

SHARF

PHILOSOPHY SHARING FOUNDATION

ISSUE 7

JANUARY 2018

Marx my words

• **Thinking porno**

• **Philosophical gardens?**

• **Marxist Christians, unite!**

• **Philosophy's way of life**

• **Marx & machines**

... and more

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PHILOSOPHY SHARING FOUNDATION

ISSUE 7 - January 2018

It has been now over two years since this fascinating experience with our magazine has began. Slowly but surely, it continues to attract attention both locally and abroad. We are very grateful to those who contribute with their articles, letters and support. As the official platform of the Philosophy Sharing Foundation, we are pleased to help readers of **SHARE** to question and think. The main aim of our magazine is to disseminate articles and information which contribute to philosophical discussion and debate. The magazine adheres to no single creed and ideology, and thus its policy is to published any type of article as long as it contains philosophical substance and argumentation. Philosophy Sharing Foundation may or may not agree with the opinions expressed in the published articles. The responsibility for the published material shall lie solely with its author.

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"The [Idealist] philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it."

Karl Marx, *Eleven Theses on Feuerbach*
These words are also inscribed upon his grave

◀ Front cover: *Karl Marx* (2015) by Rayesh Dunna (India).

EDITORIAL

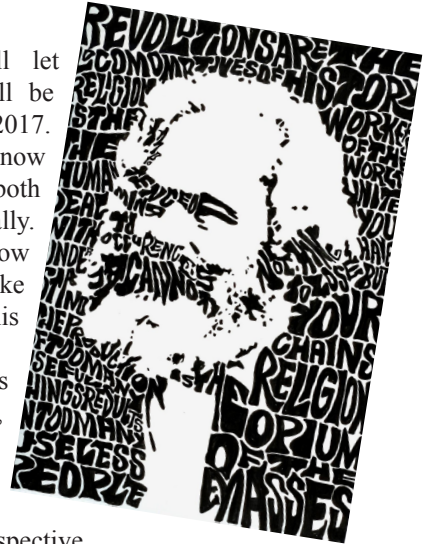
Grappling with Marx!

Another year. Well let us hope that 2018 will be as productive as 2017. The magazine has now established itself both locally and internationally. We have a steady flow of articles that make interesting reading, this issue in particular.

Our front cover is dedicated to Marx, perhaps one of the greatest minds of the last century. His ideas seem to mould a perspective that is critical in a profound methodological way.

This methodology is often referred to as 'Marxism'. In this respect many thinkers were actually Marxists without any need to affirm the origins of their thoughts. This was in fact the greatness of Marx. He managed to offer objective critiques of capitalism at both 'economic' as well as 'social'/'cultural' levels of human intercourse which were empirically corroborated. These insights allowed others to form a frame of reference guided by the same principles. We can attribute Marx's methodologies permeating such groups and thinkers as the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida, Rex, Negri, and so many others. Whether the subject was urbanisation, space, time or capacities Marxism presented a plausible critique methodology. The greatness of Marx of course was that he did not need to be acknowledged as the source of these methodological perspectives. Indeed, he often is not.

If we focus on Marxist theoretical underpinnings, we know his perspectives gave rise to ideologies that may appear impractical and far too abstract. Yes, the voluminous contributions from different continents illustrate the importance of Marx's methodologies and how these lend themselves to form guidelines for further critiques in an array of thematics. The very fact that Marxist perspectives can be the basis of critiques of a diverse range of thematics, from education to economics, shows the very practical and tangible nature of Marx's concerns. Our contemporary critique of capitalism would greatly lose its resonance if Marx had not originally laid out his own critique a century earlier. Even existentialism and ontology would have been greatly depreciated if Marx had not informed the background—and side line—commentary that avail themselves to a deeper and more profound reading, and so 'writing', on these (any many more) subjects.



Off your chest

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor, what is the purpose of philosophy? Believe me, I am not being snooty, really. I often feel genuinely confused. Your magazine, and also, I see, your activities, promote, to my delight, a philosophy which relates to life. However, then, when I attempt to delve deeper, I am faced with a sort of academic or intellectual philosophy that appears more like rocket science than anything close to concrete help. What is the point of anything if it doesn't work?

— Petre Scalpello, Fgura.

Dear Editor, I stumbled upon your Foundation's YouTube channel and was pleased by the quality, if not the technical calibre, of some of the talks uploaded there. I particularly enjoyed the one on Luther and Philosophy given by Dr Mark Montebello last October. I was actually surprised by this talk since, to my embarrassment, I knew practically nothing about Luther or, which is worse, the little I knew was inaccurate. He was truly a remarkable man! The video was a pleasant discovery and an eye-opener. Thank you!

— George Spiteri, Żabbar.

Dear Editor, the courses offered by the Philosophy Sharing Foundation should be advertised more widely. I learned of one of them—The Nature of Truth by Karl Borg—too late. What a pity I missed it! Such an interesting subject! And again, why are most of the courses in Maltese? Is there a special reason for this? I am sure foreigners like me would be more drawn to attend if they had been in English. Just a suggestion. Keep up the good work!

— Andulka Svoboda (Czech), Bugibba

Dear Editor, though your magazine always contains very interesting articles, and I say this with hand on heart, for I

<

The trajectory from 'grand narratives' to 'structures', and then on to more abstract 'post-modernism', were all in their specificity Marxist-inspired perspectives. How Marxist-inspired perspectives can be so versatile and far apart as to offer these diverse perspectives is actually the evolution of Marx's thoughts among readers and writers. The future may still revise and tender further readings.

Marx is still alive in our readings and writings. In this issue, among other things, we give you a taste of just a few of them. Enjoy!

Meinrad

truly appreciate most of the articles' challenging nature, as I do the overall effort being made to produce and issue such a magazine, however I respectfully find some fault with it. The reason being that, as the only philosophical magazine issued in the Maltese Islands, it rarely, if ever (not ever! I should say), engages with the reality we live in day in, day out. Particularly, I have in mind the charged political situation we are plagued with, which is in great (really, really great!) need of some sensible, rational thought. If a magazine like yours does not provide this, what will?


— Anna Spiteri, Luqa.

Dear Editor, I have read the article 'Killing me softly' by Anthony Zarb Dimech (issue 6) with much interest since I had the great misfortune to go through the prolonged, agonising death of a loved one very recently, and questions on euthanasia crop up quite impulsively. One cannot help asking what is the whole point of delaying death, or even of not deliberately hastening it, when someone is shrunk, very often in an unconscious state, to a pitiful state of being. Though well written, confronted with such questions I found the article I mentioned too dogmatic and self-righteous, even to the point of insensitivity. Perhaps a philosophical magazine should challenge more, at least for argument's sake, deep-seated convictions.

— Maria Laurentis, Floriana.

Dear Editor, well done for you magazine **SHARE**. I enjoy reading it. *A prosit* to you! Continue your good work.

— Marie Benoit, Sliema.

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| SHARE PHILOSOPHY SHARING FOUNDATION Issue 7 January 2018 | |
| THE MISSION OF SHARE IS TO SERVE AS THE OFFICIAL PLATFORM OF THE PHILOSOPHY SHARING FOUNDATION AND TO DISSEMINATE ARTICLES AND INFORMATION WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION AND DEBATE. | |

Anyone who watched the science fiction film *The Terminator* will surely remember Arnold Schwarzenegger as the cyborg assassin sent by the Skynet system from the future. In the original film and in the other four sequels that followed it Skynet is a computer system developed for the US military which, at a certain point in history, gains artificial consciousness and decides to exterminate humanity. In the rest of this article, I

Hence, a robot is a type of machine but not every machine is a robot.

Machines are built to make our work easier!

In September 2016, Ryan Avent wrote an article in *The Guardian* in which he observed that “if everyone, not just the rich, had robots at their beck and call, then such powerful technology would free them from the need to submit to the realities of the market to put food on the table.” (Avent, 2016)

Of course, none of us, not even the mega rich, have

MARX

and the rise of the machines

by Godwin Darmanin

am not going to explore the possibility that the advanced machines that we are currently building and interacting with will one day turn against us in such a destructive way, but rather what I want to expose is something more subtle, and which is already happening: the physiological and the psychological enslavement of the postmodern proletariat under capitalism.

Before continuing any further, it is imperative that I distinguish between two terms that I will use throughout the rest of this article: machine and robot. The former comes from the Greek *mekhos* (meaning contrivance, device, apparatus), whereas the latter comes from the Slavic *robota* (meaning forced labourer). At a very basic level, a machine is a tool having different parts which together perform a particular task. On the other hand, a robot is a type of machine which is proficient at carrying out a complex set of activities

personal robots doing all the work for us, at least not yet. Nonetheless, we are already being told repeatedly how much technology is making the life of the average worker easier, and by the latter I am not just referring to the fact that, with the use of machines, what was once considered to be hard manual labour has indeed become much easier. Rather, nowadays even the typical white-collar worker is being encouraged, and provided with, technological artefacts to allow him to work from the comfort of his home or literally from anywhere in the world. Indeed, many workers look at such arrangements as beneficial due to family commitments, while others can fulfil their dream of working for a renowned capitalist venture without the need to relocate. Needless to say, even educational institutions teach the *modus operandi* of such arrangements within their various curricula, with the latter being specifically designed to address the needs of

automatically. Basic machines must be operated by human beings, whereas robots (especially the most technologically advanced ones) can carry out their tasks independently in accordance with a set of pre-programmed instructions and in response to recognisable situations within generic or specific physical locations.

postmodern capitalism.

Machines are making us work more!

What I have just depicted is the bright side of work



The Coming Integration of Humanity, Ryger (2015)



Kuromon Ichiba Market, Ōsaka-shi, Japan (2016).

arrangements in the digital economy, but, as in all other situations in which humanity is present, hiding behind it there is also a dark side. As is the case for any type of machine, computers and robots do not need to rest and, since their lifespans do not usually stretch more than a decade, corporations want to ensure that these keep moving capital without any interruption. After all, this fully adheres to the ethos of postmodern capitalism: keep on generating profit relentlessly. In this scenario there is only one important caveat: these machines are not fully autonomous, at least not yet. Accordingly, there will be times when they will need to be assisted by their creators and, since these machines do not rest or sleep, business owners impart expectations so that workers remain remotely available outside contractual working hours. The grim consequence is that all of this has abolished the boundary between work and free time and, thus, workers of the digital economy have lost what their predecessors had fought for, most of the time without being compensated for the extra hours worked outside their contractual obligations.

Marx and the plight of today's workers

It is noteworthy that Marx had foreseen all of this. In fact, in the *Grundrisse* (1858), specifically in the so-called 'Fragment on Machines', Marx writes: "Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the

mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a *link* of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism". Hence, what Marx had observed about the early machines of his era still applies to our digital economy since, nowadays, the alienated workforce is nothing more than the conscious linkage of a global interconnected system which serves as the backbone for 21st century capitalism.

Moreover, what is certainly more treacherous about the condition of today's working class is that, contrary to what was the case during Marx's era, those who own the means of production can nowadays rely on a global army of workers, most of whom can be literally fired with a touch of a button if, in their sole role as the link of the system, they do not adhere to what is expected by the work ethic of postmodern capitalism. However, who 'in his right mind' would not voluntarily give up a good chunk of his free time for the pursuit of illusory happiness under capitalism ... at the expense of remaining shackled by the demands emanating from the same system? My closing question is unquestionably sarcastic but I do hope that it will allow all of you to ponder!

The way of

Imagine living in a place where time is slowed down to almost a standstill, nobody works, everybody is just laying around, leisure is the only order of the day, no politics exists, and everyone lives with everyone else in tranquil coexistence. Just think of it. Wouldn't that be grand? This is no eutopia. It is a garden.

Perhaps that's why gardens and philosophers go so well together. Though again, this might sound as an affront—*so sorry!*—since most of us live in relatively small residences or urbanised areas, and do not have the time, the space or perhaps the aptitude to tend a garden. Some of us might have a few plants in small pots to look after, at most, but that's the closest some of us will ever get to tending a garden. Which is one large far cry, of course.

Nevertheless, philosophers *do* fancy gardens? Just think of Plato's Academia, Aristotle's Lyceum, Epicurus' hedonistic school, Zeno's Stoa, and Pythagoras' Samos school. All were situated in well-tended gardens.

Closer to our time, one might think of Erasmus' garden in Anderlecht (Brussels), the numerous Zen philosophical gardens in Japan and elsewhere, the Foxfire philosophical gardens in Marshfield (Wisconsin, USA), the Garden of Philosophy in Budapest (Gerllért Hill, Hungary), just to mention a famous few.

Or one might also think of Voltaire's well-known moral at the end of his *Candide*: "*Il faut cultiver notre jardin*", We must [all] cultivate our garden. And by 'garden' Voltaire *meant* garden. Not some social or political endeavour at some corner of the earth to which we are chained by human madness. No. He meant, precisely, *a garden*. A patch of ground with soil, flowers, fruit, vegetables or whatever else. In any case, a place we build by love and care. Whether this is done individually or collectively is another matter.

As one might imagine, gardens come in all forms, shapes and sizes. Not that it matters very much to our discussion here except to press the point that the makeup of gardens generally follows some kind of philosophical abstract notion. Some would be meticulously structured or perfectly ordered while others would be riotous or anarchic; some would be complex or elaborate while others would be simple or austere; some would be

Do philosophers and

f a garden

By Pauline Farrugia

January 2018

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private or secluded while others would be public or communal. In any case a theory is at work; a conceptual hypothesis of some kind; a conscious rational interpretation of life and the world.

This could make us suppose that, since philosophers should seem to be quite logically attracted to gardens, they would have systematically dealt with gardens very often in their intellectual labours. So much so that one can come across some kind of philosophy of gardens. But no, suprisingly enough this is not so. One could possibly stumble on a rare reflection *on* gardens—as in, say, Bacon, Shaftesbury, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and a few others—but, no, not on a philosophy *of* gardens or, conceivably, *the* philosophy of gardens, as one could easily find, say, *the* philosophy of mind, *the* philosophy of education, *the* philosophy of language, and so on.

A fairly recent exception would be *A Philosophy of Gardens* (Oxford, 2006) by David E. Cooper, a Durham University professor well acquainted with

Malta and Gozo. “To reflect [...] on connections between philosophy and gardens,” he writes (p. 7), “is not, *per se*, to reflect philosophically *on* gardens, and once we turn to the literature for reflections of the latter kind—for philosophy *of* gardens—we are indeed struck by the relative neglect of which several modern authors complain.”

The thing is, what would a philosophy *of* gardens possibly tell us? Chiefly, it would probably tell us something very significant about the relationship between us and the Earth—our “co-dependence”, as Cooper maintains (p. 145, 160–1)—not only on an ontological level, but also aesthetically, epistemologically, ethically, and even politically.

In the ultimate analysis, perchance gardens may well be a reminder of ‘paradise lost’. Not in any religious sense. But rather anthropologically; as human beings populating the Earth. If so, then gardens must also be an expression of our subconscious longing for a ‘paradise regained’.

Pauline Farrugia studies philosophy on her own, attending some classes whenever she can, just for fun. She pursues her own intellectual interests away from ‘academic’ philosophy as much as possible.

garden pollinate?

Nietzsche, nihilism and the Gospels

a clarification

By Gianfranco Strazzanti

Nihilism, as we know, might mean many different things. With Nietzsche it came to hint at something very specific: the devaluation of human life whose cause is to be sought in Socrates' teachings and, above all, in Christianity – which, in *Ecce homo*, the German philosopher does not hesitate to define as “a crime against life”.

Christianity throughout the centuries has worn many masks. No one would deny that any of these have been somehow nihilistic. Nevertheless, as we are about to see, traces of nihilism are really hard to be found in Jesus' words as reported by the four Gospels.

Unfortunately, a sort of pathological repulsion prevented Nietzsche to meditate on the New Testament more seriously than he did. A deeper insight would have been of great help. He could have realized, for instance, that the state of mind ‘beyond good and evil’ which he was struggling to find had been already clearly expressed by the Rabbi Jesus in these words: “... you may be children of your Father in heaven: He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt. 5, 45).

Another accusation against Christianity, as seen by Nietzsche, deals with certain disgust for nature. In the Gospels we read words like these: “Look at the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not adorned like one of these” (Mt. 6, 28-29). This does not seem to be the description of a horrifying world we have to be disgusted by. In other words, we would not say these words are nihilistic.

Obviously, the world is also made of mean and rotten people who may turn it into a very sad place, as Nietzsche himself, with his aristocratic estrangement from any community, happened to confirm throughout his lifetime. Despite this evidence, in the Gospels we do not find any accusation against *the world* but rather an accusation against a *specific* human perception of the world: the utilitarian, plotting, morbid and greedy one, but not against the world as seen by pure eyes.

For this reason, the Gospels feature sentences like: “... even the very hairs of your head are all numbered ...” (Mt. 10, 30), as everything that happens in the whole universe, not only in this visible world, is ruled by a superior intelligence

Nietzsche, Fabrizio Cassetta (2017)



for which nothing is unknown and to which everything has got its own importance. Giordano Bruno himself, the *champion* of modern scientific liberty, would probably agree with this! While Heraclitus of Ephesus, with his deep sight, would ask: “How can anyone hide from that which never sets?” (frag. 16 DK).

In order to highlight all the richness and mystery of many evangelical sentences, such as “... the very hairs of your head are all numbered ...”, it must be said that they might hide a deeper meaning, perhaps hinting at some kind of *spiritual body*.

Things being as they are, a nihilistic interpretation of all the evangelical words quoted above and others could be found only by those who persist in confusing eternity with nothingness. Such was the case of Nietzsche himself since he fell into the trap of a sort of *integral* materialism together with countless insuperable contradictions.



In his controversial, and posthumously published, *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche asks himself: “What does nihilism mean? That the highest values devalue themselves. The aim is missing; ‘Why?’ finds no answer”.

Well, are evangelical teachings bereft of supreme values?

The Heavenly kingdom is compared to what cannot be replaced every now and then in Jesus’ words. Nonetheless, and this is the point, however evident it may seem that the Gospels are *not* nihilistic, Nietzsche did not consider them as worthy of a serious reflection.

This is the reason why we can finally say that nihilism is nothing but the metaphysics of the Gospels revealed as false by a man who did not understand it at all! Furthermore, we can even say that, paradoxically, nihilism is the point where Nietzsche and his idea of Christendom meet. Because it is exactly out of that meeting point that he meant to create his new values, though it is not easy to understand what kind of values he was planning to create, except, perhaps, for an extreme individualism which is still so much in fashion nowadays.

Despite what we have said here, Nietzsche’s ‘philosophical children’ of our times cannot usually see all these contradictions. They do not even notice how these actually led him straight to madness. Few seem to ask themselves how it has been possible that a man who spent half his life in a hermitage, and found such firm and steady answers on how to face existence, came to shipwreck unto the abyss of a paralyzing lunacy.

Very important: I do not aim at judging him here but at valuing the *efficacy* of his philosophy, since the main question about it should sound like: is his philosophy fit to face madness? Or, more clearly: Is his philosophy, a philosophy against losers and in favour of winners, fit to overcome madness?

In Nietzsche’s books we can surely find interesting sparks on how to face life. Nevertheless, the true master does not prove himself to be a master by the books he writes but by the life he leads and by the living teaching he gives.

As I said, any personal judgment would be useless. However, what is not useless at all is to focus on what Nietzsche said about nihilism and about Christianity, and clearly show all of his incomprehension of the evangelical words. Faced with such evidence, all those who intend to support Nietzsche’s message have the duty to compare it to the Gospels without any prejudices.

Maybe in this way they would come to realise that an ‘eternal return’ to the same shadows of this illusory world is not the path that leads the ‘overman’ beyond good and evil, if he really means to go beyond good and evil. It is a liberation from those shadows that they should look for.

Gianfranco Strazzanti is from Sicily and lives in Malta. He’s a graduate from the Faculty of ‘Lettere e Filosofia’ of the University of Catania. His main interests are Italian Literature, European Philosophy, and World Spiritual Traditions.

This article is a response to Marta Obiols Fornell’s contribution ‘Christianity as the origin of nihilism’ (SHARE no. 5, May 2017).

Many hold on to the view that Philosophy is a heavily academic and complex subject reserved for great thinkers, many of whom are very pedantic, and sometimes pensive and morose-looking people, whose task is to think and talk and write long research papers with little or no substantial practical applications.

By and large, this is a justified notion, as Philosophy produces an array of scholarly documents containing a construct of technical jargon, most often read and reviewed by other philosophers who cross-fertilise each other through this kind of literature.

But, in essence, I wonder what would be the results if one were to take an opinion poll. One might find that this image of the subject is perhaps even more erudite. Still, it would still be very interesting to know what kind of answers would be elicited from such a study. What does Philosophy mean to the man/woman on the street? Can it help the individual and society at large in everyday life?

To answer this question we need to go back to the drawing board and take a cursory glance as to how Philosophy evolved over the centuries, and answer yet another question: Has Philosophy retained the goals of its founding efforts?

Philosophy originally started off in ancient Greece as a subject of study that was intended to answer deep and meaningful questions about life, such as: What is evil? What is virtue? What is the Good life? How can one transform one's life for the better? What is the truth?

Early Philosophy—from Thales, Socrates, Plato, the Epicureans and the Stoics—was not just about finding the truth

(though that was part of the mission) but the need for the truth to help in living, and better transform, one's life for the better. Real wisdom was not just knowing about it but to live it, and live life in a different way.

For instance, Hadot argues that Philosophy is hardly ever practiced as a way of life. I subscribe to this view, as very frequently the subject is reduced to a purely academic exercise practiced in universities with students studying texts, analysing and criticising arguments without having much impact on their lives.

A historic review of Philosophy over the centuries reveals that the original intent of the ancient philosophers seems to have faded away and developed from an art of living into a

Philosophy as a Way

By Anthony Zarb Dimech

very technical subject that veered away from its practical and even its therapeutic applications. Living is truly an art form and not merely the antique objects that embellish homes.

A recent interest in the subject as a guide to life prompted John Sellars to write a paper entitled 'What is Philosophy as a way of life?' (1995, 2010). In it the author discusses a third distinct approach to Philosophy, 'Philosophy as a Way of Life', which is closely aligned to Continental Philosophy.

In this paper, the author asks the key important question whether this approach offers a third way, distinct from Analytic and Continental philosophy.

Indeed, Continental philosophers of the post-antique tradition—such as Descartes, Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche—sought to live a life that was consistent and congruent with their Philosophy, and this, in itself, sets an example in that actions speak louder than words. Ancient philosophers did not teach merely by words but also through their everyday life examples (in what they ate, clothed themselves with, customs and bodily expressions).

I fully subscribe to the view that one has to look closely at the philosopher's life first before his

*Blossoming under the sun (2016),
Gaelle Marcel.*



Why Way of Life



Life in New York, USA (2015), Anubhav Saxena.

works. In fact, John Sellars makes a succinct distinction between the scientific and humanistic images of Philosophy in ancient Greece. Socrates looked upon Philosophy as a duty to live, and was even prepared to die for what he believed to be the truth, which he did. In fact, in *The Apology of Socrates*, written by Plato in 399 BCE, we find the speech of legal self-defence that Socrates made at his trial where he was accused of impiety and corruption.

In response to his accusers, Socrates is quoted as saying: “You have brought my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting the conduct of your life to criticism”.

The above words epitomise Socrates’s preparedness not to compromise with his vision of the truth. Aristotle’s task, on the other hand, was that of uncovering principles and causes and ‘the knowledge of the truth’. Hence, his was the task of living a philosophical life in order to pursue knowledge through a scientific approach. Socrates, alternatively, adopts a humanistic approach.

At this juncture, one might be tempted to associate Continental Philosophy with the humanistic approach (and what John Sellars calls ‘Philosophy as a Way of Life’), and the scientific with Analytic Philosophy.

But the distinction is not as clear cut, as not all Continental philosophers appear to have embraced philosophy as a ‘way of life’. For instance, Hadot identifies European philosophers—such as Goethe, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Bergson and Merleau-Ponty—as embracing something close to Philosophy as a way of life.

Given this lack of distinction between the two streams of Philosophy, Michael Chase, in *Observations on Pierre Hadot’s Conception of Philosophy as a Way of Life* (2007), recently presented Philosophy as a way of life as a third way of doing Philosophy distinct from Analytic and Continental Philosophy.

Chase writes: “I had a taste of both Analytic and Continental Philosophy, the two mutually exclusive branches of the discipline, and neither had satisfied me. Neither seemed able to speak to my thirst for the honest, jargon-free discussions philosophical issues that genuinely mattered to my life”.

Tom Stern, in an essay titled ‘The Complications of Philosophy’ (2015), speaks about his experiences in attempting to bring Philosophy to the general public using therapeutic sessions for a mental health charity. Stern argues that Philosophy should veer away from merely being therapeutic since its primary role should be the uncovering of truths, and truths might not always make persons feel good about themselves, and are often uncomfortable.

Stern’s conclusion is that, “wherever we find Philosophy, we find, on the one hand, the pursuit of truth and, on the other, some promise to make a difference or to guide us towards a better or a more fulfilled life”.

Given the above context, my view is that any serious researcher of Philosophy is not to present off-the-shelf happiness packages of Philosophy. One has to study and extract the real motivation behind anyone doing Philosophy in the first place.

This primary intent should be to seek the truth, and this truth, based on sound arguments, should help in transforming one’s life for the better. Hence therapy and truth are closely linked. A philosopher should embrace both the practical healing role of Philosophy and its basic commitment to uncovering the truth.

Anthony Zarb Adami pursued philosophical studies on his own, with much keenness, to preserve his avid zest for life.

that he had an unshakable premonition that a plane will play a crucial role in his death. Ordinarily he refused to travel by air even when it involved very long distances.

Some of course will immediately dismiss his plane crash as nothing more than a horrendous coincidence, and maintain that his presentiment was only a figment

RITCHIE'S FATE

By Roderick Portelli

W

hoever is even slightly acquainted with rock n'roll, particularly with its exciting early days in the 1950s, must immediately recognise the

name of Richie Valens. He was just seventeen when he rocketed to fame in 1958. But his star burned for just eight months. During which time, when the likes of Elvis, The Everly Brothers, Perry Como and others were making it big, he reached the pop chart list in America with three successive hits: 'Come On Let's Go', 'Donna' and the still popular 'La Bamba'.

The amazing career of this Mexican-American, Los Angeles-born rock star only came to an end when a biplane he was on together with Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper crashed in a blizzard on February 3, 1959. The crash inspired Don McLean's 1971 famous hit 'The Day the Music Died'. The thing is, Valens claimed to know that this would happen. He only went on planes occasionally, and was on that particular flight just because, during a performance tour, he had a cold and could not possibly travel in freezing weather on a bus that had its central heating inoperative.

According to his main biographer, Beverly Mendheim, Valens developed an intense phobia of planes when, in January 1957, several of his friends were smouldered by falling parts of a plane which collided with another plane above their school playground. Moreover, Valens avowed more than once

of the imagination or an unreasonable mania. Others, however, will hesitate. Whatever they might think of Valens' cruel end (some conspiracy theories do exist), they might still be willing to give some credence to fate. Let's face it, most of us would.

Though most of us would not claim to have a hunch on how they shall die or when, they'll still maintain that some occurrences in life are somehow predetermined, and that one cannot avoid them. On examination, the basis for such beliefs are generally not merely biological (DNA and so forth) or cultural (by nurture). People do very often believe in destiny. "It was written," they'd tell you; "It had to be," they'd assert without being able to explain what they might mean.

If not all, most ancient civilisations certainly believed in destiny and fate, and the Greeks of the classical age were no exception. Oedipus, Medea and other tragic subjects stand out as personalities thrust by fate. However, the supposedly wiser philosophers were no less believers in fixed destinies. Plato and Aristotle both surely did.

Far right: Ritchie Valens. Background: The crash scene on 3 February 1959 'The day the music died'.

The mediaevalists had at least two minds about it, and debated the issue incessantly. In 1611 our own Maltese philosopher, John Matthew Rispoli, in Paris disputed against predestination in opposition to the School of Luis Molina. Rispoli and his side maintained that even if God is omniscient nonetheless this did not in any way infringe on our perfect freedom. The opposing side upheld that this was a contradiction in terms. If God knows our future then our future is fixed and, whatever we do, we can't change it.

Leaving God out of the equation would seem to untie the knot altogether. Most post-Kantian philosophers, at least, would think so, with the atheist Sartre wrapping it up nicely with his famous 'We are condemned to be free' maxim.

On the other hand, as a theist philosopher Peter Serracino Inglott distinctively held that since the future does not exist neither God can know it, and hence no predestination can even be conceivable.

Does this solve the problem? Is our future, or parts thereof, fixed? Are we predestined? Could Ritchie Valens or anyone else possibly have a reliable premonition of what was to happen? Can anyone 'see' the future, as Nostradamus claimed to have done?

The whole question seems to hang on what we decide time to be. Beliefs in destiny, fate and predestination treat time as if, like matter and space, it existed apart from a thinking subject. Durability seems to imply some sort of passage which persists on its own whether or not it is situated within a definite system (linear, circular, spiral, etc.) or whether it is gauged at all. Passage, while not having its existence in any need of rationalisation, seems to imply that material things do pass from one moment to another, sometimes making it inevitable that certain happenings occur at some imminent moment which is neither present nor past, and hence in the future.

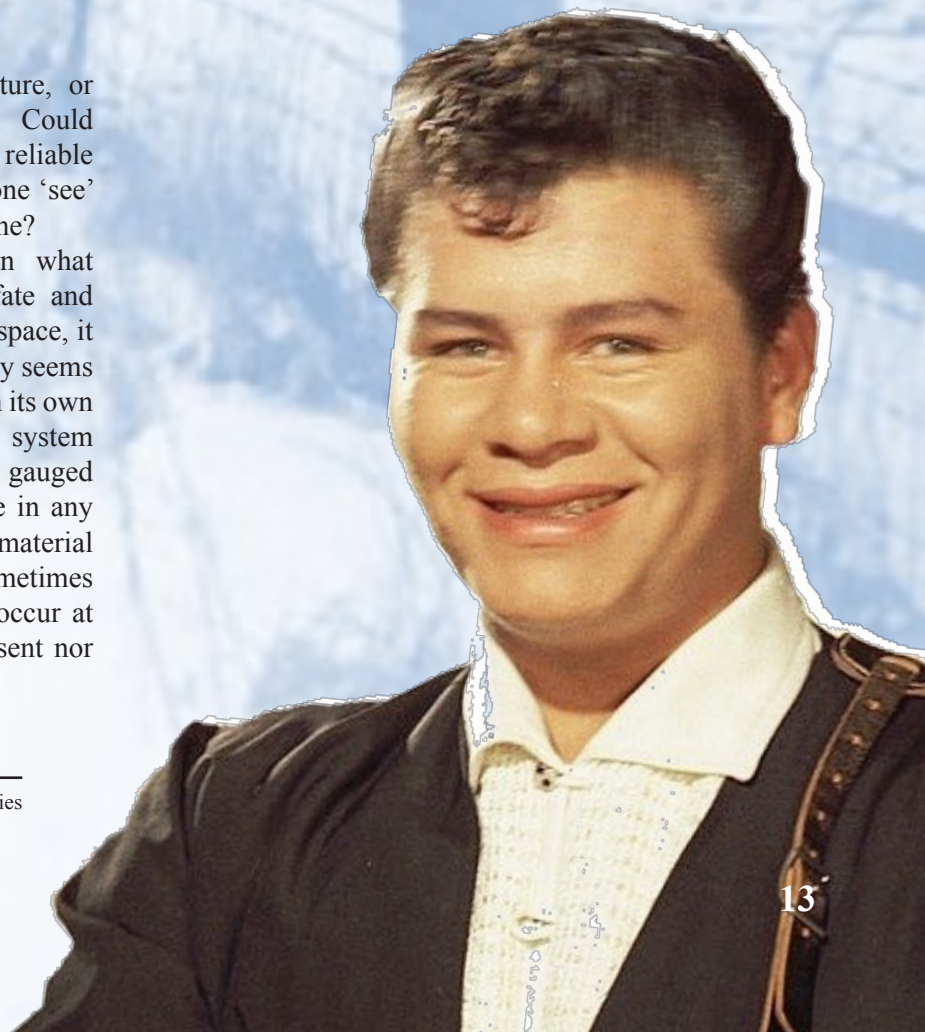
Nevertheless, while the past and the present are dimensions which conceivably persist concurrent with matter and space, and are fixed (since they are *completed* incidents), the future apparently does not share these qualities. Its very impending nature makes it variable and flexible, and thus, since intervening occurrences can ensue, wholly unpredictable.

For theists the question might be more complicated. Though it is often theoretically stated that God knows all past, present and future, it is consistently ignored that God does not have any past, present and future. To him everything is instantaneously present, and there can be in his mind no inkling of any passage of time. This supposedly excludes both the future *and* the past. In other words, the present stands on its own without the likelihood of sways from elapsed or forthcoming instances.

In any way one looks at the issue, it seems to be the case that a fixed future is not possible, and predestination is thus incompatible with the present state of things.

After all, irrespective of any premonition whatsoever, it had taken an innumerable quantity of circumstances, and not just one, to have the unfortunate Ritchie Valens on a plane that would eventually fall from the sky.

Simply put, he was sadly in the wrong place at the wrong time. Fate had nothing to do with it.

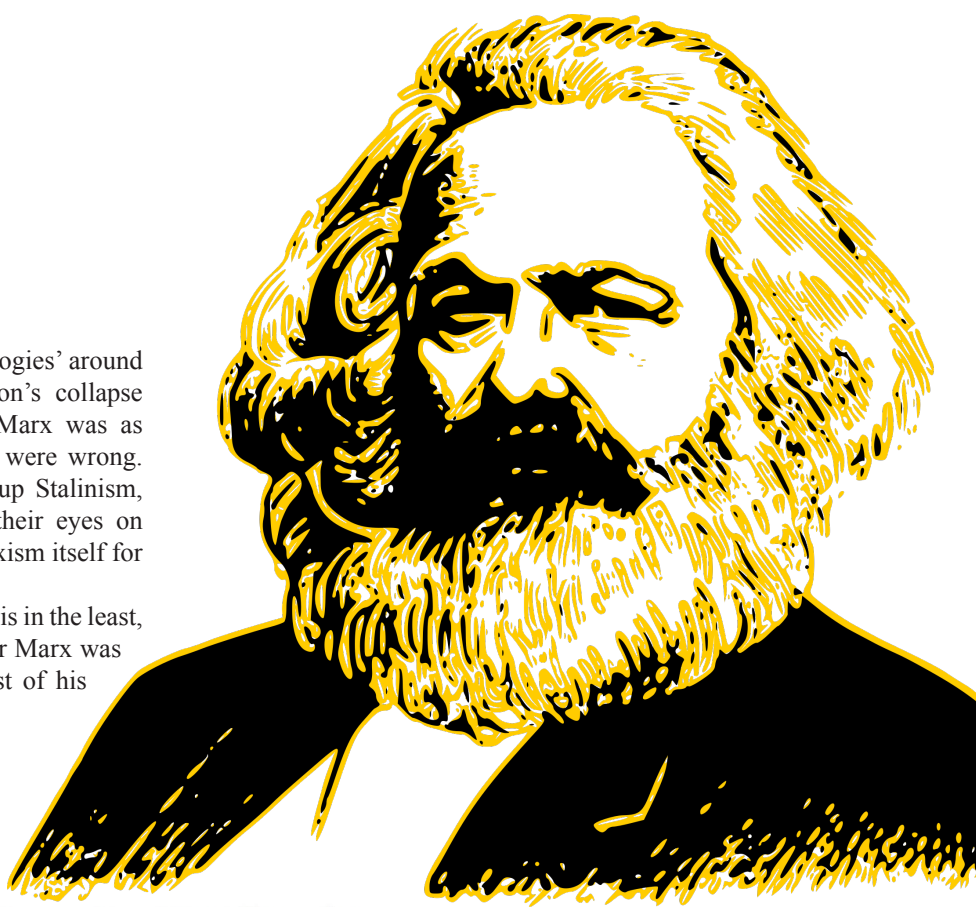


W

ith the so-called ‘end of ideologies’ around the time of the Soviet Union’s collapse (1990s) some thought that Marx was as good as finally done, dead and buried. They were wrong. Very wrong. They probably not only mixed up Stalinism, Leninism or whatever other ‘ism’ they set their eyes on with Marx but they possibly also mistook Marxism itself for Marx.

Marx is no *ism*. He himself did not accept this in the least, both overtly, and implicitly in his writings. For Marx was a mind in movement, and he considered most of his

By Jonathan Magro



Pop art Marx, Suthir (2011)

MARX
my words

a mind in movement

writings as works in progress. With eyes wide open and a mind on the alert, what he endeavoured to do was to arrive at a scientific analysis of economic life. On the way he paid particular attention to scientifically analyse capitalism as a system. What he ended up with was a definite modern social science.

It was of course the overzealous ones who made a doctrine out of him, starting with Engels. Quite understandably, I might add. For in the suffocating oppressiveness of 19th-century industrialisation Marx appeared to his disciples as a unique and exceptional gasp of pure fresh air. His methodical mind and his meticulous analyses—placed so disinterestedly at the service of the fraught masses, to put it romantically—must have seemed like a miracle. It was only a matter of time before he began to be treated as some sort of messianic one-stop dispenser.

As a doctrine Marx is probably worthless. The vim is squeezed out of him. He’s transformed into an unthinking sausage machine with no zest or punch, becoming what he always opposed: an ideology, a mere superstructure of systems and ideas which maintain and shape possible forms of oppression. If it was *this* that came to an end back in the 1990s, then it was most likely for the better. Marx could breathe again. He could resume his kicking and screaming. That’s what he’s best at. Marx the ruthless critic. Marx the destroyer of myths. Marx the defender of humankind. Marx with the mind in movement.

Forget these overstatements. (I got carried away.) My main question here is not why or how Marx’s dogmatisation happened, nor in what forms does Marxism still live today. My chief concern is what Marx still has to offer to you and me. Can he still be relevant? Do we need to heed him at all?

My answer is yes, of course, and what I strongly propose is that we need to pay special attention to his methodology of social science. Having said that, however, I certainly do not want to give the impression that Marx's methodology is one clean whistle. Far from it. What we may call 'Marxist social inquiry' is just an umbrella phrase—and a very large umbrella at that—which covers a rich assortment of contributions from all around the globe in every language. It's enough to think of the likes of Gramsci, Althusser, Mao, Bukharin and Poulantzas to make your head spin. These and many more in the last hundred years or so chipped in to add to the great body of literature constituting Marxist theory. In *no way* do they add up to a single, coherent Marxist methodology for the social sciences.

It necessarily follows that what I'll be saying next will come in very, very broad strokes. But I think it might serve our limited purpose.

So. Extrapolating Marx to the extreme, one might arrive at six main substantive methodological guidelines for social research. Mind you, these need not be taken in successive order as they appear here. Each one can be a line of procedure with or without one or more of the others. In what follows I'll use 'legal person' to indicate any individual, company or other entity that has legal rights and is subject to obligations. Here we go:

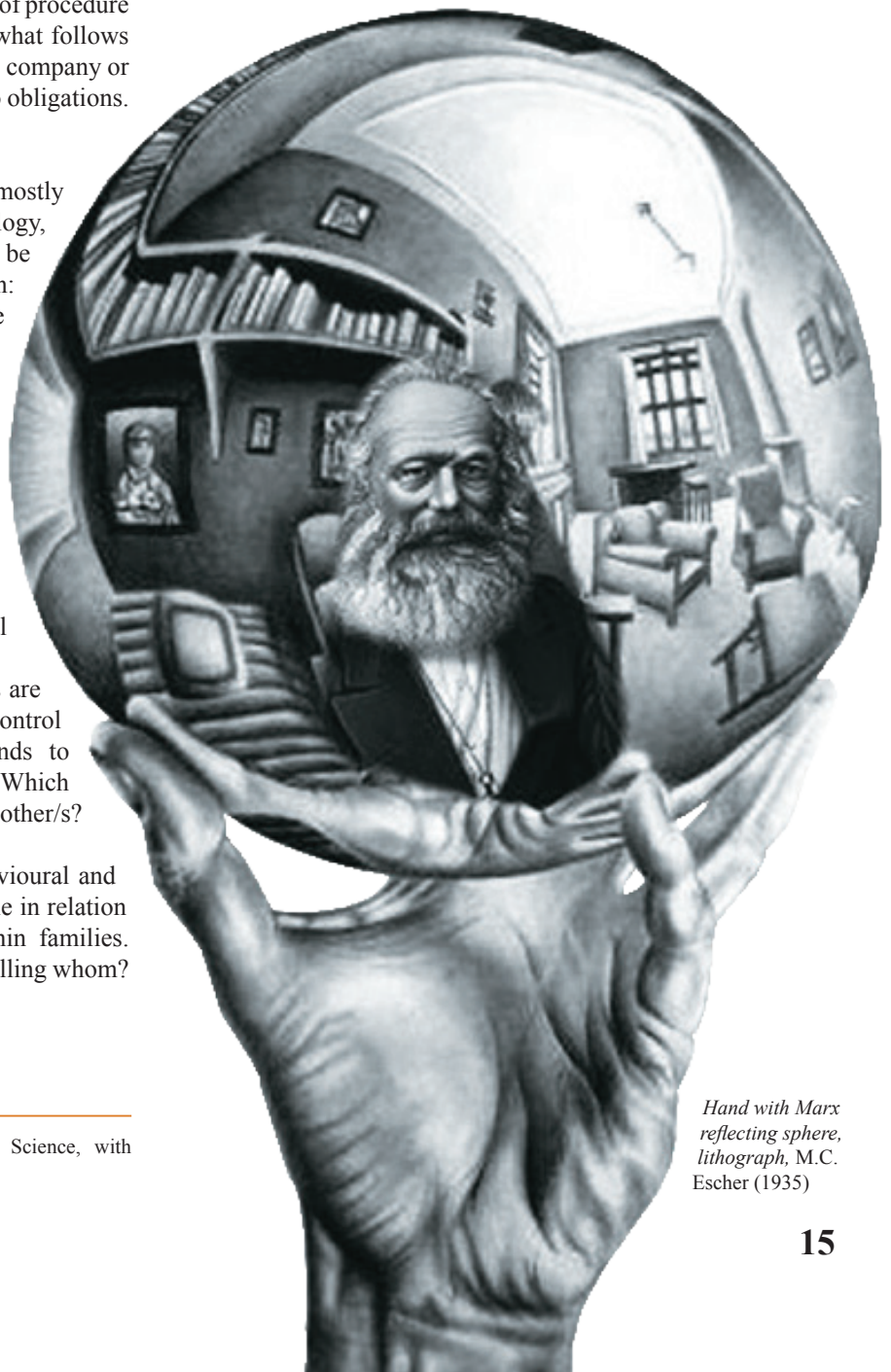
- Identify and examine which institutions mostly control, say, immovable property, technology, the media, and labour. These would be established institutions. Answers the question: Which legal persons are doing most of the controlling?
- Identify and examine the 'mind-set' of, say, the state, culture, the church, and education in relation to production and control. This would roughly correspond to ideology, and would include such things as art, the family, philosophy, the law, formal education, religion, the media, politics, and science. Answers the question: What controlling mentalities do the dominant legal persons have?
- Identify and examine which legal persons are in conflict with each other for production, control and possible exploitation. This corresponds to intergroup conflict. Answers the questions: Which legal persons are attempting to dominate the other/s? How is this being done?
- Identify and examine the system of behavioural and relationship patterns of the 'common' people in relation to production and control, especially within families. Answers the question: Who is mostly controlling whom?

• Identify and examine the system of behavioural and relationship patterns of social classes in relation to incentives, ideology, production and control, especially across distinct geographical areas. Answers the question: What social classes are chiefly part of the controlling mentality?

• Identify and examine the dominant established economic, political and cultural structures through which the activities of individuals within society are channelled. Answers the question: Which structures are mostly controlling people's identity?

Do we need such guidelines? Rest assured that plain observation, ordinary common sense or the natural sciences simply are not enough to 'read' the social world. Its exceptional complexity and its profound difference from the natural world make it quite impossible.

Marx, at least, provided some tools to do so. We'll do well to mark his words.



*Hand with Marx
reflecting sphere,
lithograph, M.C.
Escher (1935)*

pornosophy

A syncretism *between* philosophy and sexuality
(which prevents us being f***ed by politics)

By Francisco Tomás González Cabañas

Yes, to agree with the Marqués de Sade (*Philosophy in the Bedroom*, 1795), prostitutes might be the only authentic philosophers. Nowadays we cannot meet them anymore in brothels or on the streets since they have been hounded down and, recently, confused with sex slaves. Associating them to philosophy may seem quite questionable. However, think about it. Isn't philosophy the love of wisdom? Well, prostitutes deal with the essence, the raw material, of love. The sexual. And let's face it, for most of us this is the *only* real thing we can attain from our close relationships. This is as unassailable as metaphysical abstractions. Who some prefer to call love.

The folly, especially in politics, of loving wisdom occurs in a limited space of time. It's the same with people who claim to love: they initially sign a marital contract and consent to live as if that feeling, which is often sexually based, is to last much longer than it actually can.

Isn't it the same with those who claim to love wisdom? They initially choose to serve their people politically, like a Socrates or a Plato, attempting to justify the political foundations while nurturing their

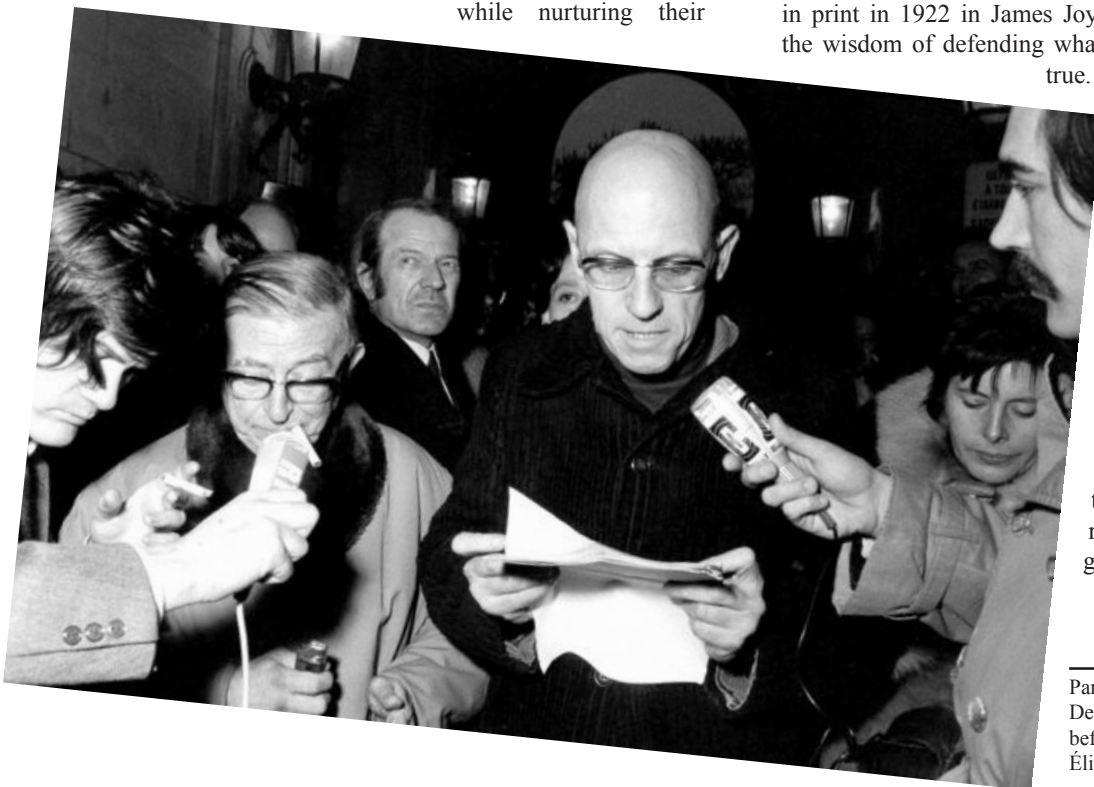
love of wisdom. Then, however, when the legitimising bottom of their shining, 'real' and useful love falls off, the inability to continue to love questions what love itself aided in building. That is perhaps why Socrates ended up condemned to suicide, and Plato being sold as a slave. Though they could not love what had been changed (or, rather, accomplished), as philosophers they could not cease loving their pursuit of knowledge.

Who marries claims to love. Nevertheless, when he or she senses that the original feeling has changed, when the attempt to somehow everlastingly perpetrate the few seconds of orgasm becomes futile, they wonder whether they should break the contract or continue with a love that has become something else.

As sex professionals, prostitutes know better than anyone the exact moment when the truth becomes a lie. They know how to avoid falling into marriage or, rather, how to set limits when the necessary or the appropriate becomes dangerous. As philosophers do.

Pornosophy, a Greek portmanteau word of *porn* (pornography) and *sophia* (wisdom), perhaps first mentioned in print in 1922 in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. It refers to the wisdom of defending what one believes in or feels to be true. The Greek root of this term

implies an absolute, a given, and that's where we find a new twinning between philosophy and pornography. For the pornosopher reaches out to the authentic, to that absolute nature with which we were originally brought into the world. Pornosophising also implies that we always intend something to happen with our thinking. Just like, in paying for sex, we go all-out to convince, to conquer, to render homage, to rationalise what we do, and thus gain more profit from our action.



Paris, France, 17 January, 1972, Sartre, Deleuze and Foucault in public protest before the Ministry of Justice. Photo by Élie Kagan.

What is unique is that today both philosophy and pornography—the father and mother of pornosophy—seem to be going down the same road: they defeat themselves by vegetating on scraps (even if this too, interestingly enough, in a way disrupts the established order). On its part, philosophy ceased being a threat to the oppressive wealthy; at best it became a hobby, a literary bravado. Pornography, on the other hand, has given way to plastic sex flaunting virility as some kind of supreme rule.

Pornosophy challenges them both. With regard to philosophy, pornosophy is a duty for those who function as a synapse, that structure in the nervous system which permits a neuron to pass an electrical or chemical signal to another neuron. With regard to pornography, objectification is not a genre but a condition of the poor or the less affluent. Both pornography and philosophy lost their ability to shock. Like every child, pornosophy comes not for overcoming its parents but to rescue their memory. It comes to recall what was known as philosophy and pornography. As Bertrand Russell put it (*Principles of Social Reconstruction*, 1916, 165–6):

Men fear thought as they fear nothing else on earth more than ruin, more even than death. Thought is subversive and revolutionary, destructive and terrible; thought is merciless to privilege, established institutions, and comfortable habits; thought is anarchic and lawless, indifferent to authority, careless of the well-tried wisdom of the ages. Thought looks into the pit of hell and is not afraid.

To put it coarsely, the pornosophising policy is to politically fuck without playing around. We must preserve our dignity, preventing the virus of lewd politics and class inoculate us by keeping us in a sort of existential work blockage.

In several areas of life we are surprised by reality. Internationally, we see migrants forced to take voyages of biblical proportions just to survive. Their hope, which is like a spiritual impulse to remain human, will sooner or later compel international affairs to make a paradigm shift. This will be only the beginning.

Democracy itself as we understand it today will be modified by these generations of victims. For, in terms of power, democracy is strongest where it is weakest: *with the vote*. Here is the key to end democracy's inadequacy. Not by TV shows, or by marches or political parties, but by redefining the vote; by forcing the hand of the 'social contract' that failed us all.



Delaying Intimacy (2015).

It will be very difficult for any of us to find redefining answers from those who do not question for fear of thinking. Many of our philosophers, academics and intellectuals, just like most of our cultural circles, have been infected by the decease of the age. Their gaze is clouded. They fear to go beyond the immediate. They cannot think the unthinkable. When faced with the deep recesses of the human condition they only flinch, unwillingly horrified, and retreat to their absurd classrooms and desks, and their powerful and harmful institutions.


Thinking, or pornosophising, if you like, may well be the vehicle that will lead to new or old horizons that link us with our most human side.

Francisco Tomás González Cabañas, an Argentinian, studied philosophy, psychology, political sciences, and communications. His publications include *El voto Compensatorio* (The redeeming vote; 2015) and *La Democracia Incierta* (Uncertain democracy; 2015). In 2000 he founded the artistic-literary movement *Anarconihilismo*, which publishes a magazine with the same name.

A philosophy of

FAN

By Amanda Falzon



Fanaticism is generally not considered favourably. It almost certainly conjures up images of terrorists, hooligans, suicide bombers, fundamentalists and extremists of all sorts. It spells danger. Fanatics are not simply thought of as passionate, devoted or fervent, but rather as obsessive, frenzied and, more likely than not, abusive. The word is also largely associated with small-mindedness, self-righteousness and, worst of all, intolerance. The liberal West seems to have a horror of fanaticism, and perhaps ranks it as the second, if not the first, nastiest f-word in the English language.

Maybe it is for this very reason that any zealous dissident, and not only in the West, has been dubbed a fanatic. It is a label which reeks, and very convenient when dealing with social or political undesirables. The trick seems to be infallible. Jesus, Luther, Havel, Romero, Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Gandhi, Wałęsa, Solzhenitsyn, Mandela, Tutu, Luther King, Chomsky ... all of these, to mention a few, at one point or other were called fanatics. All of them, for certain, passionately believed in what they said and did. Nonetheless, to state that any one of them was small-minded, self-righteous or intolerant seems to be going a bit too far. None of their enemies liked them very much, you can count on that.

FANATICISM

Eva
Perón

Philosophically, fanaticism is somewhat difficult to pinpoint (Dominique Colas, *Civil Society and Fanaticism*, 1997). From Cicero to Locke, from Luther to Voltaire, from Kant up to our own time, the word was predominantly used negatively to denote, alternatively, hot-headedness, stubbornness, unreasonableness and even hatred.

Kalmer Marimaa suggests five factors that seem to distinguish fanatics, namely (1) unwavering conviction about the absolute rightness of one's understanding, (2) seeking to impose one's convictions on others, (3) dualistic world-view, (4) self-sacrificial devotion to the goal, and (5) devotion itself is more important than the object of that devotion ('The many faces of fanaticism', *Estonian National Defence College Proceedings*, vol. 14, 2011). More tongue in cheek, Churchill once famously said that "a fanatic is someone who can't change his mind and won't change the subject". In *The Gay Science* (1882), Nietzsche held that "fanaticism is the only form of will power that even the weak and irresolute can be brought to attain".

This is rather a bourgeoisie perception of fanaticism, and perhaps needs to be challenged a bit. Maybe a good start could be Alberto Toscano's *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London/New York 2010), which extensively studies fanaticism against the background of the insidious 'liberal pacification' pervading any political or social aspect of our lives. Here we'll stick to what Eva Peron (1919–1952), Argentina's First Lady (k.a. Evita), had to say on the subject. Of course, she was no philosopher. Nevertheless, her reflections might provide some spur. A glimpse, in fact, at her 'spiritual testament', entitled *Mi Mensaje* (My Message), written on her death-bed and published immediately after her passing away in 1952, provides an arguably rare view into the mind of someone who unabashedly avowed fanaticism. Which is at least intriguing, for a change.

"I like fanatics and all of history's fanaticisms," Evita proclaims, "I like heroes and saints. I like martyrs, whatever the cause and reason of their fanaticism. Fanaticism which converts life in a permanent and heroic death is the only way that life has to overcome death. This is why I'm a fanatic".

Bold words indeed. But do they have substance? Evita explains: "Fanaticism is the only power God left in the heart

to win its battles. It is the great force of the underdogs: the only one not possessed by their enemies, because these have suppressed from the world everything that stirs the heart. [...] Because even if they have money, privileges, hierarchies, power and wealth, they can never be fanatics. Because they have no heart. [...] They cannot be idealistic, because ideas have their root in intelligence, but ideals have their pedestal in the heart. They cannot be fanatics because shadows cannot be seen in the mirror of the sun."

Such words might find an echo in works like Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Both, amongst others, speak of the dispossessed and their powerlessness in the face of the crushing hegemony of the high and mighty.

"The world will be of the underdogs," Evita proceeds, "if the people decide to get caught up in the sacred fire of fanaticism. We blaze in order to be able to set alight, without hearing the siren of the mediocre and the imbeciles who speak of prudence. They, who speak of sweetness and love, forget that Christ said, 'Fire I have come to bring upon the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!' Christ gave us a divine example of fanaticism. How can the eternal preachers of mediocrity compare with him?"

Apart of the rhetoric and the religious jargon, there seems to be here a point or two of note which might be relevant to our present age. First of all, Evita appears to be challenging the structures of inequality by undermining the *perceived* legitimacy of unjust hierarchical relationships. Such a perception, upheld by both the dominant classes as much as *by the dominated*, increases the sense of powerlessness in the latter to better things. Secondly, and maybe more importantly, she defies any justification of this paralysing acceptability of powerlessness. Fanaticism—or whatever agreeable name one might prefer to give it—is none other than that which may fuel rebellion against hegemony. It is the conviction of one's right to be treated with dignity.

"I confess," Evita concedes, "that I do not grieve so much the hatred of [Freedom's] enemies as the coldness and indifference of those who should have been friends of [its] marvelous cause."

Amanda Falzon, from Melleiha, acquired a BA (Hons) in Politics, Philosophy and Economics by correspondence from The Open University (UK).

Why should Christians be Marxists, and Marxists *not* be Christians?

By Elise Scerri

Some would call this subject controversial. I call it critical. Not that I care about Christians or Marxists. What I care is about our political society. However, since it seems that there are quite a number of Christians around, or rather, since most Maltese and Gozitans seem to think they possess a Christian tradition—meaning, cultural mores rooted in Christianity—I keep wondering why they seem to be unable to analyse the world in a more politically coherent manner; why they seem to keep getting it wrong.

Now, since I consider anyone having a minimum of Marxist instruction to be, if certainly not fully qualified, at least on the right track towards analysing the complex social world more or less soundly, or rather, as someone who has a modicum of the right potential to politically analyse the world *at all*, it follows that my aspiration of seeing Christians become Marxists is not such a long shot, after all. Or is it?

You may say that I *do* care about Christians, nonetheless. I suppose I do. As long as they keep to the philosophy of that amazing teacher of theirs, and not turn him on his head, as they seem to be quite intent on doing. Mind you, I don't want anything to do with their rites and ceremonies, their petty get-togethers or their moralising orations. Brrrrrrr, these give me the shivers.

The fact is that I think Christians have such great potential—ideally speaking, of course—that I consider it a truly lamentable waste to see them take the wide road. Also, they surprize me, for sure. For I really cannot fathom how they can read the teachings of their master so keenly *and* misunderstand him so unequivocally from top to bottom. How is it done? Where did it all go wrong? And please, do not give me that Constantine crap.

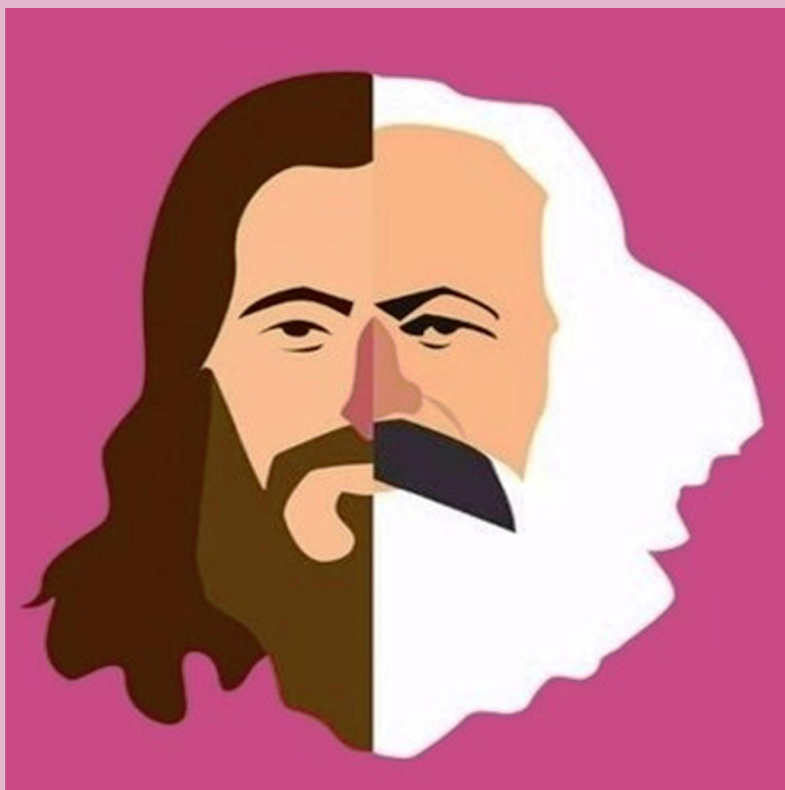
As you might have guessed, in all of this I

am not interested in Marxism at all. At least, not as a system of political organisation. For, in whatever guise it comes, its propagators most likely have made a parody of *their* teacher and master as much as the Christians made of theirs. What I'm mostly interested in is Marx's technique of political and social analysis. This is what impresses me most in him, and I retain it to be his most original and lasting contribution to science and to humankind's welfare. Marx gave us, in my view, what is probably the most valuable and helpful tool with which to analyse the systems, processes and structures of the social and political world. It seems to me that he succeeded where others have failed.

This is what I keenly desire Christians to learn. How to understand the material world. How to make heads and tails of its complexity as to be better equipped, even properly equipped, to deal with modern humanity and its ailments (or sin, if you like).

To do this successfully, I submit, they should be 'Marxists' in the sense I explained above. That is, mastering the techniques of interpretation proposed by Marx with which the world opens up to their comprehension. I am sure that they will find that their lord and master has a lot to say to such a world since, I further submit, his perception of the world and his vision for it was not short of the revelatory skills similar to Marx's.

No, I do not compare Jesus to Marx or vice versa. Far from it. I admire Jesus as much as Marx, perhaps more. What I *do* compare is



Jesus/Marx, poster by Natan Nakel for Brazilian Glocal theatrical group (2016).



Warm embrace,
cartoon by A.F. Branco for
The Guardian (2015).

Jesus' followers to Marx, and how the former are blind to the latitude the latter can give them when it comes to 'looking' at the world.

Christians who are incompetent or even incapacitated to evaluate the world correctly, or *at all*, are unworthy of their master. They do him disservice.

Of course, if I do not consider most Christians to have any aptitude to analyse the world comprehensively, it follows that I do not want Marxists—or anyone else, for that matter—to be anything like them.

Yes, Christians might have a 'spiritual' mission to accomplish, namely to attest for Jesus' values and ideals, and, yes, their main objective might be to deliver the world from 'sin' (both in personal and universal meaning, including social and political). Nevertheless, this must certainly mean that they should not be ignorant of how the world ticks.

Far from unreservedly endorsing something like Jacques Ellul's *L'Idéologie Marxiste Chrétienne* (1979; published in English as *Jesus and Marx*), I find myself paying more attention to the present pope, Francis, who seems to understand all of this better than anyone. Whether he's making any headway at all is another question.

Not far back, American journalist George Neumayr, the author of *The Political Pope* (2017), observed that Francis "has turned the Vatican into, almost, an annex of Greenpeace and the Sierra Club. He's also been a great advocate for La Raza style open borders and, of course, he's a strong voice for the global left in terms of promoting socialism" (CBS report, May 2017).

This may be over the top, really, but it does say something. Not about the pope as such but rather about how Christians should be sharpening their wits to meet the modern, neoliberal, capitalistic world and its 'situation of sin' without compunction.

Christians, pull your socks up!

Elise Scerri, from San Gwann, is very much involved in social activism. Her passion for Philosophy was indulged by studying dissident literature.

philosophy in Malta

SNIPPETS FROM HISTORY



A philosopher snubbed

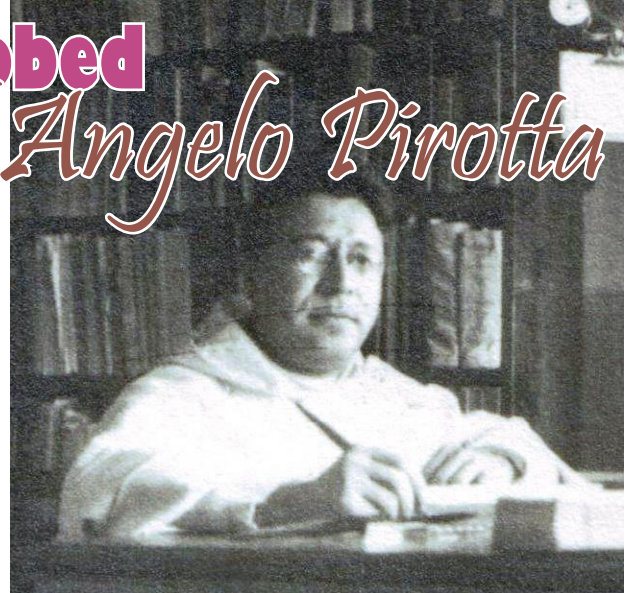
The sad story of Angelo Pirotta

The past is never just a chronicle of happy occasions, as the story we are about to relate bears witness. Nonetheless, when things go wrong—and they very often *do*—philosophers are perhaps expected to take them ‘philosophically’.

What this should probably mean is that, though battered and hurt, they rationalise the situation at hand and, in good time, sublimate it as best they can in order to veer themselves away from enduring feelings of rancour and distress. Of course, philosophers are not immune to suffering. However, as Aristotle says (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1, XI; 1000b: 13–4), “nobility of the soul is shown when a man bears and digests many and great misfortunes, not from insensibility, but because he is generous and magnanimous”.

The story we have here takes us back to 1938. It involved the philosopher Angelo Pirotta (1894–1956), a Dominican friar who by then was well-established as a highly respected academic and intellectual both in Malta and abroad.

It so happened that in that year, 1938, the respectable sixty-six year old Carmelite philosopher, Anastasio Cuschieri, was about to retire from Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the Royal University of Malta. He had held the office for a full thirty-eight years (since 1901). As was proper, a call for applications was issued. Professor Pirotta was one of the contenders, having submitted a dossier running into many pages and a load of supporting material, including five large volumes of his philosophical publications, and even an endorsement by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli



(later Pope Pius XII). This application was (and could not be) matched by any other local applicant.

Nonetheless, another candidate was put forward. It was Saviour Grima, a diocesan priest who, though a Doctor of Philosophy and of Theology, and a Master of Canon Law, had not a *single* scientific publication to his name. As it happened, however, he was secretly groomed for the post by the priests involved, and by the university Senate, well before the call for applications was issued.

Though Pirotta’s application was almost impossible to refuse, refused it *was*! Grima was appointed in his stead, even if he had to undergo some studies abroad to complete the requirements of his new office.

The rejection was not only a humiliation to Pirotta but, moreover, an insult. Grima himself was mortified. Nevertheless, as a true philosopher, Pirotta behaved stoically. He took the rebuff most gracefully, even if it proved to be difficult to digest.

Of course, the end result was that the then Faculty of Philosophy was denied of one of the most brilliant minds on the island at the time. Politics, as often happens here, had once more seen to that.

BEATIFIED LYING

Make-belief and truthfulness in the democratic imaginary

The 6th edition of the Annual Philosophy Lecture promises to be a smasher! Prof. John Baldacchino takes on democracy and questions, as any philosopher must, its underpinnings.

Professor Baldacchino is the Director of the Arts Institute at the University of Madison-Wisconsin, United States of America. Previously he served as an academic at the universities of Dundee (Scotland), Falmouth (England), Columbia (New York), Robert Gordon (Scotland) and Warwick (England). He specialises in art, philosophy, politics, and education.

The annual lecture will argue that the act of lying has been gradually beatified as a political-aesthetic event. The beatification of lying inaugurated the substitution of democracy with what Baldacchino identifies with the society of myth. This is possible because in the language of myth the process by which lying is structured as a polity of representation is mostly taken in its state of immediacy. As such, the practice of lying now deceives itself in that its validation comes from a procedure that lost its mediating virtue. This is to say that, in their beatified state, lies and acts of lying are no longer virtuous, and less so effective in their pursuit of fairness and democracy.

Equipped with comprehensive teaching experience in British and American systems of education spanning across primary, secondary and tertiary levels, Professor Baldacchino's research interests converge on society, the

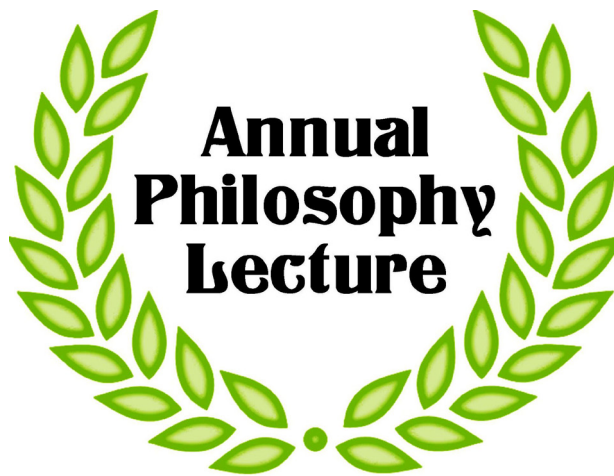
school, and the polity through a concern for philosophy and the arts, their ethical-formative roles within and beyond the school; pedagogy, innovation and creativity; educational politics and their cultural condition.

Philosophically speaking, the annual lecture will explore how and why lies have become meaningless to the polity because no one believes a lie anymore. The lie is now misconstrued by mechanisms of deception and lost its ability to become truthful. To understand this apparent paradox one needs to recognise how the polity of representation has been reduced to a positivist structure where facts are artefacts and deception suffers the same fate as knowledge, which is reduced to an epistemology that lacks any gnoseological value.

Professor Baldacchino's books include *Post-Marxist Marxism* (1996), *Easels of Utopia* (1998), *Avant-Nostalgia* (2002), *Education Beyond Education* (2009), *Art's Way Out* (2012), *Mediterranean Art Education* (2013), *Democracy Without Confession* (2013), and *John Dewey* (2014). He is also the editor of *Histories and Philosophies*, The Wiley Blackwell's *Encyclopaedia of Art & Design Education* (2018).

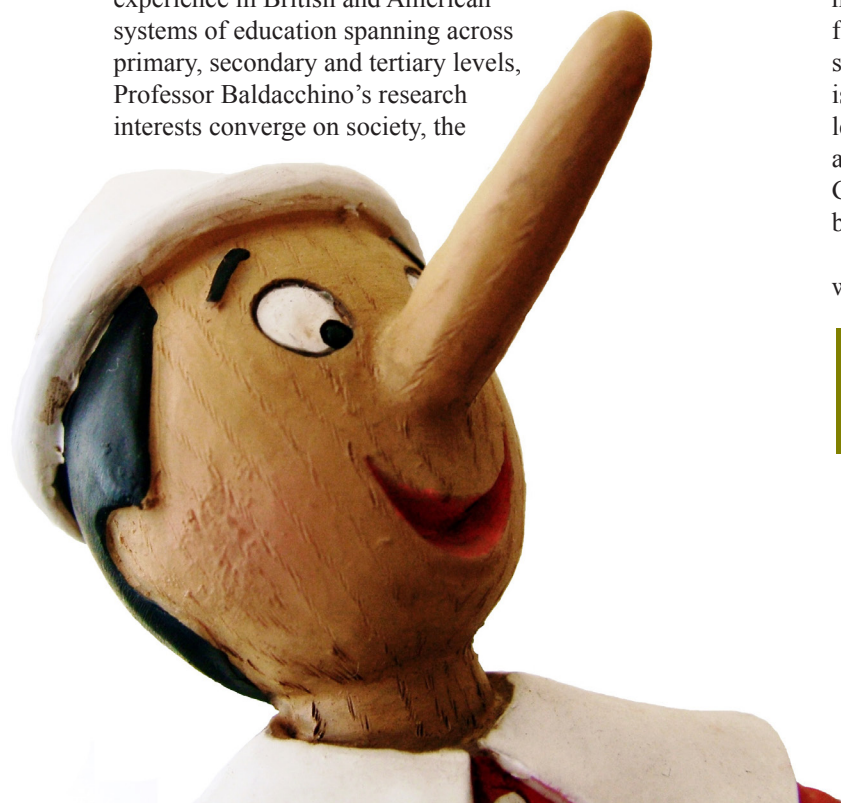
In this lecture Professor Baldacchino will argue that: Firstly, just like truth, the lie is no longer dialectical, but has become relational. Secondly, forms of instrumentalised forms of relationality have become commonplace in the structure of representation. Thirdly, relational representation is acting as a surrogate form of relativism where the vacuum left by the retreat of the virtuous lie has weakened democracy and any other form of societal living to the extent that, what Gillian Rose aptly calls "the fascism of representation", has become a way of life with all the consequences thereof.

Professor Baldacchino's website can be accessed at www.johnbaldacchino.com.



Phoenicia Hotel, Floriana
Friday, 16 March 2018
7.30 PM - 9.00 PM

Proceedings in English
All invited
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Delivered by: Dr Mark Montebello
Dates: 2 till 30 April, 2018



This is not a course of spirituality or on Christian beliefs. It is strictly philosophical. Please do not attend if to deepen your faith is your intention, for the course might not help in this regard. The course will particularly go into the anthropology, politics, and ethics of Jesus' teachings.

Members of the foundation, registered students and seniors enrol for only €15 for each course. Everyone else for €25 for each course. Special reduction on attendance of more than one course. Enrolment is done at first attendance. More details: www.philosophysharing.org



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the gozo experience

By Marta Obiols Fornell

In Spanish we usually say '*Sin prisa, pero sin pausa*', which literally means: 'without hurry but without pause'. It is true that our organisation has been moving slowly, but it also had a constant thrust, trying to achieve as much as possible in the Gozitan social panorama. We keep up our monthly talks, now in a more relaxed and distended environment at the new Restaurant Sinatra at Circolo Gozitano at Victoria. The talks have become more participative and engaging. In November Gabriel Gauci talked about Philosophy as a way of life, rather than a mere intellectual academic exercise without implications about how to live. In December we launched a debate within the '16 days of Activism' campaign about gender violence. The title was 'Can violence be love?'. Different voices rose trying to understand why we can reach a point of no return in the name of love.

As a group we thirst for Philosophy as something that it is burning in our brains and hearts. We want to become more active and get in touch with the written source of Philosophy at first hand: reading the philosophers we consider that

have something to say today to us. For this reason, every third Friday of each month we meet up in a bar to share and discuss a text previously agreed upon ... and read. We call it our 'pizza meeting'! Philosophy makes us want more, ask for more ... without ever being satisfied. If you would like to join, don't hesitate, give it a try and contact us: philosophysharinggozo@gmail.com

We would consider it a failure had if we do not succeed in creating philosophical controversy around different topics that affect us: as individuals and collectively. What is an institution if it's not driven by its own motivation? Who is interested in an empty structure? The fact that we don't have to please anyone or behave as expected or wait for any applause gives us plenty of freedom. What a world of possibilities is in front of us! We hope we will manage to hold our commitment high and enjoy it as long as it last in this way.

Ah! Finally, just to remind you, we still have some philosophical books at the Inspire Charity Shop (Triq Fortunato Mizzi, 103). Better to go, before they are all gone!

Below: The public meeting delivered by Gabriel Gauci last November on Philosophy as a Way of Life.





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A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

Throughout the past months a thorough critical analysis of the Foundation's operations and rationale was underway as part of an exercise to help the Foundation continue to thrive and flourish. A broad-based questionnaire, of which you can find a summary of its results on the next page, was part of this exercise.

Since its establishment in 2012, the Foundation has mostly concentrated on organising public activities which could be relied upon for their quality and consistency. The activities mainly consisted of monthly public talks in Malta and Gozo, short courses and this tri-annual magazine. However, though the Foundation consistently had a number of members, at times reaching a maximum of about a hundred, these were generally not directly involved in decision making processes, which were mostly confined to elected Steering Teams in Malta and Gozo.

Though useful for the launching and stabilisation of the Foundation within the local public educational sphere, this structure and mode of operation kept its members more or less structurally marginalised. It also seemed to hamper recruitment due to lack of membership incentives and benefits.

The Strategic Plan which is put together, and which makes projections for 2018–20, intends to bring about a structural change which should enhance members' tactical importance by placing them at the very core of the organisation's operations. In this way, it is hoped that this new perspective would eventually transform the Foundation from an activity-based organisation, as it has been up till now, to one which is member-based and member-driven.

The Plan will be brought before the Foundation's Annual General Meeting for approval in February 2018.

Apart of the general aim of the proposed Strategic Plan, as explained above, it also goes into five other main areas, namely, the Foundation's organisational structure, its operational objectives, its website, its international association, and its financial policies.

With regard to its organisational structure, the Plan mainly seeks to define the level of autonomy of the respective Malta and Gozo branches, and their relation to each other. The foremost operational objective identified is to increase annual memberships to around 350 in Malta, and around 150 in Gozo. Further, the Foundation's website is projected to become a cyber hub of activity. With regard to international relations, the plan is to establish effective international connections in view of the Foundation becoming increasingly recognisable abroad as a local philosophical partner, having foreign support, supporting foreign initiatives, and making a presence in international fora. As for financial policies, the major targets are for the Foundation to be commercially self-sufficient, to adequately meet the costs of a professional management set-up, events, activities, publications, information dissemination, and attracting high quality speakers and lecturers, and, finally, to make an annual surplus to fund the Foundation's long-term objectives.

The Plan is certainly ambitious. Though it aims high in terms of adjustment and refinement, it also retains a sense of reality and limitation. Reticence or timidity are not on its books.





By Ian Rizzo

As an initial step in an effort to make the Philosophy Sharing Foundation more membership driven, an online survey was sent to the present registered paid-up members of the Foundation and further persons who are on the Foundation's e-mailing list.

The survey was first sent on 18 October 2017, and closed for analysis and reporting on the following 8 November. The Foundation received a 39% response, which, as surveys go, was quite satisfactory.

Profile of Respondents

The age of respondents were evenly spread amongst the 30, 40, 50, 60 and 70+ age group. As regards occupational background, the most representative were in the education sector (25%) and pensioners/retired persons (21%) with the remaining being thinly spread in other professional areas.

Although 68% of respondents had an academic qualification from a first degree upwards, only 14% of respondents were qualified from such a level in philosophy. 61% of respondents confirmed in the survey that they are philosophy enthusiasts and this indeed highlights the potential beneficial role of the Foundation in promoting philosophical interest to persons with a wide diversity of professional and educational backgrounds.

Philosophical Interests

When respondents were asked to list their favourite subjects in philosophy, the following preferences resulted, the top being political philosophy (54%), philosophy of religion (36%) and contemporary philosophy (36%). Others were Ethics, and Existentialism.

As regards the favourite philosophers of respondents in this survey, the following topped the list: Nietzsche (29%), Plato (25%), Sartre (18%) and Socrates (18%). Others included Russell and Kant.

The table below displays the level of participation and satisfaction of the Foundation's activities.

There were two other interesting observations obtained from the survey that the Foundation will be duly taking note of. When respondents were asked to rate their present level of engagement with the Foundation on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 10 (the highest), the average score turned out to be 5.67. On the same scale, when respondents were asked to rate their level of likeliness in recommending membership of the Foundation to their friends and colleagues, the average score reached a positive 7.53.

Various recommended improvements and suggested themes for future talks, courses and conferences were proposed in this survey. The Foundation will be taking them all into serious consideration while thanking all respondents for such valuable insights.

| Foundation activities | Percentage of Respondents | Average satisfaction (1=lowest, 10=highest) |
|--|---------------------------|--|
| Attendance of at least one Public Talk over past two years | 75% | 7.43 |
| Attendance of at least one Course over the past two years | 46% | 7.69 |
| Attendance of the last Annual Conference – 'Politics by Twitter' held on 8 March 2017 | 21% | 7.33 |
| Read at least one article in full from last SHARE Magazine issue no.6 | 68% | 8.05 |

