the message of the album is magnified further.

To understand the meaning of The Dark Side of the Moon, it is crucial to explore how the album came about. Way back in 1972, the band had a lot of improvised material in their hands, which had yet to find a place in a new album. Both Gilmour and Mason concur that it was Waters who came up with the idea of developing a concept album on a meditation of what drives people insane, following a brainstorming discussion held by the band that focused on the pressures of modern life. Waters later summed up the theme of the album as an expression of “political, philosophical, humanitarian empathy that was desperate to get out.” Empathy is indeed the central theme as the album explores the human experience: from the beating heart of a baby inside a womb and a woman’s screaming during childbirth in the first song, ‘Speak to Me;’ up to the final song of the album ‘Eclipse’, which concludes with a perfect metaphor for the overshadowing of all life struggles by death. This bleak tone is a recurring motif throughout the whole album.

In ‘Breathe’, Waters’ lyrics caution on the transience of life experiences: if you do not manage to ride the tide, you will end up on the biggest wave that will send you to an early death. When I was preparing for the presentation of this talk, I recalled some great celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Freddie Mercury, Kurt Cobain, Whitney Houston, Diego Maradona, who died tragically at a young age. But this inability to cope with the modern stresses of life is not just confined to celebrities – it is capable of afflicting and shortening the lives of any ordinary individual person.

‘On the Run’ is an instrumental piece of music transformed into a sequence of sonic effects that explicitly conveys the frantic life to which the band members were constantly subjected to. The song was inspired by the fear and paranoia of constant flying. In many live performances of the album, this song ended with a plane flying over the audience and crashing on stage. In the short documentary of the explanation of every song in the Redux, Waters delves deeper into the rat race that can cause self-destruction.

‘Time’, one of the most profound songwriting masterpieces of Waters, makes us aware of how life slowly slips away and yet leaving us unprepared to act.

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2 See the Documentary of The Dark Side of the Moon @ 2003 Pink Floyd Music Limited licensed to Eagle Rock Entertainment Limited.
3 Available on YouTube: Track by Track- The Dark Side of The Moon Redux, Roger Waters https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNtZawT3jUY
'The Great Gig in the Sky', with its beautiful melancholic piano piece composed by Wright and added vocals of Clare Torry, evokes the spectre of death. The song was previously called The Mortality Sequence, as its point was to demonstrate that religions could also drive us to insanity. But the idea of this title was abandoned as the band wished to avoid hurting the religious sentiment prevailing at that time.

In the documentary of the Redux, Waters declares himself an atheist who does not believe in the comfort offered by religions to console us with an afterlife in the face of mortality. He views life and death only as a matter of consciousness and stresses that religions are not deemed necessary for one to have a moral compass.

‘Money’ delves into the commodification of life, with emphasis on its eternal power to satisfy our desires – from ‘buying a football team’ to owning a ‘Learjet’. Waters’ sarcastic wit plays on as the song urges us to grab that stash of cash while acknowledging its contribution to an egoistic and shallow lifestyle. In another sarcastic twist, the song makes fun of how we find no problems in calling for a fair distribution of wealth as long as our present share is not adversely affected. The quip that money is the root of all evil seems to be an ironic consolation when people feel disillusioned that their hard work has not been financially rewarding.

‘Us and Them’ originates from a previously known song called ‘The Violence Sequence’, composed by Richard Wright for the soundtrack of the film Zabrieske Point by Michelangelo Antonioni. Antonioni had rejected their songs because the music made him feel sad. Waters adapted this song for the album by writing a set of lyrics that touched on some of the artificial barriers created by humanity, leading to divisiveness and violence. Waters, who lost his father in World War II when he was only a few months old, focuses in one particular verse on the futility of wars, questioning what authority the generals from the rear ask the front-line soldiers to proceed with battles and lose their lives. He also touches on the lack of empathy shown by war generals who remain detached from the horrors of the war as they plan their military strategies. This lack of empathy resurfaces and aligns with the final verses of the song when it imagines the death of a lonely tramp whose pleas for help are ignored by the passers-by who carry on with their busy lives.

‘Any Colour You Like’ is an instrumental song, drawing humour from an expression used by the roadie Chris Adamson who, when asked for a guitar, answered, ‘choose any colour you like, they’re all blue.’ This touch of humour could have possibly been inspired by the famous formula quip used by Henry Ford when launching the T-Ford model on the US market in 1908 ‘choose any colour you like as long as it’s black’. The song title could be interpreted as a commentary on the dehumanising effects of industrial society.

‘Brain Damage’ is the song that overlaps with the final song ‘Eclipse’ and ends with the dark side of the moon completely overshadowing the sun’s brilliance. In it, Waters refers to his former childhood friend from Cambridge, and co-founder of Pink Floyd, Syd Barrett. Barrett suffered a mental breakdown following the success of the band’s first album The Piper at the Gates of Dawn and became invisible, isolated, and impossible to work with. He started to sink into erratic and often strange behaviour, partly caused by the consumption of mind-altering drugs. The band members felt they had no option other than to part company and continue working without him, even though he was recognised as a creative genius. The memory of Syd Barrett’s demise haunted the band members of Pink Floyd for the rest of their lives, which resurfaced in at least two other following albums – Wish You Were Here and The Wall.
But apart from Barrett’s tragic experience, Waters is cautioning us in this song about how easy it is to slip from a state of sanity into one of insanity. Waters is not just alluding only to Syd when he later refers to the *lunatics on the grass* (in the plural). He is implying that even prominent figures like politicians can succumb to madness. And further along, Waters seems to admit that he also could also join the club of insane people, when he sings:

‘There’s someone in my head, but it’s not me’

As I mentioned in my talk, *The Dark Side of the Moon* is constantly depressing and pessimistic in tone, especially when it refers to many elements of life that are difficult to control. The album seems to suggest that somehow, we are destined to race towards an early grave or else lose our minds to insanity.

However, the song ‘Breathe’ offers a glimmer of positivity when it encourages listeners to choose their own path and make the most of life’s experiences.

*Look around choose your own ground;*  
*Long you live and high you fly;*  
*Smiles you’ll give and tears you’ll cry;*  
*And all you touch and all you see;*  
*Is all your life will ever be;*

These lines resonate perfectly with the existentialist philosophy, which emphasise individual responsibility for our actions. They are also in tune with another branch of philosophy known as phenomenology that emphasise the importance of appreciating life from the immediate aspects of mental and sensory experience.

There is another verse in ‘Breathe’ whereby Waters shares Camus’ philosophy: that humanity must embrace the absurdity of life to be liberated from the hopelessness of this condition and to continue with its daily struggles. While Camus refers to Sisyphus, who according to the Greek myth, is condemned by the gods to push a rock up the mountain (only to find it rolling down again once he reaches the top and repeating the same futile process), Waters’ lyrics in a similar vein sing:

*Run rabbit run*  
*Dig that hole*  
*Forget the Sun*  
*When at last, the work is done*  
*Don’t sit down, it’s time to dig another one*

The rabbit is here an apt reminder of Sisyphus, the absurd hero who accepts the absurd conditions of life.

But there is one line above all in ‘Breathe’ that conveys the most powerful message - ‘Don’t be afraid to care’. This line conveys Roger Waters’ humane belief that it is empathy which remains essential to combat the pressures of modern life. Such a message remains highly relevant to this very day in an era of increasing isolation through technology and Artificial Intelligence.

*The Dark Side of the Moon* thus endures as a great work of art due to its universal philosophical message combined with its beautiful melodies, insightful lyrics, and innovative structure. The themes stressing the need for empathy, connectedness and communication to ensure the future survival of humanity, and to countervail against the dark forces of our human nature, will continue to resonate for countless generations to come. This is what I believe, makes *The Dark Side of the Moon* a great work of art and a timeless masterpiece.

**References**


*Ian Rizzo is an accountant by profession and currently leads the Philosophy Sharing Foundation. He has been listening to Pink Floyd since the age of eighteen and followed all their albums since then.*
Dubbed as the ‘metaphysical tarzan’ (Cronin, 2014, p. xxiii), having filmed in all seven continents (Cronin, 2014, p. xxii) and a radically independent director who strives to create a space for cinema beyond the commercial form (Leger, 2015, p. 93), Werner Herzog hardly needs any introduction. His filmography is as vast and diverse as the oceans he crosses, appropriately described as ‘unclassifiable’ by film cineaste and curator Amos Vogel (Cronin, 2014, p. xxiv). It is legitimate to question what it is then that connects Herzog’s work? This article aims to answer this question by highlighting some philosophical undertones in his work with a focus on his film *Fata Morgana* (1971) which, to the author, is the culmination of Herzog’s existentialist streak.

There is something which is both deeply intimate as well as substantially outwardly in Herzog’s work and part of his genius is in bringing the two together in a unique way. Paul Cronin, in his ‘conversations’ with Herzog (2014) (and what is deemed as the closest to an autobiography on the latter), mentions how Herzog is hardly interested in anyone else’s perspective (pg. xvi). Yet Herzog yearns for distant lands and diverse truths. In his own words ‘The starting point of many of my films is a landscape, whether it be a real place or an imaginary or hallucinatory one from a dream. Maybe I should say that the landscapes are not so much the impetus for a film, rather they become the film’s soul (Eye, 2023).’ His outwardness is towards anything which offers ‘a very small patch of existence (Cronin, 2014, p. xxiii)’ which is beyond his own but connected to his own in a highly existentialist approach. In the words of film historian Thomas Elsaesser, ‘The existentialist dimension of his characters always seems to take precedence over any social issues against which they might revolt or from which they might suffer (Cronin, 2014, p. xxvi).’ William Verrone writes about the ‘Transgression and Transcendence in the films of Werner Herzog’ and argues that across most films of Herzog one finds characters which are seeking some kind of different level of calling or consciousness (Verrone, 2011, p. 180).

In *Fata Morgana* (1971), named for mysterious mirages, Herzog tries to transform hallucinations and fever dreams on film (Eye, 2023). At the same time, he hints at how humanity’s search for meaning has elements of the absurd (Hagin, Meiri, Yosef, & Zanger, 2011, p. 94). He brings this out, amongst others, by using substantially paradoxical text and images where the image is depicting directly to the opposite to what the narrator is saying. There is no main character in this film or perhaps a character who is not of this world and is viewing this world from beyond. Indeed, the film germinated from an idea of Herzog to capture an alien’s view.
as it reports of a dying planet (Hagin, Meiri, Yosef, & Zanger, 2011, p. 95). Set in three parts – Creation, Paradise and the Golden Age, the film starts with a mirage and a female voice narrating over the scenes ‘There was only the nothingness (Herzog, 1971, 09:52).’ Herzog himself recounts how he worked ‘as if in a dream or hallucination, never asking myself questions during the shoot or thinking about how to structure the material I was gathering (Eye, 2023).’ He recognizes in fact that it is possibly his most unfinished work leaving space for the viewers to finish it themselves (Eye, 2023). The French philosopher Alain Badiou discusses the element of ‘chance events’ on film shooting in his essays on Cinema where he argues that the cinematic truth is influenced by a substantial amount of unplanned and uncontrolled parameters, producing ‘the most absolutely undeniable truth’ which is ‘steeped in the infinite of the real (Badiou, 2010, p. 18).’ Herzog is similarly less interested in the factual than in the ‘illumination, the ecstatic flash, from which truth emerges (Cronin, 2014, p. xxxiii).’

Throughout the film Fata Morgana, there is no central storyline but rather a constant ‘existential state of melancholia and loss (Hagin, Meiri, Yosef, & Zanger, 2011, p. 96).’ This can be exemplified by the paradoxical titles to the second and third parts of the film, which following the opening with an untainted image of the earth without humans, under the title ‘Creation’, present strong scenes of destruction and misfits under the titles ‘Paradise’ and ‘Golden Age’. The film is brimming with references to higher orders, and the narration recalls the one set out in the Genesis; yet it envisages a number of forces working together including the Mayan Q’uq’umatz, god of wind and
rain. In Cronin’s words ‘Organised religion plays no part in Werner’s life. But the divine and the sacred and the ineffable always have (Cronin, 2014, p. xxx).’ Indeed, the film can be said to be a philosophical reflection of deep profundity which reminds of Nietzsche’s philosophical arguments in Thus Spake Zarathustra, whose main protagonist, Zarathustra, famously proclaims that ‘God is dead.’

It is unknown to the author, whether the reference ‘Thus spake they’ at minute 19:06 of the film, relating to the different forces speaking together, is a direct reference to Nietzsche’s work. Yet the film is loaded with Nietzschean undertones. The construction of the film in three parts and the content of each part, remind the author of ‘the three metamorphoses’ in Thus Spake Zarathustra (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 21). In the three metamorphoses presented by Zarathustra, the spirit becomes a camel which then becomes a lion, and then becomes a child. The camel represents the heavy load of the spirit which like the camel wanders in the wilderness. This wilderness can be associated to the earth without humans depicted in the first part of Fata Morgana. The camel then becomes a lion who struggles with a great dragon ‘no longer inclined to call Lord and God (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 22).’ This is strongly depicted through the second part of Herzog’s Fata Morgana titled ‘Paradise’, which ends with the following narration: ‘In Paradise you call “hello” without seeing anybody. There you quarrel with strangers to avoid having friends. In Paradise man is born dead (Herzog, 1971, 57:31).’ Again, perhaps an indirect reference to Zarathustra’s God is dead. To the author this could be building on that notion to the extent that Herzog could be telling us that after killing God, man has killed himself.

The lion then becomes a child symbolising, innocence, forgetfulness and a new beginning (Nietzsche, 1997, p. 22). Here Herzog in the last part of the film ‘The Golden Age’ moves away from the desert and into a more contemporary Western world, there are scenes of joyless humans in meaningless situations with a narration about a man and wife who ‘live in harmony. Now for example, they appear before the lens of the camera... death in their eyes, a smile on their faces, a finger in the pie. Running, they train themselves harder and harder. Weight-lifting, too, is rewarding. Unforgettable, however, remains a jump from the light-house. In the Golden Age traces of Paradise can still be discerned (Herzog, 1971, 1:05:45).’ The third part gives the author the impression of moving beyond the time of a God into a time where everything is devoid of a higher meaning, where the times of Paradise are a mere recollection. In the words of Greg Garrard, ‘the early scenes of Fata Morgana remain a signal instance of existentialist disanthropy which refuses its landscapes either a human or a biological meaning, and then takes perverse pleasure in finding them meaningless (Garrard, 2012, p. 47).’ As such, this third part offers the viewer a strong opportunity to meditate on humanity’s place in this world.

There is no limit to the depth and length of discussion on Herzog’s works and their philosophy should one want. The author has explored one main work and focused on one philosophical dimension throughout this article, mainly due to limitations on word count. The filmography of Herzog is extensive and highly diverse as are its philosophical roots and implications. Verrone, for example, looks at elements from Michel Foucault and Georges Bataille as sources of inspiration to the transgressive nature of certain characters in Herzog’s films (Verrone, 2011, p. 179). It is the author’s wish to instil in the reader a curiosity to explore the works of Herzog further and question their other philosophical depths. Borrowing from Cronin, ‘Werner has long recognised that he can’t change the world through his films, but he can help us better understand certain things (Cronin, 2014, p. xxx).

References


Film

There, There
Affect and Subject in Radiohead

by Guillaume Collett

‘[W]hen you record [...] the one thing you’re not really aware of is you. You’re not aware of your own identity, so it’s like meditating [...] [I]f you perform something well, you have a sort of feeling that goes beyond that.’

Thom Yorke, quoted in Rolling Stone, 08.09.2023

Radiohead’s music questions the coincidence of affect and self-identity. For them, music does not express the musician’s preexisting ideas or feelings so much as it stages a site of collective self-creation by the band and their equipment. What this self-creation amounts to, above all, is a movement of de-personalisation, of de-subjectivation. Not only does the collective practice take over from the individuality of any one member, problematising the notion of a pre-established intentionality or feeling waiting to be expressed or put into music. But also, the heart and perhaps even the aim of the expressive musical process, for them, lies within a site of impossibility or disjuncture, where subjectivised thought and experience themselves come up against their own limits. This limit is that of the individual subject, who must be left in the dust for the possibility of any deeper experience to take hold. In order to be able to reach and articulate transindividual affect- the social and material basis of thought and experience that is retrospectively fixed, frozen, fixated and rationalised as the affectively impoverished ‘feeling’ of an individual subject- Radiohead must work backwards. They must explore the limits of the individualised medium of the singer-songwriter in order to implode it and thereby release and construct the transindividual affect that subjectivity forestalls.

They have a special name for this impossible limit-site or horizon of self-dissolution staged by their musical practice: ‘there’, or better put, ‘there, there’. In its pure, which is to say iterative form, the word ‘there’ demarcates distance from the self (‘here’) but also points to a relation rather than a fixed point that could be designated by a proper name. In a way, it is the inverse mirror image of the self, the site where the self is not, a relative designator of absence. As Jacques Lacan put it, in his reversal of the Cartesian Cogito, ‘I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think’.2 The subject is not identical with itself (there is no identity of Self=Self), since its experience (or, for Lacan, its being) exceeds, or is displaced relative to, self-awareness or to self-mastering consciousness. Instead, the subject is marked by an internal crack within self-identity (there, there). For Radiohead, if I think and feel (as transindividual affect) where I am not (as individual subject), I can only ever fully exist ‘there’ - so long as ‘there’ is never a fixed end-point, but an iterative movement of slippage (‘there, there, there’, ad infinitum) relative to a subject position that would wish to be closed and fixed.

On the track ‘There, There. (The Boney King of Nowhere)’, from 2003’s *Hail to the Thief*, Thom Yorke - the band’s principal song writer and lyricist- emphasises in the chorus, ‘Just ’cause you feel it / Doesn’t mean it’s there’, later adding ‘(Someone on your shoulder)’. On the track ‘Nude’ from 2007’s *In Rainbows*, Yorke reiterates: ‘But there’ll be something missing. / Now that you found it / It’s gone. Now that you feel it / You don’t’. On ‘Lotus Flower’ from 2011’s *The King of Limbs*, Yorke repeats the line, ‘There’s an empty space inside my heart’.

They condemn the singular ‘there’: ‘There’s always a siren. /Singing you to shipwreck’ (from ‘There, There’). The menacing and claustrophobic ‘Climbing Up the Walls’ from 1997’s *OK Computer*, makes the ‘there’ a hostage site in and by the self: ‘And either way you turn / I’ll be there / Open up your skull / I’ll be there / Climbing up the walls’, anxiety and dread being the only affects that don’t slip away, filling the void-site of the subject. ‘Pulk/Pull Revolving Doors’ from 2001’s *Amnesiac*, makes it clear that the function of the ‘there’ is ultimately two-sided or ambivalent, acting as a hinge that can both trap but also open out: ‘There are doors that lock and doors that don’t / There are doors that let you in and out but never open / And there are trapdoors that you can’t come back from.’

It is perhaps the 2000 track ‘How to Disappear Completely’, from *Kid A*, that articulates most starkly and beautifully both the subject’s limit and also the possibility of an outside. The song begins ‘That there / That’s not me. I go / Where I please. I walk through walls / I float down the Liffey. I’m not here / This isn’t happening.’ Here, the ‘I’ or ‘me’ is not identified with ‘that there’, a somewhat fixedly defined substance

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‘that’) that anchors the more relational ‘there’, from which we must imagine the ‘I’ is standing back, as an out-of-body experience. The ‘I’ is a de-substantiated doubling of the physical embodied ‘that’, ghostly and incorporeal, walking through walls, while still in a way affirming and merging with the flow of impersonal ‘life’ itself.

It surely is no coincidence that Yorke chose this river over any other, the ‘Liffey’ running through the centre of Dublin, cleaving it in two (like the comma between ‘There, There’). On ‘Pyramid Song’ from 2001’s Amnesiac, Yorke continues exploring this theme of subjective dissolution: ‘I jumped in the river and what did I see? / Black-eyed angels swam with me / All my lovers were there with me’. The song finishes by repeating, ‘There was nothing to fear and nothing to doubt’. Amidst black-eyed angels, anxiety and dread dissipate in the absence of a gaze that would act as a siren-like mirror of self-recognition in the other.

Acting as a kind of ‘how to’ guide, ‘How to Disappear Completely’ thematises the eclipse of the subject when faced with the experiential limits of their self-identity, not only lyrically but also musically. The track dramatises the tension between the lyrics sung in a fragile and earnest tone, and the accompanying orchestration that refuses the claim that ‘this’, something extraordinary isn’t happening. It is precisely because of this earnestly articulated claim that nothing is happening, that something extraordinary can emerge in the site of disjuncture between the lyrical negation of the experiential present and the musical negation of the negation. Impersonal life or transindividual affect can only be constructed and affirmed on the other side of the voided experience. The ‘I’ is a de-substantiated doubling of the self-doubled ‘i’s here are surely not coincidental, the ‘wings’ in question being the self-doubled subject liberated in the knowledge of its lack of self-identity, since it is the space between the two ‘i’s that is privileged (as with ‘there, there’), the point of disjuncture as site of flight from the self-enclosed subject.

Fittingly, ‘Let Down’ lyrical imagery conjures up butterflies or moths, whose chrysalis is on the road to pupating: ‘one day i am going to grow wings’ (as it is presented in the album booklet). The self-doubled ‘i’s here are surely not coincidental, the ‘wings’ in question being the self-doubled subject liberated in the knowledge of its lack of self-identity, since it is the space between the two ‘i’s that is privileged (as with ‘there, there’), the point of disjuncture as site of flight from the self-enclosed subject.

As ‘Karma Police’, from the same album, concludes: ‘Phew, for a minute there / I lost myself’. Or, as ‘Dollars and Cents’ from Amnesiac puts it, ‘(I want to live in the promised land). / (Yeah, and there, there we can be free)’.

Guillaume Collett’s research focuses primarily on Deleuze and Guattarí’s work and on social and political thought more broadly. He has published a monograph on Deleuze, Leclaire, and psychoanalysis (Edinburgh University Press, 2016) and edited two books, one on Deleuze, Guattarí and transdisciplinarity (Bloomsbury, 2019) and one on revolution and neoliberalism (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022; co-edited with Krista Bonello Rutter Giappone and Iain MacKenzie)

See also MT Letts’ Radiohead and the Resistant Concept Album: How to Disappear Completely (2010, Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN).

A discussion with Krista Bonello-Rutter Giappone helped me form this point.
Should We Dream of Electric Sheep Too? Science Fiction as Science Communication and Technological Dialogue

By Kyle Galea

Jules Verne, a literary pioneer in every sense of the word, has contributed much to the corpus of science fiction. From the visual aesthetic of steampunk to the popular concept of the submarine, we owe much to the turn-of-the-century French author and visionary. In a clear break from the fiction writers of his day, he was well-known for his meticulous research and determined attempts to ground his stories in the body of scientific knowledge of his day, a prelude to what we would today refer to as the branch of Hard Sci-Fi.

In one of his most well-known masterpieces, “De la Terre à la Lune” (“From the Earth to the Moon”) published in 1865, he captured the imagination of his readers by describing an American mission to the Moon using a giant cannon called the Colombiad to launch a manned projectile from Florida to the Sea of Tranquillity on the moon’s surface. As much of a visionary as Jules Verne was, even he, could not predict that just a little over a hundred years later, NASA’s Apollo mission would safely land Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the very same surface of the Sea of Tranquillity through the help of the Mission’s command module “Columbia.” This is just a single example of the power that artistic mediums have not only in an “art for art’s sake” sense but also as powerful imaginative pathfinders for the potential of applied human knowledge.

In order to describe the general approach of this publication, the intent is to make the argument that science fiction has the potential to not only act as an artistic niche to be enjoyed, but also has the potential to have a practical influence on society as a whole in a broader sense. The three main ways I will highlight as we go along are:

- Science fiction as a means to inspire the next generation of researchers, technologists and innovators.
- Science fiction as a context through which to explore the societal and existential ramifications of technological progress and scientific knowledge.
- Science fiction as a cultural force to empower the political and sociological prioritisation of research and innovation.

The first, illustrated well in our introduction, describes the medium’s power to inspire some of the best and brightest amongst us to use their talent and drive to expand humanity’s knowledge and instrumentalise that knowledge into innovative products and services. From new commercial services such as SpaceX and ChatGPT, to groundbreaking achievements in research such as the Human Genome Project and even the original moonshot of Apollo 11, many of the most influential scientists, researchers, innovators and tech entrepreneurs owe their original foray into the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects through the potential that their love of science fiction opened up for them. From Arthur C. Clarke’s original visualisation of geo-stationary satellites to Robert H. Goddard, the father of modern rocketry, directly citing H.G. Wells’ War of the Worlds as inspiration,
the medium of science fiction as a whole has repeatedly shown itself to be a potent tool in science communication and in enhancing the uptake of the STEM subjects, which both underpin value-added socio-economic development while also almost chronically suffer from under-subscription.\(^1\)

Another positive aspect of this is the medium’s ability to attract STEM uptake from under-represented groups such as women and girls.\(^2\) The “Scully Effect”, named after the iconic X-Files investigator Dana Scully, refers to the impressive effect the character had on its young female viewers during the series’ original run in the 1990s. Scully, a highly intelligent and competent FBI agent with a background in medicine who often acts as the rational counterpart to Mulder’s eccentricity, inspired a significant number of women to enter the STEM fields including areas such as forensic science, pathology and medicine.\(^3\)

The second pathway outlines science fiction’s capability to go beyond the question of “what” we can do by also allowing for dialogue that asks “why” or “if” we should do it. Fundamentally, as instruments, the effects of science and technology are rarely dictated by the idiosyncrasies of the technology itself, but mainly by the proverbial hand wielding it, or the financier behind it. To the genre’s credit, this often goes far beyond the archetype of a mad scientist with loose screws and an even looser sense of scientific etiquette, even if Frankenstein is foundational science fiction and more cerebral than the movies would like you to believe. To take the example of the sub-genre of cyberpunk, this gritty and realistic turn from the golden age of “raygun sci-fi” often platforms the consistent critique of widening social disparity and income inequality. Beyond the cybernetic implants and cyberspace, one of the most identifiable themes in cyberpunk is the widening gap between a large and destitute class of menial workers and an ever-tightening plutocracy of shadowy tech-barons and financial elite with an anaemic, shrinking and powerless middle-class (if there even is one). Beyond social commentary, science fiction has served as a platform for discussion on subjects as diverse as

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1. (2016). Barriers and Opportunities for 2-Year and 4-Year STEM Degrees. https://doi.org/10.17226/21739
and profound as the nature of universal sociology (see The Three Body Problem by Liu Cixin if you are so inclined towards existential dread), the very nature of reality and ontology (literally almost everything Philip K. Dick had ever published) to the potential teleology of the human species as a whole (Arthur C. Clarke but also a quite popular subject during the Golden Age of Science Fiction). As technology continues to become more influential in society as a whole, as the looming trends of AI popularisation and New Space seem to indicate, science fiction’s role as a medium for discussion and debate may wax in importance.

This brings us to the final identified pathway, that of science fiction as an advocate for science and technology. While the rise of science communication and popularisation of STEM have made massive strides in recent years, science and technology as a whole remain relatively isolated fields to both the democratic body politic as well as to mainstream society as a whole.

While the advancement of our understanding of the world and technological sophistication remain amongst the best tools towards future prosperity and sustainability, the importance of these fields in-of-themselves remains distant to your average citizen. This has the effect of weakening the prioritisation of science and technology and reducing our ability to invest in and unlock the potential of fields such as biotechnology, artificial intelligence and far more. As seen previously in this publication, science fiction has the ability to make these very technical fields digestible to a broader demographic of society while also allowing this increase in engagement to also include debate and dialogue on how these discoveries and innovations should be used for the greater good of society as a whole.

In conclusion, if art is the skilful application of creativity, science fiction has the potential to combine art, scientific knowledge and a philosophical approach to allow for a strengthening of our ability to understand the world and to know what to do with that knowledge when we have acquired it. Moving into the future, our ability to shape the conditions that allow for prosperity and societal benefit will necessitate the participation of the body politic as a whole and this genre might be a very critical tool in allowing us to maintain that focus and allow for that dialogue to happen.

Kyle Galea is a Strategy and Policy Executive at the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) which drafts strategies and advises Maltese and EU policy pertaining to science, research, innovation and space. Views expressed in this publication are strictly the author’s own and do not necessarily reflect those of MCST or the Maltese government.
Philosophers have attempted to change reality for more than a century, the question however is, not to change reality but to re-interpret it, again.¹

The Adornian question on the inability of philosophy and its conceptual language to articulate and to dig into the meaning of a work of art is one which is persistently encountered. Due to this question, Picasso’s artistic-creative energy was aborted for a couple of years, pushing him to opt for poetry, poetic-philosophy, Dantesque-poetic-philosophy, in versed prose.²

Arthur Danto, amongst others, quite correctly believed that such an inability is caused by the fact that contemporary art has itself become philosophy, and without such a categorisation art is constrained to blur into nonsense.

Thus, we are faced with a species-being philosophy of humankind which is unable to utter, nor to articulate, essence into its own meaning, through neither graphesis³ nor through ‘cataloguing’. The Narcissian self-reflective stage of contemporary art has turned or back-fired into its own negation, transmogrifying such a reflection into a self-reflection reflecting nothing: a contradiction personified in what I term as the Saatchi myth phenomenon.

Philosophers have now steeped in to such an extent, that they should wade no more⁴, with apologies to Shakespeare

¹ The author’s apologetic bow to Marx’s Theses on Feuerbach [XI], written in 1845 and published in 1888.
³ Graphesis: knowledge production embodied in visual expressions.
⁴ Macbeth, Act III Sc. IV.
following that to Marx. One wades deeper with the assistance of Deleuze’s blessing as he challenged Marxist dialectical materialism on its own terms by rhizomically blending and fusing contradictions, thus neutralising them. He succeeded in de-politicising hegemonic connections with the idea of the *rhizomic plateaux*. This constrains me to agree with Slavoj Žižek who defined the French philosopher as the *ideologist of late capitalism*. Rhizomic logic camouflages hegemonic interests whilst exploitative adorning Marxist left-wing robes, thus proving Lenin’s definition of ‘left-wing communism’ as an ‘infantile disorder’ right. If one could unite the *thousand plateaux* horizontality with dialectical materialism, without negating the arborescent verticality of hegemony, a decent approach for a re-reading of the art-philosophy connection and its relationship with what can cautiously be termed as ‘progress’ may be achieved.

Whether ‘progress’ is enlightenmental, arborescent or post-modern rhizomic, or both, or whatever, one cannot dispute the fact that it is a power category. Progress as the Baudelairean ‘inevitability of descent’, Ricoeur’s ‘Fall’, or Heidegger’s ‘Second Fall’ into inauthenticity and banality, leads to Adorno’s culture industry and the globalisation of ‘progress’ and its banal reality virtualisations, now transformed into Shelley’s A.I. monster world.

All of a sudden we woke up to woke, becoming hazily aware that all this subverts the very idea that truth is attained through some kind of intellectual energy, sufferance, and creativity. We wake up disbelieving the nightmare in front of our very eyes, a shattered mirror shrieking back to us and claiming that the very same intellectual energy is finally and completely subdued by and subject to such virtualisations and consumerist diktat. Shelley again (after Marx and Shakespeare, now apologies to Shelley).

Intellectual energy is appropriated by a proto-mummified mass-commercialised culture in the form of an industry monopolising mind and thought, now A.I.-ised. Baudelaire’s *Bonheur* without its sibling *Beau*, is transformed by art into the realm of an enticing and seducing promise, a Wizard of Oz promise. Such an act-of-promise partakes of all hegemonic relationships, this time, with apologies to Gramsci.

Promising happiness is revolutionary subversion found in all dominant ideological and religious categories which form the structure not only of Baroque, Socialist Realism, and its costumbrist antipode, but also in popular commercialised mass marketable culture. A grave paradox which is exacerbated when one engages with the question of what exactly is being promised.

Within the context of this question, Realism, Stalinist Realism, costumbrist Realism, Modern and Saatchi Commercial Realism, Supermarket Realism, Consumerist Realism, A.I. Realism, Capitalist Realism, become quite enticing and envious bedfellows, all competing for Philosophy’s attention, her choice, and her ultimate surrender, through their seducing tactics. This they attempt to do by propagating subversion or a treacherous pseudo-subversion since it is only subversion that can succeed in disrobing Philosophy naked, as she yields.

Subversion seduces Philosophy, either by pushing progress back as in Costumbrism, by pushing forward as in Socialist Realism, or by pushing back into the existential primordial essence as in Heideggerian thought. In other words, alluring art tactics to win over Philosophy is either by going back to the soil-rooted earth as did Heidegger or to the idyllic past as in Costumbrism, or going back to a rooted pre-Socratic Dasein as Primitivism asserts, or ultimately by going back to some sort of future Hegelian-Marxist utopia. All seem to be heralding such a promise to Philosophy.

Each ‘choice’, however, engages with its corresponding methodology, tools and means, which are obviously different for each version of this realism-multitude hovering around Bakhtinian chronotopic vertiginous oscillations.

According to Adorno, within this context the modern artwork is defined in terms of its refusal to make use of traditional aesthetic means. However, this refusal takes on various oxymoronic forms.

The Costumbrism’s ‘going back’ away from the Paul Klee tsunami of progress utilises precisely these very same traditional means which are violently refuted by the neo-primitivist, however harbouring the same reason for the existential desire of ‘going back’ archetypally away from capitalist progress. These costumbrist-primitivist twins are in fact the Janus figure of Benjamin’s ‘angel of history’.

The angel who ‘looks at nothing but the expanse of ruins of the past, is blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress’. Oxymoronically and similarly to Costumbrism, its sibling twin Socialist-Stalinist Realism utilises the same traditional means for practically the contrary reason, that is,

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2. See also Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945-1982), particularly in Ian Penman’s *Fassbinder: Thousands of Mirrors* and Vladimir Nabokov’s (1899-1977) *The Eye*.
4. Baudelaire and Stendhal’s assertion that ‘la beauté n’est que la promesse du Bonheur’ starts to make sense.
to peep into the future heaven on earth. Albeit their parallel status, the latter looks towards the utopian future, and the former towards the idyllic past.\footnote{Robert Musil puts it beautifully. “Mighty cousin … it is amazing that half of them seek salvation in the future and the other half in the past … His Grace would say that the present is without salvation. Robert Musil, The Man Without Qualities, tr. Sophie Wilkins and Burton Pike, Picador, London, 2001, 294.}

Such traditional means adopted by Costumbrism and Stalinist Realism were refuted by the contemporary avant-grade constructivist philosophy, the latter which provoked a novel \textit{fak'tura} means, encapsulating and defining the modernist storm of the future. Within the Stalinist world, this avant-garde proposed its new anti-Bourgeois \textit{fak'tura} methodology and philosophy, which was furthered, violently so, onto the North-African Post-Independence anti-colonial aesthetic challenge, previously drowned in the exotic orientalist world.

In such a strange romantic bed, Costumbrism and Stalinist Realism, realising the danger, opted to share their part of the bed in the fight against the revolutionary alternative proposed by the constructivist anti-Bourgeois and the anti-Colonial ‘Native-Primordial’ \textit{fak'tura}. This anti-Bourgeois and anti-colonial struggle was ensuing within the global chessboard being played by what we today term as Modernism, with all its rhizomic-arborescent contradictions.

This web of beautiful contradictions manifests a horrendous situation which proves how modernists, unlike the much later complacent post-modernists, ‘schismogenesistically’ could not accept the age within which they were living. This unresolved tension, \textit{Ranci'ère’s conflict of faculties}, was exacerbated into Modernism’s ‘descent of mankind’ and reflected in Manet’s ‘mediocre and uneven’ creative genius in which \textit{the hand fails to execute thought adequately, while thought hastens to act, rushing the work of the hand}.\footnote{Jacques Rancière, Aisthesis. Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art, tr. Zakir Paul, Verso, London, 2013, 141.} Dante Gabriel Rossetti was more ferocious as he qualified Manet’s works as \textit{putrescence and decomposition} and Manet himself as a \textit{French idiot}.\footnote{Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, ed. Oswald Doughty, John Robert Wahl, 5 vol., Oxford Clarendon Press, 1965-67, vol 2., 527; Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence, ed. John Bryan, Janet Camp Truelli, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1976, 174.}

Manet, who was, against his will, recognised as one of the fathers of Modern art, paradoxically enough, was in fact consistently fighting for the traditional aesthetic means and form, placing him at loggerheads with Adorno’s qualification. However, Manet did not, despite his Realism, succeed in exploiting such means which were traditionally at his disposal. That is why he is validly defined as the father of Modernism, in spite of, or rather, because of, his ‘failed’ traditional aesthetics. This is why Zola called his works \textit{imperfect and uneven}\footnote{Emile Zola, La bon combat, in Françoise Meltzer, Seeing Double: Baudelaire’s Modernity, Pimlico, London, 2007, 178-179.}, and this is the reason why Adorno is right, in spite of Manet himself.\footnote{Charles Baudelaire in Meltzer, 130.}

Attacking Manet validly enough, as being \textit{nothing more than the first in the decrepitude of your art}\footnote{Jacques Rancière, Aisthesis. Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art, Verso, London, New York, 2013, 214.}, proves this rather paradoxical thesis. In other words, I would argue that Manet’s imperfections and unevenness were in fact the birth pangs of a de-skilling process begotten for the new, yet unrecognised, formal means of aesthetic production adjusted to the structure of a radical novel social reality, one not yet then recognised but nonetheless deeply felt. Manet the sharp seismometer could not do otherwise. He had no choice but to convert these radical socio-aesthetic vibrations into new signs and signals which were, in his time, incomprehensible.

A complementary and seemingly contradictory argument to this concerns the belief that \textit{art begins where technics ends}\footnote{Robert Demachy’s and Constant Puyo’s Les Procédés d’art en photographie, particularly the thought that in artistic terms perfection of visual art exposes the limitation of its own possibilities. Perfection by exposing its own limitations transmogrifies into its negation. Only through such a process of negation can art become a mode of materialization for thought capable of unveiling the features of [a] new idea and thinking (Jacques Rancière, ibid., 157) through the re-birth of aesthetic-aton of the aesthetics.}… or better still, \textit{art begins when technics has developed enough for its intrinsic limit to become evident: not its insufficiency, but on the contrary its excessive perfection}.\footnote{Paul Cézanne fared slightly worse by being criticised for using the pistol and a bricklayer trowel instead of the traditional tools and the brush. Ross King, The Judgment of Paris: The Revolutionary Decade that gave the World Impressionism, Pimlico, London, 2007, 178-179.} I appropriate this idea and transmit the idea to my Manet problem.

Such Manet’s ‘imperfect unevenness’ found its dissonant reflection and fruition during a time when the art form of painting evolved to its perfection and when painting had achieved epic heights in the 19th century. His ‘unevenness’ is the cracking away from such ultimate heights of perfection achieved by this art of painting. We are alluding to the whole art evolution reaching its ‘excessive perfection’ and thus constrained to give birth to Manet’s ‘unevenness’ which would hence lead further on to a novel birth of a different art language.

Through his ‘unevenness’, Manet succeeded in transcribing a new vision, the \textit{grasping [of] the spectacle of the world, the successful composing of a plastic equivalent of [one’s] inner perception}. This needed a radical new language still unborn, but already felt in Manet’s womb, which only Walter Benjamin’s \textit{excavation of this present} can help us
transform incommunicability into communicability. This ‘communicability’ confronts us with a memory-in-flash: what has been comes together in a flash,¹⁸ a crystallised history in one flash, a dialectical image.

Art’s communicability proliferates its incomprehensibility through criticism, engagement, analyses, decomposition, deconstruction, destruction, surgical separations, fragmentation, disruption and self-obliteration. However, it is (durch Abbruch zu bauen), through its own demolition that it builds.¹⁹ Through these very same cannibalistic actions it acquires an ‘after-life’ which could reach some kind of philosophical truth-attempt refracted through the montaged prismatic multi-deconstructions which cobweb us with multiple plateaux.

Such a montage is not only a visual but also, and more importantly, a philosophical one.²⁰ It is the philosophical ‘after-life’ reading-perceiving of a work that accomplishes this total de-constructed dismantling of the work and thereby comes to establish an inner transformation of the work,²¹ a transformation that is consistently subject to Baxandall’s ‘period eye’ or to T.J. Clark’s shifts of ‘thought-structures’.

Boringly enough, one has to present our age in the age during which it arose. To excite the issue, however, one must also simultaneously present the age during which they arose in our age. This is a dialectical relationship: generation and destruction interpenetrate hierarchies of meaning, independently of any teleological ‘intention-ness’²² or ‘intentionless ‘-ness. This process finds itself reflected in what Benjamin termed as a primordial mimetic mode of vision harboured by the cosmos of similarity which leads one to experience this as ‘lived similarities’,²³ a Poundian cosmic subject-rhyme.

Due to such separation-in-time, textual deconstruction (abmontieren/ummontierung) together with functional transformation (Umfunktionierung) become vital to unearth truth for all that it is worth. Such unearthiness would lead to change either into banal clarity with its corresponding detritus²⁴ or into the nothingness of silence. One is confronted by a purgation of language, a language of silence, and the avoidance of language, which further begets silence. Overturning by misinterpreting Benjamin’s assessment, such begotten silence becomes the only home of truth²⁵, Pascal’s very same eternal silence between the stars.

    Nothing My Lord/
    Nothing/
    Nothing?/
    Nothing/ Nothing will come of Nothing/...
    So let truth by thy dow’r.... [King Lear, with apologies]:
    A bizarre act created out of Nothing going into Nothing, meaning Nothing.

And now after the Nothing, why the Uffa?

Since reading a painting demands a multidisciplinary conceptual critical approach, it has become unreadable since the act of reading has been abandoned in exchange for ‘looking at’. Philosophy must play the central role of putting back ‘reading’ into the equation. The verb oida (to know) has to re-member itself into its root, eidô (to see).²⁶

Many authors tackle works as separate, independent, unrelated monads, independent not only from their theoretical and historical context, but also from the seismic tumultuous state of analytical eruptions passing by or that bypassed us. Such abstracted monads were not, and are not, seen in relation to an overall universal development.

Furthermore, when it comes to Maltese Modern art scholarship in particular, it seems it has forgotten that Maltese artists were dealing with the same questions troubling their foreign colleagues. With their corresponding successes and failures, these formed part of a larger, transversal, and wider conceptual artistic constellation.

Artists create not only consciously but also sub- and unconsciously, not only rationally but also, and predominantly, intuitively and irrationally. All these psychological settings seep into the artwork in some form or other, unknowingly to the artist himself. It is the task of Philosophy to unearth and to provoke a further development of the artwork in question and also to enhance conceptual thought.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin in Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 2014, 111.
²⁰ ibid., 479
²¹ ibid., 344
²² ibid., 359
²⁴ Dead organic matter.
²⁵ Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, 2014, 185.
Such enhancement demands an interdisciplinarity drawn from innumerate geo-culture hubs and sources, as defined by Roland Gérard Barthes. Different disciplines must interact since innovative unprecedented ideas are begotten due to the philosophical friction which erupts during such interaction.

During this process, which finds its roots in Deleuze’s ‘process-philosophy’, we not only, in a kind of illusion, discover the meaning of a work: but we also invest it with one, and, according to me, ‘invent’ one to exacerbate the whole issue. This can be corroborated by Adorno’s premise defining research as a sustained X-ray examination which unconceals a hidden force-field, much in line with Pavel Florensky’s invincible lines of force.

How can one uncover such invisible sources?

Here enters the ‘Uffa’: dialectical materialism allying itself with the propadeutic together with the paraeidolia-apophenic tools and the syntagmatic-paradigmatic methodological critical analyses are aesthetically and philosophically fundamental to trail the praxis of how seemingly unrelated juxtapositions give rise to new critical thought.29

This approach stems from the Eisensteinian theory of film montage and is linked with Ezra Pound’s ‘subject-rhyme’. This enriches and provokes discursive interpretative leaps which are existentially and fatally needed to disrupt the quiet tread of [the] miller’s mule in scholarship.

Conclusions may or may not be corroborated by specific positivist archival ‘vetrina-archaeological’ empirical susa data known at this stage but will surely be in the near future since paintings, in spite of being a lie, do not lie. Maltese art scholarship, in fact, has still to wake up to Yve-Alain Bois’s call stating that one cannot give an historical account, unless one has a critical theory.31

Developing Hubert Damisch’s and Rosalind Krauss’s ideas that it is such seeming ‘flaws’ that actually prove the structural system, which would eventually lead us towards the much-awaited vexierbild – an aesthetic picture puzzle that has to unfold without ever being completely unfolded.

In spite of all these contradictions, I still quixotically believe that methodological research is, as Adorno underlined, aimed at the unfolding of the artwork’s truth content and at the philosophical retrieval of the artwork.32 This harbours a Sisyphean interdisciplinary, conceptual, socio-economic, historical web experimented upon within a rigid de-chronological scientific intuitive laboratory.

Thus, the ‘Uffa’33

Professor Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci has authored several books on Modern and Contemporary Art, Philosophy of Art, and Maltese twentieth century art. He has contributed to the world of art through various cultural programs and artistic directions, including the APS Mdina Modern and Contemporary Art Biennale, the Venice Biennale 2022 [Malta Pavilion], the Valletta Cultural Agency [Strada Stretta Concept] and the Mediterranean Modern Art Project.

32 Hohendahl, 22.
33 The author wishes to thank Prof.Claude Mangion for the generous invitation to contribute to SHARE. Additionally, sincere appreciation is extended to Dr Nikki Petroni and Ian Rizzo for their assistance in the review and editing process.
"The eye cannot see the face from which it stares..."

What is the relationship between language and lived experience? Is it primarily interpretive or is it wholly metaphoric? Whenever the perennial question about the uneasy relationship between a metaphoric language system and lived experiences arises, as it so often must in the consciousness of a practicing artist, how should said artist frame or conceptualize the without within, so to speak, while existing in a wholly encompassing inertial state?

Is the issue primarily shaded by interpretive degree or does it run the full gamut of a substitutive/metaphoric veil? There can be no argument to brook the fact that at their inception, basic 'words' as a proto-language, were merely object signifiers. However, as the inexorable accretion of cognitive experience gained pace, conceptual phonetic idioms perhaps began to subtly supersede all that went before. In other words (no pun intended), they began to replace the lived experience of reality.

In the now, this end process appears to have been entirely usurped by what can only be described as an expressive-hyperbolic symbolism. Nowhere is this annexation more indicatively apparent than in the practice of the Beaux Arts, wherein, unfortunately, the circle has been very forcibly squared, and what merely used to be the Name of the Rose has, to all intents and purposes, become the very rose itself, thorns and all.

This inertial state poses a very dangerous dilemma for a practicing artist, inherently perilous given the fact that a predominance of verbiage is all that is really necessary to subvert and overwhelm the nuanced interplay that exists between the artist and lived experience. This predilection, en vogue of the non-practitioner, the pernicious desire to interpose words and metaphors between the subject and the object, the processing of which the critics themselves do not even master, the insertion of a synthetic invective between the artist and the artifact can be, I believe, viewed rather uncharitably. It is a middle-man con job. There is no necessity for such critique; the Art will always stand or fall on its own innate merit and mettle. It requires no loquacious addenda.

Could this not be simply a question of the assertion of control over Beauty’s anarchy? And is it not perpetrated mainly by tenured critics living in ivory towers? Mere wage slaves who possess no meritocratic right to dabble with the nature of the body aesthetic. Yet there they are, their certitude obliging them to insert their words and noses and any other metaphysical appendage they see fit deep into the guts of the vital matter. This is how they earn their corn, thus the need in their dire necessity for a right of interpretation and, by small dint at least, a little condescension.

The other shade in the cavern, the one gasping for dear life, is named ‘received wisdom’. It trumpets loudly the need for the rational interpretation of all things real and imagined. In effect, it simultaneously manages to convey contempt for both the practice of the art and also the observer thereof, for any artistic endeavor now is deemed worthless and just plain out of kilter without a large smattering of appellations and syllables.

Oh, those pithy phrases.

The raison d’être of all this word-traffic, according to its proponents, is of a purely philanthropic bent, the quarrel being aimed squarely at the education of the terminally stupid. Thus, by facilitating a commentary with no less verve than verbosity, regarding what the poor dumb viewers very own sense organs are actually experiencing, on the broad assumption, one presumes, that the viewer in the dim dark cave of ignorance is somehow missing the whole gist of experience.

A whole cadre within the genre of what author William S. Burroughs named ‘the Assayers of the Scribes’ has seemingly evolved to parse ‘beauty’ from ‘non-beauty’, so as to inform, one assumes, all those who are too empathetically truncated.
and perhaps just a little too lazy to attempt to see for themselves.

Thus, these architects of art criticism have become not only the gatekeepers but now, it would seem, the very Gate itself. This is clearly evidenced in the hegemony of the belief that nothing can be experienced directly, but rather that delegation of perception), in favor of a conversation between myself and reality which takes place in the realm of the pre-Cognitive Dynamic, that which was formerly referred to in the binary as ‘the fight or flight response’.

The pre-Cognitive Dynamic remains active every single moment of our long lives, never sleeping and impervious to the fictions of any self-serving critical theory. This is the underlying function that has facilitated our mantle as apex predators and is even now propelling us skyward.

Why then is this powerful inertial state relegated so low in the immense strata of academe, with glib appellation and all? The answer is quite simple. This state of being cannot be successfully monetised (and therefore subjected to control), rendering it somewhat redundant in the keen landscape of red-in-tooth-and-claw Capitalism. It makes no mark on the bottom line and is therefore banished beyond the Pale.

In my work, I have systematically researched the functional nature of the pre-Cognitive, specifically the pre-Cognitive visual system, and after much study and experimentation, I have come to the conclusion that it is indeed possible to construct forms of art which are able to exist beyond the suffocating thrall of rational analysis, which elide any interpretive insertion.

**the Thing Itself** must first be dissected and then hung about with extraneous and unintelligible turns of phrase.

Does then the artist fall into lock-step with this synthetic proposition of reality or in opposing risk abrupt excommunication from the temple of beauty? Or is there available a third way, an approach that will remain realistically extant in spite of the myriad cultural fictions and filters so intensively imposed and imprinted onto the mind of humanity?

My own personal experience tends to bend my opinion in the direction of the affirmative, that there is another, more intrinsically authentic method available, and it is this insight that has shaped my working method concerning the creation of art. In essence, the attritional bypassing of frontal lobe consciousness (that which has become so loaded with social bias that it creates a wall of blindness leading to an inability in the viewer to see for themselves, thus forcing an arbitrary to the fictions of any self-serving critical theory. This is the underlying function that has facilitated our mantle as apex predators and is even now propelling us skyward.

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![Image](image1.jpg)  
*i) “Third Mind” flatfilm ‘Five Flatfilms’ folio (2002)*
What follows is a statement regarding my own personal experiences in the field of art. It is neither an apologia nor a manifesto; it is simply a description of a working process as fact. I have been an operating artist for 44 years, and the intrinsic nature of the process of creation represents to me everything and the all. The product of this process, the artifact, means little to me, it is often a satisfying outcome, indeed beautiful, but ultimately redundant, little more than a time-fixed memento mori of my ongoing pursuit of arete.

I exist as an artist within the realm of the pre-Cognitive. I remember little or nothing of the initial image-making undertaken to create the artwork. What follows is just consolidation of that which is captured, and my tête-à-tête with reality is, on the whole, non-verbal. I do feel strongly that 'the word' introduces an inhibitive false premise when applied to the direct experience of beauty. A cage without doors. The 'word' can kill the art stone dead.

I have been engaged for so many years in this process of creation that my reaction to on-site technical issues is now nothing more than muscle memory. This frees my pre-Cognitive from distraction and allows, in essence, a fuller and more complete discourse between myself and my existential reality. A dissatisfaction with 'artistic convention' has driven me into two paradigm shifts. Firstly, utilising a form I named 'Flatfilm', which entailed the disassembly of linear film footage into component frames which were then re-assembled utilizing the mathematics of the Golden Ratio in order to allow the viewer of the piece to experience non-linearity, an attempt at 'instantaneous perception' much in keeping with the precepts of Quantum Entanglement. Secondly a form I named 'neo-Photography'. Similarly, this is a serious attempt to provide the viewer with instantaneous perception of the Thing Itself.

This process involves the capture of an image which is then fabricated into a larger composition utilizing the mathematics of X/Y symmetry. This image is then composited back upon itself in the form of a helical construct which is representative of the exponential spiral geometries found in nature. This process of fundamental/symmetrical/helical composition is based largely on the work of Bela Julesz et al (Bell Laboratories 1970-1990), which centered on the discovery that the human visual cortex perceives symmetries instantaneously, unlike non-symmetrical repetitive patterns which require frontal lobe cogitation, which in turn causes a time lag in perception and also forces a re-sampling of reality via extant social bias (this causes what is known as Pareidolia, in effect the imposition of unrealistic relative constructs upon reality).
The latter’s frontal lobe function means that in effect, ‘reality’ is never directly experienced, but rather it is merely, somewhat fallaciously, reconstructed from a synthesis of the original input stimulus and the pre-existing dominant social filter bias.

It is my firm belief that art, if attempted correctly, can bypass this feedback loop and thus present the observer with that experience of quality which is the perception of unity in variety. Artists are but map-makers, who, by wilfully deviating from the norm, beat out new pathways for future generations to tread.

An artist’s ultimate goal, in my mind, should always be to try and attain ‘the shock of the new’, for adherence and conformity to pre-existing paradigms and conventions can be little more than a repetitive series of petite-morts, containing very little insight into the nature of existence or consciousness.

My own intriguing relationship with the pre-Cognitive way of seeing began in 2001 when I was hired as the project artist in a team led by Prof. Lindsey T. Sharpe, Emeritus Professor of Physical Psychology at Max Planck Institute, Tübingen, Germany. This was an investigation into perceptual time dilation in low-light environments. The results of the various experiments undertaken were unfortunately inconclusive. We were in no doubt, however, once the data sets were in, that there was indeed such an effect in operation, but as to the implicit mechanics and the causalities thereof, we were still, so to speak, in the dark.

After the project funding ran out, I decided to investigate the matter further myself in the form of an art project, which, over the course of two and a half years, allowed me to conceptualize and create an algebraic formula which approximated the form and function of the human pre-Cognitive visual system.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to Ted Sharpe for all of his encouragement during the early stages of the development of the pre-Cognitive Dynamic hypothesis. Respect is also due to those unsung heroes of science who worked at Bell Labs USA during the 1960s and 70s led by Bela Julesz, a prescient savant of great degree. I would recommend Julesz’s book ‘The Foundations of Cyclopean Vision’ (1971) to anyone interested in learning more about this neglected subject- the how and why we see and construct the world as we do via the pre-Cognitive.

As an artist, I must admit I do enjoy it when I hear experts stating that they do not understand a system or phenomenon.
If the subject is intriguing enough, I like to run the rule over the situation myself merely for the satisfaction of my own curiosity and largely to try to ascertain whether or not the stratifications of academe have perhaps allowed their inherent biases to get the better of their observations. A common problem, I understand.

I always apply the scientific method during such projects, namely observe/hypothesize/experiment/conclude, which, combined with experimental repeatability, allows for a degree of triangulation regarding the mystery.

My interest in a Unified Field Theory and the subsequent modeling of the pre-Cognitive Dynamic which derived from it, has led me full square into the often vague field of Physical Psychology.

As a visualist, I have long pondered the nature of my metier. I now know, based on the weight of the evidence, that the subconscious is the single dominant force within my work, that my whole process is now conditioned for pre-Cognitive execution and the resultant artifacts produced are unlike anything I have witnessed before.

I see no real limit to this investigation.

"What is good and what is bad Phaedrus? And who is to teach us such things?"

Jamie Fettis is an artist who has spent forty-four years making the invisible visible in pursuit of Beauty’s unity in variety.
On October 6th, 2023, in London’s National Gallery, members of Just Stop Oil, a climate activism group, have raised their hammers not against the anvil of environmental policy, but upon the glass safeguarding Diego Velázquez’s *The Rokeby Venus*. The protest is as visually striking as it is controversial. While the glass shattered, the painting itself was lucky enough to escape damage.

This is not the first time Just Stop Oil have used artistic treasures to protest. They’ve glued, splattered, and now, hammered their message home, insisting that the UK government cease all new fossil fuel projects. The group’s methods are undeniably provocative, the Velázquez chosen with a historical resonance. In 1914, Mary Raleigh Richardson, a suffragette arrested nine times for her activism, slashed and gashed this same painting with a meat cleaver.

In 2023, the activists’ narrative is clear: urgent times call for urgent measures. But as they tread the tightrope between activism and art, between rebellion and reverence, the question looms: does this fusion of protest and performance herald change, or merely spectacle?

The list of Just Stop Oil targets also includes a Van Gogh, a Vermeer, and a Constable — a pantheon of artistic deities whose works have been made unwitting conscripts in a war against fossil fuels.

In 2022, on June 30th, two supporters glued themselves to the frame of Van Gogh’s *Peach Trees in Blossom* at the Courtauld Gallery in London. A few days later, on July 4th, another two glued themselves to John Constable’s *The Haywain* at the National Gallery, covering the painting with a printed illustration that reimagined *The Hay Wain* as an “apocalyptic vision of the future”, depicting “the climate collapse and what it will do to this landscape”. A day later, more supporters glued themselves to a full-size copy of Leonardo Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper* at the Royal Academy of Arts, spray-painting “No New Oil” on the wall just under it.

More protests followed, including throwing tomato soup on the fourth version of Van Gogh’s iconic *Sunflowers*, on October 14th at the National Gallery, and more glued protesters, this time and for the first time outside the UK, to Vermeer’s equally iconic *Girl with a Pearl Earring* at the Mauritshuis in The Hague, on October 27th.

**Vandalism as Rebellion**

These acts seem to carry something of the scourging – if rebellious and defiant – spirit behind vandalous graffiti and spray-paint tagging on public walls and historical monuments in cities like Athens, Rome, or Paris.

Granted, tagging gives vibes of apathy, ruinous youth, and a lack of appreciation for patrimony. It results in an urban
decay far removed from the sanitised aesthetics of touristy postcards. Arguably, it makes places feel less safe, less pretty.

But at the same time, it blows the lid off the less desirable aspects of real life: social isolation and fragmentation, marginalisation, abandonment, dissatisfaction, and disillusionment.

Tagging is quite literally superficial, and at the cost of sounding simplistic, reversible - nothing a good cleaning can’t fix. It defaces but doesn’t quite annihilate its targets. Of course, cleaning and restoration are costly and annoying, especially if the tags keep coming back with a vengeance by the next day – but relatively easily accomplished.

But condemning acts of vandalism and sending in the power washers, while commendable, should be but the first step of a cathartic, more permanent, process. We must see them as a symptom, rather than the illness itself. We must pursue a deeper understanding of its sources and a truthful, society-wide commitment to fix those same sources.

Compared to tagging, the damages caused by the Just Stop Oil protests are equally superficial and equally, if not more easily, reversible. At their worst, these acts have gone glass-deep in their destruction. Their artistic targets, while highly recognisable, have escaped largely unscathed, at least this far.

Therefore, Just Stop Oil are not quite the villains of cultural heritage, unlike the dreadful acts of the Taliban destroying the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001, to name one distressing example. Even locally, over the years, we’ve seen sustained, permanent acts committed on Maltese natural and cultural heritage by the very institutions meant to protect it, far worse than glued hands and splashed tomato soup on protective glass.

Earth versus Art: Destroying to Create

If the damage from these protest acts is negligible, then why do we get so worked up about them?

Just Stop Oil flirt with a paradox. To get their message across, they encroach upon and risk the sanctity of world-class artistic heritage, the same sanctity they champion for our natural environment.

The targets are canonical masterpieces. They are unique, individual works with their place not just in the history of art, but in the long story of human ingenuity and creation. This uniqueness about them is reminiscent of the uniqueness of the Earth itself. Both these works and the Earth possess an irreplaceable quality, a thread of continuity that once severed, cannot be reknit in the same way.

Why do many spring up at these protests but are unperturbed by global warming, or the Great Pacific Garbage Patch? What do we value more? Singular examples of past human artistic achievement, or the future of our planet, with its incredible biodiversity, dazzling landscapes and ecologies, and the promise of more singular human accomplishments, terrible, beautiful, and sublime? It’s a false dishotomy, but one that serves its function of making us think.

Perhaps the artworks feel more tangible. They are present and we experience them in their immediacy. They are perceivably finite. Their degradation and loss would be concretely immediate, and therefore more acutely felt and more visceral. On the other hand, the issues surrounding the ecological future of the Earth seem more abstract, more difficult to grasp. They come loaded with misinformation, scientific illiteracy, and appeals to inappropriate authorities. They are sliced between accusations of delusional scaremongering on one hand, and bribery and corrupt dealings such as the Panalpina case on the other.

Smashing the Past to Birth a Future, Almost

Through their protests, Just Stop Oil may have inadvertently stumbled upon a new kind of performance art. It’s one where the crescendo stops shy of the climax, where the hammer is stayed by the glass — an alarming spectacle of, let’s call it, almost-violence. There is not the visceral finality of Ai Wei Wei’s calculated shatter of a 2,000-year-old Han Dynasty urn, an act he transformed into a searing critique of cultural amnesia. His 1995 performance, aptly titled Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn, was a deliberate, irreparable act of destruction. Reacting to accusations of desecration, Wei Wei retorted sardonically, “Chairman Mao used to tell us that we can only build a new world if we destroy the old one.” Despite the powerful message, one can’t help but feel gutted at the loss. Art doesn’t always have - isn’t always meant - to be beautiful. It can be horrifying and, through that, provoke change.

In contrast, Just Stop Oil’s gallery protests, while resonant with the same theatricality, lack the final destructive act of Wei Wei. They are a prelude without a conclusion. They leave us in a state of suspended – if dreaded – anticipation. Their performances, staged with the dramatic flair of a heist movie, seem to end just as the plot thickens.

Therefore, given that there is no irreversible damage, can we grant these protests the same gravitas as Wei Wei’s urn?

Driving the Hammer Home

Here’s one way to judge the effectiveness of these protests: it resides not in the act of destruction but in the public’s visceral response to the mere threat of it. From the news coverage, the activists seem to have not marred a single
brushstroke of the works they have targeted. Yet, the anxiety stirred is palpable. We’re watching a trapeze artist teeter without a net — all it takes is a momentarily unsteady hand, a blow landed too far.

Therefore, the answer may lie not in what is broken, but in what such acts break open in the collective consciousness. Just as Wei Wei’s urn sparked dialogue on the value of social and cultural structures, that of Just Stop Oil is an art of the unfulfilled threat, focusing on one of society’s paradoxes — venerating the relics of the past while jeopardizing the heritage of the future.

It’s a performance that, while lacking the finality of Ai Wei Wei’s shattered urn, leaves its audience in a similar state of reflective disquiet, pondering the fragility of both our planet and the human expression it has allowed to flourish. Unlike Wei Wei, these protests allow us a small flood of relief that the artefact is still there. Their act sparks as a counter-factual exercise to reflect on what could have been, but, luckily, isn’t.

Just Stop Oil, to make us aware of one existential threat, remind us of another: that heritage, be it cultural or natural inheritance, once destroyed, is irrevocably gone. We moral, rational agents, wielding the power of stewards, are the ones who must be roused to the perils of environmental apathy.

What are we willing to destroy in the name of progress?

References

Adrian Camilleri Chiaro lectures on art criticism at MCAST, where he has also designed the evening course in philosophical aesthetics. With a BA in Philosophy and Art History (Malta) and an MA in Philosophy (Wales), he founded the multi-platform PhilosophyMT in 2020, with the aim of demystifying philosophy for beginners.
Interview with a Philosopher
Matt Qvortrup

Matt Qvortrup is Professor of Political Science and International Relations at Coventry University. He earned his doctorate in Politics at Brasenose College, University of Oxford in 2000. His research centres on the tension between political actors being driven by emotion and by rational argument, and is particularly interested in the circumstances that sway them in either direction. An expert in referendums, European politics and comparative government, Matt Qvortrup has recently worked with brain-scientists to understand the neuroscience of political action. He was awarded the PSA Prize in 2013 for his research on political institutions and policy outputs. His book Angela Merkel: Europe’s Most Influential Leader was translated into Russian, Chinese and Korean. During 2015 he was a Specialist Advisor to the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. He has previously worked as a member of President Obama’s Special Envoy Team in Africa (2009-2010). A frequent commentator for the BBC, he is also a regular contributor to Philosophy Now magazine. Matt Qvortrup has been invited by the Philosophy Sharing Foundation to address the annual philosophy lecture on the 15th of March 2024 with the theme The Democratic Brain: Body, Soul, and the Politics of Listening. He is interviewed by Ian Rizzo ahead of the event.
1. Political philosophers do not seem to be as influential as in other branches of philosophy such as ethics or technology. What inspired you to focus on political philosophy in the first place? Who is/are the political philosophers you think have been the greatest influence?

I am a Kantian – and I think his idea that we have to trust reason is a fundamental one in political philosophy. But in terms of practical influence, John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* is probably more influential. While Kant’s idea of the rule of law and constitutional order remains the cornerstone of democratic countries, and Mill’s idea of freedom and freedom of expression as a mechanism for correcting mistakes remain the single most important argument for rational debates – it is the perfect antidote to those who spread fake news and question truths – especially among would-be authoritarian politicians (you know who they are!)

2. Machiavelli has described in detail the problems of human nature in its relationship to power. Considering also that nowadays the political life of any prime minister/minister in every country has become noticeably short, do you agree that political power requires some form of ruthlessness and manipulation to survive?

Yes, we have to be realistic about politics. What Machiavelli showed was not the world as it ought to be, but the world as it is. And, politics is ruthless and manipulative, but to navigate through the corridors of power, we need to know what it is really like, not what we want it to be. I am always skeptical of idealists who espouse deliberative democracy without taking into account that politics is a bare-knuckle fight.

3. If I had to sum up the problem of politics, I would choose the opposing arguments between Aristotle’s claim that we seek the company of others to live meaningful and happy lives and Schopenhauer’s belief that living with others is at times difficult and unpleasant. Can we say that the eternal divide between individualism and community interests lies at the core of every political struggle? And if so, how can it be overcome?

I have always been enamored by Kant’s remark that we are characterized by “unsocial sociability”, and that humans strive to “establish a position for themselves among their fellows, whom they can neither endure nor do without” (Universal History, p.394).

4. From an overview of your publications, democracy is one of your most important themes. Would I be mistaken to claim that representative and liberal democracy as understood by the West holds a minority position amongst the nations of the world? Do you agree that it is very difficult if not impossible for the concept of democracy to be held in the future as a universal value for good and happy governance?

On the contrary, most people profess to believe in democracy. But yes, in practice, democracy is under threat. It always is. That is why we need to fight for it. Without open debate, a democracy is likely to succumb to government by those who claim to have wisdom. Again, I think Kant provides an answer. He wrote, in *Critique of Pure Reason*, that when “religion and... legislation... seek to exempt themselves from [criticism]... they awaken suspicion and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords to that which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination” (CPR, XXVII).

5. The rise of populist movements in the last two decades adds to further worrying concerns on how democracies can easily be undermined in countries that traditionally held a respect for free speech and liberal order. The attacks on the US Congress in the last presidential election and the re-election of certain strongmen (such as Orban and Erdogan) by democratic elections validates the main concern expressed in your publication *Death by a Thousand Cuts*. What can be done in the present century to safeguard democracy in the West?

That we follow Kant and Descartes. Democracy is based on open debate and not on doctrines. Essentially, democracy (direct democracy as well as representative government) is merely the embodiment of Descartes old dictum that we ‘ought to doubt or question everything’; ‘de omnibus dubitandum est’. Politicians and others in power have always been purveyors of ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’. The aim of philosophy in general, and political philosophy in particular, is to counter this. Or, if I may once again invoke Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, “the first and most important concern of philosophy, once and for all, [is] to avoid any adverse influence by blocking the source of errors” (XXVII).

6. Can we truly aspire for a meritocratic society when it seems inevitable that the bulk of the population tends to remain passively controlled by a power elite that is not accountable for its actions?

Well, the question is if people are as passive as you imply. I think people are involved in selective participation. In a sense...
they save their ‘civic reserves’ for when it really matters. In many cases they are happy with society as it is, but when something bothers them, they react with fury. That people should be engaged all the time would be draining. And it reminds me of Oscar Wilde’s saying, that “the problem with socialism is that it would take up too many evenings”. I think people are capable of participating, but they save their energy for when it really matters. That, incidentally, was also what Machiavelli espoused in Discorsi.

7. Throughout your career, you have observed various political systems worldwide. Are there any examples of successful democratic practices or constitutional arrangements that you believe could serve as models for other countries?

In Ireland, they have a so-called deliberative democracy in which a carefully selected and representative sample of people discuss constitutional issues. This is not idealistic and otherworldly. There is a vigorous debate. But it takes the ‘politics’ out of ‘policy discussions. The focus is not on ‘winning the argument’ but on ‘solving the problem’. I think this is an example of how critical thinking and ‘the wisdom of the crowds’ can be used to inform debate. This institutional mechanism helped take the polarizing ‘politics’ out of contentious issues like abortion and marriage equality (gay marriage). We can learn a lot from this example, I think. But note, this deliberative forum did not stand alone. There was a referendum afterwards. Deliberation must be followed by a fair democratic vote! I think Kant would have approved. The system rather proves his point that we are all capable of thinking. In Critique of Judgement, Kant entertained the idea that, “final end of creation is such a constitution... as harmonizes with what we can only definitely specify according to laws, namely the practical reason” (p.282). To a degree the ordinary Irish citizens who took part in the Citizens’ Forum were the embodiment of Kant’s ideal.

8. Considering the terrible consequences of climate change, don’t you think that Governments have failed
on a global level as they tend to be more concerned with parochial matters and with a short-term rule that focuses on materialistic considerations?

Politics is never perfect. But I think that democratic systems where politicians can be held to account are better at solving problems than systems where politicians do not have to fear re-election. There is always the concern that things are not happening fast enough. Still, very few governments in democratic (and even undemocratic) countries are completely ignoring environmental issues. We have come a long way in the past few years. The reason for this is that arguments matter, and this indirectly goes back to Kant. In a way, we are only discussing these issues because we are children of the Enlightenment – without Descartes and Kant we would not be discussing rational solutions to environmental problems.

9. What motivated you to write about Angela Merkel’s leadership and what do you believe set her apart as a leader from others?

Two things. I speak German, and I met the former Chancellor at an EU summit. I am fascinated by German culture and politics, and writing about her gave me an opportunity to combine my love of German culture and philosophy with my interest in German politics today. She is not a philosopher, but Dr Merkel is a politician who was shaped by the ideals and the thinking of the likes of Kant – and perhaps even Hegel. At a time when politicians are focused on ideology, she was a politician who was focused on solving problems – though she too could play party politics.

10. How can political philosophy contribute to the contemporary challenges facing humanity such as climate change, AI, pandemics, and nuclear war? And how do you see the role and contribution of political philosophers in this regard? Should they be a direct part of the political process or just provide advice and solutions from the sidelines?

Once again, and I hope this is not tedious, I would like to cite Kant – my hero. So, it goes something like this. In response to the first question, political philosophy can contribute by following Kant’s Categorical Imperative – that you must always “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (Groundwork, p.36).

The role political philosophy can play in this is by ensuring that human progress is “realised in a society that possesses the greatest degree of freedom” – that is, “one in which its members continually struggle with each other and yet in which the limits of this freedom are specified and secured in the exact manner”; in other words, under “a just civil constitution” (Universal History, p.395). Such a legal framework cannot be one with an absolutist monarch or a single ruler, “for such a person will always abuse his freedom if he has no one above him” (Toward Perpetual Peace, p.12). Like Kant, I believe that a democratic constitution will utilise “the mechanisms of nature on human beings in order to direct conflict between their hostile intentions… in such a way that they compel each other to submit themselves to coercive laws” (p.59). Yet as much as Kant, and I believe that history is progressing, I am not a not a utopian. Nor was Kant. He believed it was impossible to create the perfect society, “nothing straight can be fashioned out of the crooked timber of humanity” (Universal History, p.398). I humbly take the same position, but I think we should strive, and I think we will if we are animated by the social unsociability espoused by my Prussian friend.

11. You will soon be publishing your book Great Minds on Small Things in the coming October. I gather that the book will make readers appreciate how philosophy can be applied to everyday common unfamiliar themes. Can you perhaps elaborate more?

Yes, philosophy is a serious business, but the greatest minds of all times were also human beings. This book shows that they did not just think about the great questions like God, death, being, or the meaning of life, but also pondered such things as cheese, beer, buildings, farts, and even, eh ‘shit’ – yes several of them even used this word!

12. In the annual philosophy lecture to be held in March 2024 by the Philosophy Sharing Foundation, you have been invited to address the theme The Democratic Brain: Body, Soul, and the Politics of Listening. What is going to be the main message you intend to deliver to the audience?

The message of my lecture is based on another book I have coming out. It is called The Political Brain: The Emergence of Neopolitics https://ceupress.com/book/political-brain. The books show what happens if we, so to speak, put Plato and Aristotle in the MRI-scanner. Basically, Plato’s idea of ‘Thymos’ – the animated part of the soul – in The Republic has been discovered in current neuroscience. In my lecture I combine ancient philosophy with modern brain science. David Hume wanted to use the insights of Newton’s physics on philosophy. I will attempt to show how neuroscience and political philosophy go together.
A Letter to my Students

By Colette Sciberras

This little essay is for all those students who have asked me, in class, “What do you think, miss?” and I replied, “That’s not the point of this lesson.” In case anyone is still interested, I’ve given it some thought, and here is my reply.

I think that whenever we do philosophy, we always have to begin with a distinction. Sometimes, this amounts to splitting the world into two, for example, body and mind. Sometimes, it’s just to contrast one thing with another, for example, virtue and happiness. Making a distinction is the easiest way to start thinking and perhaps even the only way.

I think these days we should begin with the old Aristotelian distinction between nature and technology. If we begin there, the first thing we can say is that technology seems to have a life of its own and seems to be intent on enslaving humanity. Whenever writers try to predict future, hyper-technological societies, the vision is usually a dystopian one. You might argue that it’s not technology per se that is evil, but that there are economic and political forces more powerful than human reason and goodwill, that turn technology into an evil thing. Following Paul Kingsnorth, let us refer to ‘the Machine,’ as the combination of these economic, political, and technological forces.

The distinction between nature and technology or Nature and the Machine is useful because of the contrasts it reveals. Nature, at least in the past, was seen as providential. We could assume that the future would resemble the past, that Spring would always follow the Winter, and if this is no longer true, due to climate change and so on, this is because the Machine has corrupted Nature. These days, the Machine looms large over everyone and everything, and technology develops rapidly, sometimes unpredictably, and never in a way that is unequivocally for the better.

Perhaps you disagree; you might share Stephen Pinker’s persuasion that the world is getting better thanks to new technologies like better medicines, better communications and so on. In that case, you might ignore the pessimistic tone and focus only on the proposition that technology today is changing more radically and unpredictably than nature in general does. Even if you think the changes are good, you’ll have to admit that they are happening fast and that not all the consequences can be foreseen.

In between nature and technology, we find culture, and this too, these days, changes more rapidly and unpredictably. What is true of the psychology of my generation is not true of yours. Again, this seems to be because technology has infected our natural psyches. What I learnt as a child is different from what your children will learn, plugged into the internet and AI from birth. On the other hand, human generations over thousands of years all learnt very similar lessons on how to handle nature; how to work the land, manage the water supply, extract and use minerals, and so on.
Technology existed in the past too, obviously, but there seems to be an enormous difference between a plough or an anvil, and ChatGPT, for instance. Any farmer or blacksmith can understand how their tools work, even if they cannot make them themselves. With AI, on the other hand, not even its creators fully understand how it works.

This, to me, is the single most important lesson in Western philosophy; the distinction between, on the one hand, nature which in general, endures and can be understood and predicted, and on the other, human tools and creations, including artificial intelligence, which often do not endure and are not so easily predictable.

Perhaps the reason we tend to begin philosophy with a distinction is that language and other functions of our minds are inherently dualistic. When we speak, we usually say either that something is, or that it isn’t. It is true that there are other language-games we play other than making simple propositions, but a lot of our discourse can be reduced to ‘this and not that.’

Similarly, a moment of experience breaks down into subject and object. As Sartre described, as soon as you look at me, I feel distinct from you and become something you experience. Our mind is usually dualistic, because we are always breaking things down into two, separating this from that, liking this, hating that.

The question that has occupied me most in philosophy, and why I turned to the East, is whether there is a state of mind that isn’t dualistic. I think I can now reply that there is, but of course I could not describe such a state, except very badly, in a language that is inherently dualistic.

It is generally understood that to get to a non-dualistic state of mind, one needs to go beyond any distinction, including the distinction between nature and technology, or Nature
and the Machine. We can do this by theorizing and redefining words where we must, a la Bruno Latour. But I think we need to decide whether we are satisfied with a theoretical account or whether we want a deeper understanding of the issue.

What I learnt from Buddhism is that we generally tend to see one side of a distinction as good, and the other as bad, and this causes us a lot of pain and suffering. Perhaps like me, you prefer Nature to the Machine, and you are dismayed at all the ecological destruction wrought by technology. Or else, if you’re of Pinker’s persuasion, perhaps you think technology is preferable to the natural evils of disease and death. Equanimity is a rare thing in human psychology.

The non-dualistic state of mind is equanimous, and like Nietzsche’s Ubermensch, goes beyond good and evil, but again not much more can be said. Obviously, virtual bi-location is dualistic too – you cannot appropriate my propositions about a non-dualistic state of mind; you have to experience it for yourself. Or rather, you have to experience it, as yourself.

That is why non-dualism is impossible to explain. It is easy to collapse dualisms with words; to say there’s no subject and object, no me and you, no man or woman, no nature versus the Machine. But then we’d have to say there is no difference between anything, anywhere, at any time, which is obviously nonsense when we put it like that.

If reality is non-dualistic, why do we experience the world dualistically? Why is our language dualistic? One theory is that the distinctions we keep making and the contradictions we keep running into, emerge from the fact that our brains are bi-cameral. The left side of our brain is good for zoning in on things and using them to get what it wants, whereas the right is better at taking in oneness and wholeness. That is, as Iain McGilchrist explains, our left hemisphere distinguishes this from that and reasons instrumentally, whereas the right can enjoy aesthetic and spiritual experiences. I think human happiness requires that we develop our use of each side.

When a culture predominantly uses left-brained mechanistic and instrumentalist reasoning, the economic, political, and technological structures it creates are bound to become a Machine that enslaves people. On the other hand, predominantly right-brained cultures seem fated to get swallowed up; first, because they are less technologically advanced, and secondly because the Machine is the very devil that tempts their young ones into the city and away from traditional lifestyles.

So, we can say there are two, Nature and the Machine, or God and the Devil, or else we can say All is One. Saying something remains just that, saying something. Much more valuable is to experience, to see, and to know.

For me, ‘know thyself’ is still the most important instruction for philosophers. My advice for a happy life is to find out what you are, and to make sure you know this for yourself and not second-hand. We mustn’t take Nietzsche’s word for it that we are ‘sick animals’ or even Harari that we are ‘hackable’ ones but must see for ourselves what we are. Are we different from Nature or a part of it? Are we part of the Machine, is it a part of us, or is it a separate entity with a life of its own? To me, these are the most important questions that philosophy will get us thinking about and to paraphrase the Buddha, we must not accept anyone’s answer but must seek to know for ourselves.

Colette Sciberras obtained a PhD in Philosophy from Durham University in 2010 and has been teaching Philosophy at Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary since then.
Lorenzo Milani and the Struggle for Social Justice

By Peter Mayo

Saturday, May 27, 2013 marked the centenary of the birth of an important European pedagogue whose writings provide insights for a critical social justice-oriented approach to education. Lorenzo Milani was born in Florence on 27 May 1923. He has all the credentials to be regarded as a key source of inspiration for a critical education and a critical pedagogy. The latter refers to that movement which is very much inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and others, but which has had its origins in North America. Critical educators draw inspiration from some important historical figures, including John Dewey, Paulo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, W.E.B Du Bois, Lev Vygotsky, Hannah Arendt and bell hooks. One should also add Don Lorenzo Milani to this list, together with Gabriela Mistral. In this regard, Milani joins other important figures from Italy who provide insights for a critical pedagogical approach to knowledge, learning and action. These include Ada Gobetti and her writings on parent education, Danilo Dolci, who wedded community learning and social action, through community mobilisation, reverse strikes and hunger strikes and Aldo Capitini, the anti-fascist peace educator and activist who organised various educational and mobilising activities within the context of a peace education movement and his post-war centres for social orientation (COS). Capitini was a visitor at Milani’s school at Barbiana.

Milani’s approach to education for social justice accords importance to a number of issues, notably social class issues, race-related issues especially with his critique of North-South relations, the collective dimension of learning and action (emphasis is placed on reading and writing the word and the world collectively), student-teachers and teacher-students (a remarkable form of peer tutoring), reading and responding critically to the media (newspapers), the existential basis of one’s learning (from “the occasional” to the “profound” motive) and the fusion of academic and technical knowledge. The list is by no means exhaustive.

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1. This article draws on themes developed in a paperback book, on Lorenzo Milani and the School of Barbiana, I co-wrote with two Italian scholars: Federico Batini, Peter Mayo, Alessio Surian (2014) Lorenzo Milani, the School of Barbiana and the Struggle for Social Justice New York: Peter Lang. A broader chapter drawing on the whole Milani oeuvre can be found in Peter Mayo and Paolo Vittoria (2022) Critical Education in International Perspective (Bloomsbury Academic, paperback edition).
3. Associazione Amici di Aldo Capitini (undated) Introducing Aldo Capitini, DVD.
and derives from the one important work with which he is associated, the *Lettera a una Professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher), which I will henceforth refer to as the Lettera, and whose authorship is attributed not to Lorenzo Milani but to the students under his care (Scuola di Barbiana – the School of Barbiana).

There is also an anti-war pedagogy that emerges from his defence of the right to conscientious objection. This entails a process of reading/teaching history against the grain. This feature of Milani’s pedagogical approach, which is to be found in his letters to the judges and to the military chaplains, in the defence of the right to conscientious objection to the military draft, would be very apt for critical educators engaged in exploring signposts for a pedagogical politics after Guantanamo Bay and Abu Gharib and for a decolonising education. It would be quite appropriate for and inspiring to educators trying hard to teach against the pervasive culture of militarisation that has emerged from the USA and is being felt in many parts of the world. Milani’s social and pedagogical voices are very much relevant in this day and age. The reading of Italian history by Milani and his students provide the grist for a pedagogical politics relevant to this age of casino-capitalism (Milani’s denunciation of hyper-consumption practices in the booming Italian economy of his time can be read as some kind of foreboding with regard to the last decade’s debtocracy and the Wall Street debacle). Their writings provide us with examples of what has been called a “pedagogy against empire”7. “Empire” is here being given a more contemporary meaning which we associate with the work of Toni Negri, another prominent Italian having enjoyed recognition outside his own country, and his American co-author, Michael Hardt.

Being quite eclectic like Freire and sharing with the Brazilian educator the influence of the Holy Gospels, Lorenzo Milani differs with respect to Marxism. And yet Gramsci’s writings, an important influence on critical pedagogy, were of interest to Milani. The Italian Marxist’s *Lettere dal Carcere* (Letters from Prison) were important reading material at the School of Barbiana. One does not, however, come across traces of Marxism or references to Marx in the writings of the Tuscan priest. The Gospels were the most important source of inspiration for Milani. This notwithstanding, his classes at San Donato, the place where he served prior to Barbiana, were deliberately devoid of religious symbols – a secular, non-denominational school also in view of the then impending elections8. Milani was not keen on providing religious instruction. Milani felt conversion occurred not as a result of instruction, but through the grace of God, a position which landed him in hot water with the ecclesiastical authorities at the time. He was more concerned with helping raise the critical educational level of the peasant and working classes, hence his setting up a non-denominational school in one of the two localities in which he was involved. At the same time, he was concerned with the plight of the downtrodden, as underlined in the subtitle (’dalla parte dell’ultimo’) of Neera Fallaci’s detailed biography of him. According to his reading of the Gospels, those who were socially the least positioned were the ones the Church needs to reach out to. This explains his option for the oppressed and his commitment to living a life that was not removed from the reality of these people. His was no doubt a “pedagogy of the oppressed.” Much before Vatican II, Milani embraced a view of the church akin to that, referred to by Cornel West, Paulo Freire and others, as the “prophetic church.” This stands in contrast to the “Constantinean Church” – the “Church of Empire.” His pedagogical and social insights can therefore be as inspiring to a critical education as that which derives from Liberation Theology.

His writing, in *Esperienze Pastorali* (Pastoral Experiences), and the Lettera by the eight boys he taught at the school he conducted at Barbiana, all drop-outs of the public school system, anticipate or echo the arguments of many influential scholars. They anticipate or complement the ideas of French, European and USA sociologists/philosophers, with regard to the themes of the bourgeois school and its role in social reproduction. A number of these were of neo-Marxist orientation. Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Christian Baudelot and Roger Establet, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Jean Anyon, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron come to mind. In this regard, one should underline the convergence of the ideas expressed in the Lettera and the

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ideas concerning the school and bourgeois “cultural capital” expressed by leading French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who was not Marxist. It seems that Milani, a keen reader of French literature, had been exposed to the critique of bourgeois culture and power that occurred in France and that certainly influenced Bourdieu.

Like all human beings, Milani had his contradictions, as one can observe from the interviews reproduced by his helpers, students and colleagues. He was after all, a product of the Tuscan upper class who must have struggled hard to “jump out of his skin” and live a life of sobriety and humble dwelling. He might have even used old fashioned and therefore contemporary unorthodox pedagogical ploys (“qualche pedata”) in the course of his day to day teaching. One must keep in mind the time when his writings emerged. However there is much in the work of Milani and his students to provide the basis for a process of schooling that serves as an antidote to the prevailing contemporary system, a system which accords pride of place to testing, standardisation, league tables, charter schools, vouchers – the kind of education that is predicated on excessive competitive individualism with the separation between students supposedly occurring on the basis of merit when it conceals the pernicious process of social selection taking place, through which materially rewarding power is retained by those who already wield it at the expense of the majority.

When the Lettera was published in 1967, it provided an important source of inspiration for the social movement for change known as the ‘68 movement. It was heralded by Pier Paolo Pasolini, as one of the few books that had aroused his enthusiasm at the time. Pasolini states that the text constituted a “wind of vitality… I have never felt so enthusiastic about something, being obliged to tell others: read it!”[^10] (my translation from Italian).

Mario Capanna, of *Democrazia Proletaria* (Proletarian Democracy), was a leader in the ’68 student movement during his student days at Milan’s La Cattolica (Catholic University of the Sacro Cuore, Milan). In 2007, the year that marked the Lettera’s 40th anniversary, he wrote of the huge impact that this book had on the student movements in the late sixties. It served as an important manifesto then, in the struggle for reform of the Italian educational system. Capanna feels that its impact confirmed how some of the more dynamic and social justice oriented aspects of the Gospels had as much influence on the thinking of the period as key basic Marxist concepts. This provided a strong combination of ideas in the struggle for school and social reform[^11].

The text underlines the social class basis of school failure and does so with much clarity as it contrasts the fortunes and everyday worlds of Pierino and Gianni, the two


representative stock figures of success and failure in the public school system. Its vignettes from peasant/working class and middle class lives serve to render the arguments made most compelling.

The *Lettera* goes beyond this. For, in projecting an alternative vision for schooling, it draws on the experiences that took place at Barbiana, which, as Freire would argue, almost echoing Milani, cannot be transplanted but must be reinvented. In Don Milani’s view, the experience at Barbiana started at Barbiana and ended at Barbiana. This is not to say that critical educators cannot glean ideas from the Barbiana experience, as presented in the *Lettera*, to contribute to a more humane, more social justice oriented education predicated on rigour, love, collective work and strong imagination, and which eschews a process of ‘programming for failure’. On the contrary, the letter serves this purpose. The text however represents no blueprint. It must be reinvented and cannot be transferred to other contexts in cargo-cult style. In *Esperienze Pastorali*, he wrote one should not ask how one must do teaching (“fare scuola”). That is the wrong question (“sbagliano domanda”). The question is how one must be to teach. The focus was not on neutral, class-oblivious schooling but on teachers who take sides in the power struggle, including the social class struggle (‘educatori schierati) - there is no such thing as a neutral education. This entails, in Milani’s sense, a “preferential option” for the disenfranchised.

*Lettera a una professoressa* (Letter to a Teacher) exposes many of the basic features of a socially differentiating education within a Western “democracy” and provides insights for a truly transformative and possibly revolutionary pedagogy. It was meant to contribute to the creation of a caring society, a society predicated on a culture of social justice. “I care” was the motto in English adopted by the school.

Barbiana’s pedagogical approach was intended to enable its adherents to place their knowledge, including knowledge and insights derived through critical engagement with texts and episodes, at the service of others. The students learnt collectively and taught each other. Older students taught younger ones, given that professionally trained teachers were unavailable. Being a teacher as well as a learner gave the formerly flunked students a tremendous boost of confidence in their abilities and enabled them to learn things better by teaching them to others. The class would not move to the next stage unless everyone had mastered the present one, and the students who learned the task or concept had to enhance their learning by explaining it to those who had not grasped it. This represents the kind of revolutionary and collective pedagogy that provides the hitherto downtrodden with the insights, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to become sovereign citizens capable of exercising their “right to govern.”

Peter Mayo is Professor and former Head of the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education at the University of Malta. He is the author of numerous book publications and papers on adult education, critical pedagogy, postcolonialism, Gramsci and museum education. He currently holds the UNESCO Chair in Global Adult Education at the University of Malta.
‘It is as if man had been suddenly appointed managing director of the biggest business of all, the business of evolution—appointed without being asked if he wanted it, and without proper warning and preparation. What is more, he can’t refuse the job. Whether he wants to or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth. That is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner he realizes it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned.’

Julian Huxley (‘Transhumanism: Coining the term,’ 1957)

Transhumanism is not a uniform or homogeneous group, but rather a movement (or movements) that consists of many different ideas. There is a plurality of perspectives on transhumanism within the group itself. Nonetheless, all these schools of thought share the goal of human enhancement by means of science and technology, where the instruments of science and technology are not only thought about in terms of their current forms, with their current possibilities. The hypothetical possibilities of these methods and tools are also frequently taken into consideration by transhumanist proponents.

1 I am here paraphrasing from two definitions of transhumanism, showcased on the Humanity+ website. Available: https://www.humanityplus.org/transhumanism
One can use the term ‘Transhumanism(s)’ to better represent this heterogeneity within this cultural movement. Among the different transhumanist groups or collectives, one will encounter different key thinkers who are advocating for certain specific situations or changes in the world. Sometimes, their vision is constructed in such a clear and detailed manner that their argumentative action becomes a political act, intended to persuade, to win people over, in order to grow the movement of people willing to raise funds or awareness related to practical projects. An example of such a charismatic thinker would be Aubrey De Grey, who created several foundations and research programmes to try to extend the human healthspan and lifespan, while also appearing on countless platforms to raise awareness and persuade the public to invest their time and money in the pursuit to stop, or even reverse, the ageing process by scientific and technological means. One also encounters sub-movements with more specific visions and goals. For instance, Libertarian Transhumanism argues in favour of the free market as the best way to achieve beneficial human enhancement. Another group, that calls itself Democratic Transhumanism, demands fair and equal access to human enhancements; calls for practical solutions to social issues; and also supports certain initiatives that could be implemented by governments, like the concept of Universal Basic Income.

Even though transhumanist movements tend to be non-religious in general, there are also some exceptions, like the Mormon Transhumanist Association (MTA), which merges Judaeo-Christian values with those of transhumanism, and focuses on transcending present limitations.

One cannot ignore the fact that many of the issues discussed in transhumanist groups are relevant due to the constant development of technology in general. Many of the possibilities debated within transhumanist groups in past decades, like artificial intelligence, virtual realities, the Internet of Things, nanotechnology, and bioengineering, have now become reality. Given that these issues, usually associated with transhumanism, have recently become very relevant, it is important to engage with the ongoing discussions taking place within these different movements or to at least research and discuss the issues brought up by these movements.

Having said this, transhumanism can be criticised on different fronts. For the purposes of this brief essay, I will only mention some of the most salient dangers of putting the pedal to the metal in an effort to bring about the maximum change by scientific and technological means, in the shortest possible time, without the necessary discussion and critical thinking needed to evaluate the effects that certain drastic changes might cause. It is also essential to analyse and criticise the set of values that seem to underlie the philosophy of transhumanism; assuming that there is some sort of general unity in the different perspectives of the members of transhumanist movements.

The particular socioeconomic system within which technological enhancement, particularly that of humans, is put into practice, will also influence the ways in which these enhancements will affect society in general. If you have a socioeconomic system that is conducive to a divide between the rich and the poor, then the possibility of accessibility limitations, concerning the new enhancements among the less-affluent group of the population, will be much greater. This would most probably lead to more problems — some of which are already present in contemporary neoliberal capitalism — such as the creation of an elite group of people and the exclusion, or even exploitation, of the underprivileged group.

Another particularly fundamental issue that needs to be kept at the forefront of discussions when dealing with the use of scientific and technological means to improve the lives of humans and the environment they live in, is biodiversity and the ecosystems that sustain it.

From a more philosophical perspective, one also needs to understand and to critically think about the philosophical underpinnings and genealogy of transhumanist values and beliefs. Max More, the co-founder of the first transhumanist non-profit organisation, articulates the philosophy of transhumanism in an essay bearing the same name (More, 2013). He starts by admitting that talking of ‘the’ philosophy of transhumanism is not very accurate, since there are many perspectives and interpretations of this intellectual and cultural movement. However, he states that one ‘can still identify some cultural themes, values, and interests that give transhumanism its distinct identity.’ More (2013) starts by highlighting the fact that transhumanism can be conceptualised as a ‘nonreligious philosophy of life that rejects faith, worship, and the supernatural, instead emphasising a meaningful and ethical approach to living informed by reason, science, progress, and the value of existence in our current life.’

More goes on to emphasise that transhumanism has its philosophical roots in Enlightenment humanism. However, according to More, transhumanism goes beyond humanism in that ‘transhumanists want to apply technology to overcome limits imposed by our biological and genetic heritage.’ In her book Philosophical Posthumanism, Francesca Ferrando, following Bradley Onishi, proposes that transhumanism can be described as an ‘ultra-humanism’
where ‘the humanist understanding of the human is not undermined by Transhumanism, but augmented.’ (Ferrando, 2019). Max More, like other transhumanist thinkers, writes about ‘becoming posthuman’, which denotes the condition of beings who manage to get rid of undesirable aspects that normally humans have to accept and endure, like ‘disease, ageing, and inevitable death’ and who acquire more desirable characteristics, such as morphological freedom, and improved cognitive, physical, emotional, and moral capacities. It should be noted that the word ‘posthuman’ in this sense is not related to the philosophical posthumanism embraced by Rosi Braidotti, Francesca Ferrando and others.

In essays written about the beliefs and values of transhumanism, there is usually a prominent lack of critical engagement with the concepts of rationality, progress, self-transformation, optimism, and other notions that transhumanists aim to embrace. Francesca Ferrando mentions this uncritical aspect of transhumanist philosophy, and notes that transhumanist thinkers tended not to fully acknowledge the philosophical knowledge brought forth by postmodernity. The term ‘postmodernist’ is even used in certain transhumanist contributions to denote an undesirable set of ideas or a faulty worldview. As Ferrando noted, transhumanist thinkers tend to operate within the philosophical position of rational humanism (Ferrando, 2019).

In conclusion, I believe that while transhumanist ideas are relevant, now even more than ever; people should not limit their ideas only to transhumanist traditions and values when reflecting on emerging technologies and new possibilities that these might bring forth. Even though it is beneficial to study transhumanist ideas to learn about certain ideas and possibilities, we also need to open ourselves up to other ideas outside the transhumanist discourse. Whereas the emergence of transhumanist movements is an important phenomenon, more important than this would be not to lose sight of the philosophical questions and the practical political decisions that need to be made in relation to the current and pressing technoscientific developments and the ways in which these are contributing to societal and environmental change. Echoing Huxley’s advice, I would say that our duty as humans alive today is to become aware of the power and ability we have of changing ourselves and everything around us. Even though our current condition is very complex and complicated, and even if it is never easy or feasible to act in a way that is beneficial to everyone; we need to be as educated, as sensitive, and as considerate as possible in order to have informed discussions and then use the power we hold to carry out this ‘inescapable destiny’ in the best way envisionable. I have my serious doubts, however, whether it is even possible to ever reach an agreement on what the latter might be.

References

Christopher Fenech has studied philosophy at the University of Malta, obtaining a Master’s Degree in Contemporary Western Philosophy. His research interests are related to philosophical issues concerning science, technology and society.
The pervasive influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the realm of Medicine is experiencing a swift and profound evolution in contemporary society (cf. He et al., 2019; Jiang et al., 2017). This transformative phenomenon is predicated on a core premise: the enhancement of healthcare practices through the infusion of AI technologies, with a primary focus on augmenting reliability, precision, and operational effectiveness. This paradigm shift stands in contrast to traditional medical methodologies, which are fundamentally grounded in human cognitive processes and, because of that, less efficient and more prone to medical errors and mistakes.

One of the key purposes of AI in Medicine is to transcend the limitations of human decision-making by harnessing the immense computational capabilities of machines. This involves the development and implementation of machine-learning algorithms capable of assisting, either in part or holistically, in the complex and multifaceted processes of medical decision-making. These algorithms can analyze vast datasets, identify patterns, and generate insights that might elude even the most experienced human clinicians.

Furthermore, AI-driven medical applications hold the potential to enhance the overall quality of healthcare services.
By minimising errors, reducing diagnostic uncertainties, and optimizing treatment plans, AI can contribute significantly to improved patient outcomes. Additionally, the efficiency gains achieved through AI-driven automation can lead to resource optimisation, cost reduction, and broader accessibility to healthcare services.

The integration of AI into the field of Medicine is steering in a new era characterized by heightened precision, efficiency, and innovation. It represents a departure from traditional medical paradigms, with the promise of fundamentally transforming how healthcare is practiced, ultimately benefiting patients and healthcare providers alike.

A specific illustration of the application of Artificial Intelligence technology in the field of Medicine was achieved by WATSON, IBM’s supercomputer, renowned for its Jeopardy-winning capabilities. Watson achieved one of its most remarkable achievements by having a crucial role in saving the life of a 60-year-old woman in Japan, after months of erroneous diagnoses and medical tests.1

The medical team at the University of Tokyo used IBM’s Watson to cross-reference the patient’s specific genetic mutations with an extensive database encompassing 20 million papers dedicated to cancer research and oncology studies. Through this analysis, the supercomputer identified a rare form of leukemia affecting the patient, thereby facilitating the prompt initiation of suitable treatment. This remarkable success exemplifies how AI technology can swiftly and accurately contribute to critical medical decision-making, potentially altering the course of a patient’s life.

By opting to employ this AI model for medical diagnostics, the physicians additionally achieved the capability to pinpoint a treatment that demonstrated more rapid efficacy compared to the manual examination of the patient’s genetic data. Initially, the patient had been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia without the use of Watson’s assistance. Following a more or less successful course of chemotherapy, the medical team observed an unusually slow recovery during the post-remission therapy phase. This anomaly led them to deduce that they were dealing with a distinct form of leukemia, diverging from the initial medical hypothesis.

Through the application of IBM’s Watson, the medical doctors at the Institute of Medical Science at the University of Tokyo achieved a different diagnosis: it was determined that the patient was affected with a rare form of leukemia stemming from myelodysplastic syndromes. It is worth noting that employing the manual data analysis approach would also have led to this diagnosis. However, this method would have entailed a substantial investment of time and effort: such a prolonged analysis process could have potentially delayed the doctors from reaching the diagnosis promptly, a critical factor in the context of leukemia cases, which typically progress rapidly and can give rise to numerous complications.

This case provides a concrete illustration of the ethical benefits that the application of Artificial Intelligence can offer to modern Medicine. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the potential for unethical applications of AI models within the medical domain as well.

Another instance involves the development of an AI model geared toward the diagnosis of skin cancer. Some studies indicate that image recognition technology, supported by machine learning algorithms, can potentially expedite the process of accurate diagnosis when compared to human capabilities.

To construct this AI model, the team leveraged an established algorithm rooted in deep learning technology, originally developed by Google. This algorithm was initially trained using an extensive dataset comprising 1.3 million images encompassing non-medical subjects, including objects like cups, dogs, or cats. Subsequently, the database was enriched with an additional 130,000 images featuring diverse skin lesions that had been medically confirmed. In the final phase of development, the AI model underwent rigorous testing, during which it was presented with 2,000 previously unseen images featuring various types of skin lesions, the nature of which was validated through biopsy. Simultaneously, the detection skills of 21 dermatologists were assessed using a subset of 400 images from this dataset.

The results of the study revealed that the AI model demonstrated comparable, if not superior, performance when compared to human experts in distinguishing between benign skin growths and carcinomas, as well as in distinguishing moles from melanomas. Specifically, the algorithm accurately identified 90% of benign lesions and 96% of malignant lesions, whereas dermatologists correctly identified 76% of benign moles and 95% of malignant lesions (cf. Esteva, Kuprel, Novoa, et al., 2017).

Crucially, the significance of these findings extends beyond the raw efficiency percentages of both groups. It also encompasses the swiftness with which the AI model was able to make these diagnoses in contrast to human experts, underscoring the potential time-saving advantages of AI technology in medical diagnostics.

A valuable application of this technology lies in the potential development of dedicated smartphone apps and camera-

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based solutions. These innovations could offer a cost-effective and expedited means of screening and recognising potential skin lesions. As evidenced by the initial leukemia example, time plays a pivotal role in enhancing treatment efficiency and the prospects of saving a patient’s life.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that some researchers express concerns regarding the advancement of deep learning technologies within healthcare contexts. For instance, David Wen, the primary author of a study focused on the datasets employed in skin cancer algorithms, has raised a pertinent issue by suggesting that these AI systems may run the risk of reduced accuracy when applied to individuals with darker skin. This concern is based on the fact that a majority of the databases used for creating such models predominantly consist of medical information derived from individuals with fair skin, since those individuals have more access, in average, to healthcare contexts.

In this second example, we encounter an instance of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine that could be perceived as ethically questionable. Consequently, there is a debate surrounding whether it should be developed or employed.

What is the reader’s stance on this ethical dilemma that directly impacts the field of Medicine? Should we proceed with the development and implementation of various AI-based medical tools within medical practice, or should we exercise caution and wait until we reach a deeper understanding of how these algorithms truly work?

If you were to find yourself at your local hospital one day, faced with two choices: one involving traditional medicine, rooted in human reasoning but less efficient and more time-consuming, and the other reliant on AI medical tools, offering quicker and more efficient solutions, which option would you prefer? This is a dilemma that will become increasingly prevalent in the years to come. Therefore, it is essential to contemplate the significance of this issue and recognize the essential role of ethical deliberation in the real world.2

References


Steven S. Gouveia holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Minho (Portugal) and is currently leading a 6-year research project on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in Medicine at the Mind, Language and Action Group of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Porto (Portugal). He is also an Honorary Professor of the Faculty of Medicine Andrés Bello (Chile). He has published and edited 14 academic books on interdisciplinary topics, and organised several online courses with the participation of prominent scholars such as Noam Chomsky, David Chalmers, Sir Roger Penrose or Anil Seth. He hosted and produced the documentary “The Age of Artificial Intelligence”. More information can be obtained from: stevensgouveia.weebly.com.

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2 This article was written within the CEEC Individual Project by FCT 2022.02527.CEECIND by Steven S. Gouveia. You can find my information about this project through this website link: https://trustaimedicine.weebly.com/.
The Challenge of Engaging AI in Patient Diagnostics and Treatment

By Alexander Lazarov

Philosophy is often considered distinct from fields like science, mathematics, and technology. However, as there are exceptions to the rules, this article seeks to venture into such territory.

Since AI and human health seem to be diverse from each other, any discussion of autonomous IT involvement in medical practice requires an initial clarification of the discourse and necessity.

The Discourse

Let us begin with the discourse. Intelligence, although still debated among philosophers, is fundamentally tied to predictive capacity. This concept holds immense significance in contemporary AI design and development. Even the emergence of remarkable AI-driven applications such as Chatbot GPT and other competitors is rooted in predictive language models.

Humanity still considers itself to be more intelligible than machines. However, there are some aspects where AI surpasses humanity in certain specialised domains. Computers excel at processing vast quantities of data in a rapid manner and identifying patterns in rapidly changing unstructured Big Data streams – terrains that we can neither observe nor analyse. Consequently, AI autonomously generates reliable predictions that are not only based on a logical trend, but also through the application of a comparative analogic approach to diverse developments without revealing the phenomena driving cause-event relationships.

Importantly, we must be responsible for providing AI with its data horizon, as the quality of its conclusions strongly depends on the resource preciseness that we serve it.

These AI characteristics led to its successful introduction into many spheres of our overall experience, often in specific instrumentation, and in some cases as autonomous actors (as when AI is installed in robots, or driverless cars).

Necessity

Now let us delve into the necessity of AI in healthcare. When we consider that AI involvement in healthcare is directly related to human life and well-being, we must remember that human health is inherently temporal. As there is no
guarantee of perpetual good health and well-being, relevant subjective personal experience, special attention, targeted activity, and responsibility, remain of prime existential importance.

In addition, we have witnessed a social paradox: as medical sciences and practices have of late made remarkable progress, the concept of healthy individuals has remained somewhat elusive. There is a jest among doctors that anyone who feels healthy is insufficiently examined.

With the world’s population steadily increasing in number and age, the patients’ population will rise proportionally, and soon, the opportunity to reach a medical expert in a reasonable timeframe will become increasingly challenging. The Covid-19 pandemic crisis demonstrated dramatically this challenge. Our civilisation is compelled to devise strategies for managing healthcare in the face of impending shortages of human medical expertise, a challenge where philosophy can offer valuable insights.

During the pandemic, many people turned to self-diagnosis and health related internet searches. However, relying solely on online research as a substitute for a doctor’s visit, often fails to yield benefits and in some cases even poses risk. Notably, the Covid-19 pandemic elevated the adoption of tele-medicine to health care management with some degrees of success in certain contexts.

Hence, a logical question arises: just as revolutionary development in IT, and especially AI have permeated various aspects of our lives, can they similarly revolutionise medical services? And what might be the consequences of such a trend? This question concerns every individual as a potential patient.

AI and Professionals

The integration of AI into healthcare diagnostics and treatment procedures involves distinct groups of professionals. The first and foremost are physicians. Most physicians worldwide tend to be primarily trained within a biologically oriented framework with limited exposure to mathematics. Yet they must now engage with complex computational solutions and recognise the importance of AI. They require new information presented in a user-friendly discourse that does not necessitate delving into theorems and equations.

Conversely, AI’s entry in the medical domain, engages engineers, hardware and software specialists, experts in mathematics, and others. Unlike doctors, they may not discern the difference between a prosthesis and an orthosis. Remarkably, AI’s evolution has spawned over 500 sub-branches of occupation. These activities encompass a wide spectrum: composing Deep Learning algorithms, constructing classic computation processors, Big Data analytics, memory architecture design, computer language developments optimising data processing for system efficiency, designing cloud data storage, and systematising the Internet.

The Philosophical Perspective

In this discussion, a philosophical perspective becomes crucial. Unlike other investigative fields that conduct research, medical science and practice must deal not only with objective criteria and parameters (such as precisely

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1 A prosthesis serves as a substitute for missing or severely impaired human organs, whereas an orthosis encompasses diverse artificial devices to support the functioning of various organs such as dental crowns, eyeglasses and pacemakers.
measured data and physical laws’ actions), but also a myriad of subjective factors. Physicians cannot turn away from their responsibilities to assess numerical data such as blood, pressure, urine test results, X-rays, and alternative imaging probes. However, such assessment must be combined with personal experiences of different levels of pain and fatigue, individual optimistic or pessimistic approaches to life, hypochondriac moods or symptoms’ underestimation, fear, and other factors. Therefore, physicians are called to assess human nature in a manner which resembles philosophical inquiry approaches, but with a practical focus that has a direct influence on health and life. In cases of catastrophic disasters, wars, or pandemics, medical experts’ decisions will impact thousands if not millions of lives.

In this context, philosophical reflections on human nature allow a broad range of perspectives as doctors prioritise their patients’ wellbeing. Any error on their part can exacerbate a patient’s condition or result in their demise. This is why societies remain so sensitive to such occurrences.

At present, AI is acting as an enhanced diagnostic tool for the medical profession. But one day, AI may become an autonomous actor in healthcare. Life-death issues would therefore fall under sharper scrutiny from society members.

People generally have little tolerance for human error, especially in healthcare. Interestingly, there are signs that they exhibit even greater anger and frustration when learning of automation failures. This observation is supported by the experiences of AI-piloted driverless vehicles in the United States. Societal attention disproportionately focused on just three accidents involving autonomous vehicles that occurred over more than a one-year period – despite numerous daily accidents involving human driven cars. This social reaction persists even though computer models in several countries predict that negligible accidents will occur once all vehicles become entirely AI-piloted. The use of AI can potentially eliminate illogical actions and rules violations resulting from human driving and the use of drugs or alcohol – all of which are major contributors to traffic accidents.

As there is no reason to believe that users’ attitude towards AI in healthcare will differ from the aforementioned example of driverless cars, we can anticipate various ethical discussions that philosophers will be expected to provide guidance.

Within this perspective, I have teamed with Prof. Alexander Gungov under the auspices of Sofia University of Bulgaria to conduct research on the integration of AI within healthcare. Apart from the ethical dilemmas that arise within philosophical inquiries, the following crucial questions must be tackled to overcome the controversial issues that are often raised with the engagement of AI in the medical domain:

1. How can we verify the reliability of AI-powered analytic healthcare tools when they autonomously assess patients’ health risks based on genetic information, medical environmental factors, and lifestyle habits? Can established protocols for new pharmaceutical products be adapted for AI evaluation?
2. The Deep Learning algorithmic capacity is based on its ability to assess vast amounts of patient cases from worldwide databases with immediate effect for every medical examination that is called for. So, will AI surpass human medical expertise in a totally superior position when it comes to precise diagnostics and treatment?
3. AI, being instrumental, is evidently enhancing human intelligence. However, could the opposite be true whereby the human-AI teamwork that is continuously upgrading machine intelligence? If so, is such a relationship based on partnership or competitive action? And what will be the winning outcome? Will it be a victorious battle between AI and humanity? Or will it be a journey with shared successes and learned failures?

Alexander Lazarov, PhD, teaches the Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence in Bulgaria, at Sofia University ‘Kliment Ohridski’. He is an experienced filmmaker and director of photography for many award-winning documentaries and features films.
Book Review

Plato at the Googleplex
Why Philosophy Won’t Go Away

Author: Rebecca Newberger Goldstein
Publisher: Atlantic Books
Year: 2015

By Valdei Pereira

The question of whether philosophy remains relevant in our rapidly changing world, characterised by the omnipresence of social networks, neuroscience, crowd-sourcing, and artificial intelligence is one that surfaces from time to time. It is precisely this question that lies at the heart of the book Plato at the Googleplex by Rebecca Newberger Goldstein. The author encourages readers to embark on an original journey that highlights the enduring significance of philosophy in contemporary debates concerning religion, morality, politics, and science.

Plato at the Googleplex is a remarkable and intellectually stimulating book that transcends temporal boundaries, introducing the ancient philosopher Plato to the heart of modern Silicon Valley. Goldstein’s thought-provoking book explores the nexus between philosophy, technology, and human nature, making it an engaging read to both philosophy enthusiasts and those intrigued by these timeless themes.

Plato is one of the founding figures of Western philosophy who left a legacy that has withstood the test of time. While it is inevitable that his ideas might have flaws, given the vast expanse of 2,400 years that separate us from him, his influence on the evolution of philosophy remains undeniable. Goldstein, in contemplating philosophy’s role in our contemporary intellectual landscape, weaves a fresh narrative about its origins that re-imagines the extraordinary culture milieu in which Plato was born and which, in turn, gave birth to his philosophy.

Nevertheless, it is the fate of philosophy that primarily concerns Goldstein. Is philosophy merely a placeholder until scientists take centre stage? Or have they already claimed that space? Does philosophy evolve, and if so, why should the ancient figure of Plato maintain relevance? Plato at the Googleplex serves as Goldstein’s striking investigation into these pressing matters.

Goldstein has ingeniously structured her book as a series of dialogues, reminiscent of Plato’s own philosophical writings. By situating Plato in a contemporary context, the author embarks on an intellectual journey, guiding readers through conversations where Plato engages with individuals from various backgrounds, including neuroscientists and cable news hosts. These dialogues are composed of contemporary questions answered with Plato’s own words from his dialogues, offering readers a glimpse of the timeless relevance of his ideas in today’s complex world.

Imagine Plato living in the twenty-first century, embarking on a multi-city speaking tour. How would he address a cable
news host who claims that morality hinges on religion?

How would he moderate a debate between a Freudian psychoanalyst and a “tiger mom” on the best way to raise children? How would he react to a neuroscientist ready to scan his brain, arguing that science has definitively answered questions about free will and moral agency? What would Plato make of Google and the notion that knowledge can be crowd-sourced instead of being reasoned out by experts? With the depth of a philosopher and the imagination and wit of a novelist, Goldstein delves into the profound issues confronting us, allowing readers to hear Plato as he grapples with the modern world.

One of the book’s strengths is its ability to simplify complex philosophical ideas without oversimplifying them. Goldstein effectively conveys Plato’s concepts while avoiding unnecessary jargon, making the book accessible to both newcomers to philosophy and professionals. Her clear and engaging writing style ensures that readers can easily grasp the core ideas and appreciate their profound implications.

Another noteworthy aspect of the book is its deep engagement with contemporary issues. By placing Plato in dialogues about topics like social media, artificial intelligence, and political polarisation, the book encourages readers to reflect on how ancient wisdom can inform and enrich our understanding of pressing issues in the 21st century. This connection between past and present is a testament to the universality of Plato’s ideas.

In conclusion, Plato at the Googleplex is a thought-provoking and engaging book that adeptly bridges the gap between ancient wisdom and modern challenges. Rebecca Goldstein’s ability to bring Plato into our contemporary world is a testament to the enduring relevance of philosophical inquiry. This book invites us to reflect on the perennial questions that have occupied human minds for centuries and, in doing so, offers valuable insights that can guide us in navigating the complexities of our ever-evolving society. Whether you are a philosophy enthusiast or simply curious about the timeless questions of humanity, this book is a must-read that will leave you pondering the depths of existence and the interplay between philosophy and technology.

Valdeli Pereira graduated in Philosophy from the Faculdade de Filosofia Nossa Senhora da Imaculada Conceicao. FAFIMC - RS Brazil. He is also the editor of SHARE Magazine.
Defining Justice

The innate sense of justice seems to be ingrained in human nature from an early age. Even children, before the concept of justice is explained to them, intuitively express their displeasure when they feel wronged. Philosophers have grappled with the question of what justice entails for centuries, with Plato’s inquiry in *The Republic* being one of the first to initiate discussion.

Justice has long been associated with the principle of equality, with one of its foundational tenets being the fair and equal treatment of all individuals and groups, irrespective of factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. The principle of equality strives to ensure that everyone has equal access to treatment and opportunities.

However, justice can only be upheld if the rule of law is applied to all members of society, including those in positions of power. It is imperative that no one is seen to be above the law if justice is to be administered impartially.

The Legal System and the Rule of Law

The legal system, as it stands, is a collection of largely man-made rules, commands, or norms that play a pivotal role in our society. Many of these laws align with the philosophy
of natural law, which derives certain moral principles of good and bad behaviour from a universal code of application. We inherently recognize what constitutes positive human behaviour, such as actions that affirm life, the pursuit of knowledge, protection and service to society, and reasonable conduct. Likewise, we identify negative human behaviour, such as murder, human trafficking, child abuse, animal cruelty, rape, exploitation, discrimination, and torture, as universally wrong deeds that cause misery and suffering, regardless of cultural or temporal context.

The strength of natural law philosophy lies in its alignment with certain principles derived from the Golden Rule or Kant’s categorical imperative. However, it has to be acknowledged that certain moral dilemmas, such as abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty, provoke deep ethical questions that challenge the demarcation between good and bad. This implies that lawmakers require the expertise of philosophers to provide tools for dissecting such dilemmas which require critical thought in such difficult choices.

The rule of law remains essential to human civilisation in order to protect individuals and property and ensure that promises are upheld. Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, clearly points out how life can easily descend into a state of isolation, brutality, and poverty if left unchecked by laws and governance. The recognition of the frailties of human nature, underscores the necessity of the rule of law to safeguard societal well-being.

This perspective reinforces the idea that justice must be intrinsically tied to human rights, encompassing civil, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. Human rights require protection not only through local laws and conventions but also through international laws applicable to every nation. The United Nations Charter of Human Rights has been a progressive step in this direction – even though certain human rights, such as freedom of expression or freedom of belief, are still not easily accessible in many countries.

One of the most fundamental human rights associated with the concept of justice is that of due process, which means the right to a fair and impartial trial, the right to present evidence, and the right to be heard before any action is taken. Unfortunately, many countries fall short of adhering to these principles when administering justice.

The rule of law can maintain the concept of justice when the legal system is accepted by its members. Laws must be seen beyond the good/bad distinction of natural philosophy. They must be seen as social rules that impose certain duties and obligations, forming a system of “oughts” or norms without the need of threats of punishment.

**Proper Check and Balances**

But there again, the acceptability of a legal system by society will depend on it being viewed as fair and impartial. One of the cornerstones of a fair and impartial legal system is the presence of proper checks and balances in the pursuit of justice, with an independent judiciary structure that is set up separately from the executive and legislative branches of power. Judges and magistrates must remain free from...
undue influence, political pressure, or external references. Moreover, the judiciary must have the authority to review the constitutionality of laws and actions taken by the executive and legislative branches. Courts must possess the power to strike down laws that violate constitutional rights or principles.

The influence of democratically elected populists attempting to shape the appointment of judges, as witnessed in countries like Hungary and Poland, raises a significant concern. It prompts us to question the mechanisms governing the appointment of judges. The process of selecting judges varies across countries, often reflecting the values and principles of their legal systems. In many democratic societies, including Canada, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, judges are appointed through independent judicial commissions. Recognizing the importance of depoliticising judicial appointments, the Maltese Government recently amended its laws in response to recommendations from the Venice Report. Under the revised law, a Judicial Appointment Committee, comprising three members from the Judiciary and three non-judicial members, now recommends judges and magistrates directly to the President. This marks a significant departure from the previous practice where the Prime Minister had sole discretion over these appointments, which inevitably raised concerns about the politicisation of the judiciary. The appointment of the Chief Justice by the President is now based on the advice of the majority of Parliamentary Members, rather than on the Prime Minister as was previously the case. This represents significant progress, especially when compared to the United States, where the political ideology of the President nominating Supreme Court Justices strongly influences the divide between conservative and liberal judges. This division is particularly evident in decisions on issues such as abortion and gun rights, where U.S. Supreme Court Justices tend to vote along ideological lines.

Nonetheless, another question emerges: to whom is the judiciary accountable? Judges must be subject to the same principles of oversight and accountability as politicians and holders of public office. The establishment of hierarchical courts with an appellate process allows the review and overturning of decisions by lower-level judges, thereby promoting more consistency and correctness in legal rulings. But judges should be subjected to wider public scrutiny, with their performance, judgments, demeanour, and adherence to judicial ethics constantly evaluated from time to time.

For one of the main criticisms of the justice system pertains to the lack of transparency, and subjectivity in certain aspects of sentencing. Furthermore, prolonged sentencing processes in both criminal and civil cases remain a significant issue since delays erode public trust in the justice system and create perceptions of inefficiency, unresponsiveness, and bias toward certain individuals or groups. Delays in sentencing will ultimately have an impact on both the rights of victims and defendants. The root causes of these delays must be identified, and measures to expedite court processes must be implemented to uphold the principles of justice and serve the needs of all involved parties. Modern technology offers opportunities for digitising court records, improving communication between parties, and facilitating remote hearings. But despite the rise of technology and increased resources, justice systems continue to grapple with delays.

Crime and Punishment

Laws, though will only remain effective if they entail consequences for wrongdoing. Justice would be rendered ineffective if offenders face no consequences for their actions.
and leave victims and society without closure or retribution. Punishment for crime plays a crucial role in maintaining social order and deterring criminal behaviour. The choice of specific forms of punishment can vary based on the legal system and the severity of the crime. Common forms of punishment include fines, probation, community service, imprisonment, and, in some cultures, the death penalty.

However, it is critical that a sense of balance is achieved between punitive measures and crimes committed. Overly harsh or disproportionate punishments always run the risk of perpetuating a cycle of crime that hinders the reintegration of offenders into society. Judges should ensure that they sentence consistently across similar cases, taking into account the nature and severity of the offense and the offender’s circumstances, apart from being delivered within a reasonable timeframe.

Policing and Prisons – The Key to Restorative Justice

Two other key institutions vital to upholding justice are the police and prisons. They, too, must operate within the bounds of the law and respect the basic rights of individuals.

The manifesto champions the concept of restorative justice rather than retributive justice. Rather than focusing solely on punishment for wrongdoing, restorative justice seeks to repair the harm caused by a crime. In this approach, police officers are viewed as part of the community and working with minimal force. They are seen to be collaborating with residents to identify and address local concerns, reduce crime, and enhance overall community safety.

Prisons should also adopt a restorative approach that emphasises the need to reform offenders through education, vocational training, and counselling. The goal should be to prioritise the reintegration of offenders into society as productive citizens. The Scandinavian Nordic model, known for its emphasis on rehabilitation and humane conditions, testifies to lower incarceration rates compared to the US, which focuses more on security and confinement.

It is essential to acknowledge that the restorative approach may face resistance from victims of serious crimes, such as murder, large-scale fraud, rape, and violence with long-lasting consequences. This is one reason why capital punishment remains a supportive component of the justice system in many countries, including certain states in the United States. It is noteworthy that a substantial portion of the democratic Western populace would support the re-introduction of capital punishment as a crime deterrent.
Is Crime Biological or Social?

Ultimately, the philosophical question that arises when contemplating justice revolves around the causes of crime and whether it can truly be eliminated in any society. There will always be a debate regarding whether crime is primarily a product of genetic traits or a result of societal failures such as lack of good parenting, lack of education and poverty. Scientific evidence does point to criminal behaviour arising from certain genetic traits. But the valuable role of philosophers comes in when they ponder the extent to which free will can control such behaviour. Philosophers can always remind society of the need to understand crime with an open mind and empathise with the factors that drive criminal actions.

Apart from genetic factors, certain crimes may be the product of unfair and unequal opportunities in a society’s structure. Sociologist Robert Merton provides a well-thought-out understanding of why deviant behaviour tends to surface in response to social pressures and constraints. Merton’s theory identifies various modes of responses to the strain between culturally approved goals and the means to achieve them. These responses consist of:

- Conformity (acceptance of goals and means)
- Innovation (achieving goals through unconventional means)
- Ritualism (abandoning goals but adhering to the means)
- Retreatism (withdrawal from society)
- Rebellion (rejection of goals and replacement with their own means)

The four responses that are an alternative to conformity, shed light on the diverse motivations behind deviant actions, part of which can border on what is viewed as criminal behaviour. This also explains why certain underground activities such as organised crime, prostitution, drugs, and illegal works always thrive and form part of a society’s economy. It is, therefore evident that justice cannot be detached from the concept that stresses the equal attainment of society’s goals. The unfair distribution in wealth, opportunities, and privileges in society will undermine a society’s attainment of justice for all.

Karl Marx and Justice

Karl Marx emphasised this point when he argued that in the capitalist system of society, the legal system is set up to serve and protect the interests of the bourgeoisie – the owners of the means of production. For Marx, the capitalist state is none other than an executive of the committee of the bourgeoisie.
Critics of Marxism argue that people who can contribute further to society, whether by capital, talent or genius minds, will feel discouraged once they realise that their efforts are not compensated proportionally. Such critics do have a point when many communist countries such as China and Russia had to turn to free market solutions to solve their economic problems without liberalising political control and granting certain rights such as freedom of expression.

However, Marx’s analysis surely raised awareness that traditional jurisprudence conspicuously overlooked the minority positions on many other fronts.

And Justice for All

Traditional laws, for example, hardly intruded into domestic violence that occurred within a home. Up to some time ago, in many countries, a husband could not be prosecuted for raping his wife, despite her refusal to consent to sexual intercourse. Feminists have been successful in addressing and remedying certain injustices and inequalities that were often unquestioned in traditional legal systems.

Nevertheless, efforts are still ongoing to recognise certain rights of women in various countries. A lawyer-activist in India, Karuna Nundy is fighting for marital rape to be recognised as a crime by the Indian judiciary. But the fact that there has overall been a remarkable improvement in women’s rights and that women are no longer treated as second-class citizens or properties of their husband evidently shows how justice can never be separated from the social context.

Remarkable progress has been achieved in the legal recognition and protection of minority rights, such as people of different sexual orientations, religious beliefs, and race. Yet, we occasionally hear of shocking cases of discriminatory treatment as was the case with the killing of George Floyd in the United States by police officers for what was a minor contravention. And although slavery as a practice has long been abolished and considered unacceptable from a legal point of view, certain forms of slavery practice still persist in the way illegal immigrants and other people are treated in the unregulated underground economy.

Non-human animals, too, need to be addressed. Philosopher Peter Singer rightly labels the human race of being ‘speciesist’ whenever it justifies differential treatment and exploitation solely on the perceived superiority of humans to other species. Singer echoes Bentham’s question – can animals suffer? – to argue that all sentient beings, regardless of their species, deserve moral consideration and should not be subjected to unjust or unnecessary harm or suffering. Although the concept of speciesism has been influential in the development of legal and ethical frameworks and discussions relating to the treatment of animals, our legal systems remain quite far from converging on a universal legal position that respects animals’ rights – especially when it comes to industrialised farming.

There is also the natural environment which needs to be seriously protected by our legal systems if we need to...
address the challenges of climate change, deforestation, pollution and overexploitation of our natural resources currently threatening our planet. Justice, therefore, cannot simply be confined to human interaction. Environmental justice highlights the ethical principle that everyone has the right to a clean, safe, and healthy environment regardless of their background or location. Environmental justice recognises that certain environmental decisions and policies can unfairly burden vulnerable communities and future generations. Although progress has also been made on this front, thanks to the increased awareness raised by scientists and environmental groups, much more needs to be done by the judicial system to hold governments and corporations accountable for the damage and irreparable harm being caused to the environment.

The manifesto, as in other pieces, always emphasized Plato’s quip that rulers should be philosopher kings, as philosophy’s role in the understanding of justice is crucial for justice to be achieved in so many different contexts.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, this Manifesto underscores that justice is quite a complex process to reach the perfect ideals of fairness. Apart from ethical and moral reasoning, justice is interrelated with many other fields, such as economics, politics, sociological inquiries, psychology of crime, feminism, environmentalism, and animal rights among many others. Other issues to consider include the influential role of technology in modern societies, particularly the rise of the internet, the smartphone, social media and Artificial Intelligence. The rule of law remains of significant importance in modern societies when it comes to the right of privacy, data protection and manipulation against AI algorithms.
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