Things as They Seem

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Abstract
I respond to the five papers of criticism in this issue of *Philosophy*. I argue that my cognitive dualism, which may be open to the theological objections levelled by Fiona Ellis, is vindicated by its ability to explain both freedom and inter-personal relations. I defend the inter-subjectivity of aesthetic judgment against Simon Blackburn's argument from 'the acquaintance principle', and my vision of cultural decline against the sceptical arguments of Samuel Hughes. The crucial role played by subjectivity in my fiction, discussed by Alicja Gescinska, enables me to add to David McPherson's account of existential conservatism, with which I largely concur. I end on a note of puzzlement, as to why such innocent arguments should be the target of such implacable hatred.

I am grateful for the many insights and objections offered by the contributors to this volume, and welcome the opportunity to address the issues that they raise. Their arguments cover a lifetime of creative endeavour, from my early study of aesthetics, *Art and Imagination* (1974), to the latest explorations of cognitive dualism (*The Soul of the World,* 2013) and the conservative approach to politics (*How to be a Conservative*, 2014). I am especially glad of the opportunity to address the important question raised by Alicja Gescinska, as to how my philosophical outlook is expressed in artistic and literary form, since this has always been central to my own conception of what I am doing. Although I was educated as an analytical philosopher, and regard the analytical tradition with the greatest respect, I see my work in continental terms, as part of a literary endeavour in which fictional narratives and metaphysical speculations arise side by side from the attempt to make sense of the world.

Fiona Ellis approaches my cognitive dualism from the perspective of the philosophy of religion and this leads her to cast considerable doubt on my conclusion that there can be two incommensurable ways of understanding a single reality, and that one of those ways opens an avenue to the divine. I am sure she is right to be sceptical of my position, and when it comes to its theological implications I have never been as clear as I would like to be. On the other hand, I don't believe that it is necessary, for my position, to settle the question of God's presence in, absence from or conjunctive connection to the world as science describes it, and I think it is worth saying why.

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As Ellis rightly perceives I do not wish to set limits to scientific enquiry or to commit myself to the existence of a 'world beyond science', that is either unknowable in itself or knowable only in some non-scientific way. I see the world as Kant sees it in the first *Critique*, as the sum of empirical reality, contained within the one-sided boundary drawn by scientific inference. Yet I also think there is an aspect of this world that science does not reveal, and the attempt to summarise this aspect in scientific categories is what I dismiss as 'scientism'. The aspect in question is what Kant has in mind in his philosophy of transcendental freedom, and my recent philosophy is really an attempt to up-date Kant's account in the light of a more Hegelian conception of human relations. My purpose in doing so is not to make room for religion in any traditional sense, but to make room for the person.

I take the concept of the person to be foundational for our understanding of each other, and for our conception of the meaning and value of our experience. And I believe that this concept slips from our grasp when we see human beings as biological organisms governed by cerebral algorithms, programmed as though by Derek Parfitt, with the software of some platitudinous 'moral arithmetic'. Against that view I argue for a concept of the person founded in the I-You relationship, as this has been developed by Hegel, Buber, Levinas and more recently Stephen Darwall. I see the I-You relationship as situated in what Sellars called 'the space of reasons' – in other words in a network of concepts devoted to answering the question 'why?', when this question asks for reasons and meanings, rather than causes. The I-You relation is one of accountability, and cannot be summarised in terms derived from scientific explanation alone. I spell this out in *On Human Nature*, 2017, where I develop an emergent theory of the human person. And I contrast this theory with the scientistic view that Paul Churchland calls 'eliminative materialism'.

I argue that 'the personal is not an *addition* to the biological: it emerges *from* it, in something like the way the face emerges from the coloured patches on a canvas'. It emerges in response to the special kinds of question and special methods of enquiry that constitute the inter-personal point of view. It is in terms of those special methods of enquiry that my cognitive dualism should be characterised. The test case for this cognitive dualism is not the one that Ellis considers – the case of the relation between God and the world. It is the case of the relation between free beings and their bodies. The reason why there is a problem of free will is that the conceptual framework through which responsibility is attributed to a

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person is incommensurable with the framework though which the neurological causality of that person's movements might be explained. This I try to show in *The Face of God*, from a consideration of Libet's celebrated experiments concerning the moment of intentional action. The correct conclusion from those experiments, in my view, is that there is no theory that can connect the description of what the person is doing, with the description of what is happening in his cortex, in such a way that the first can be explained by the second. Some of the arguments here have been developed by Peter Hacker and Max Bennett in *The Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience*, a book that has been wilfully neglected by philosophers.

From the starting point of cognitive dualism I develop a theory of subjectivity – of the 'I' notion, as displayed in first-person awareness, and second-person enquiry. Ellis recognizes the importance of the first-person in the argument of *Sexual Desire* (1986), but is worried by the quasi-Cartesian account of it that I there seem to provide. In fact, I have always been suspicious of the Cartesian account, and have held that Wittgenstein's 'private language argument' is a decisive refutation of any attempt to 'reify' the self. However, and increasingly in recent work, I have come to the view that, while the idea of an 'inner self', as object of awareness, is incoherent, there is more to subjectivity than the mere use of the first person pronoun. The idea of a subjective horizon from which we address each other is, I argue, an ineliminable part of the I-Thou relation. That horizon is in some way revealed in our words, looks and gestures, and we direct our responses to it, to the place which we cannot reach and where only the other can stand. This peculiar fact grounds what I call the 'over-reaching intentionality' of our interpersonal attitudes, and it is precisely this over-reaching intentionality, directed not to another human being, but to the world as a whole, that is at the root of the religious experience. The result is not an intransitive faith, but a relational faith, whose object is the pure subjectivity of God – the faith of a Kierkegaard or a Rumi.

You don't have to go so far as to think we can, in that way, direct our inter-personal cognition to the world as a whole. It suffices that there is a way of representing the world that derives from our inter-personal categories, and which, as it were, prizes it free from science. It is the world as so represented that I call, following Husserl, the *Lebenswelt*, and I regard philosophy as an exploration of the *Lebenswelt*, so as to discover the concepts and categories that make inter-personal being possible. I see both Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and Heidegger's *Being and Time* as works of philosophy in this sense. That is why I also see aesthetics as a central part of philosophy, and

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the neglect of aesthetics as one of the reasons for the decline of philosophy in the anglophone world. Aesthetics explores the way in which the world delivers itself to consciousness. It is about the realm of *seeming*, and what seeming means.

This brings me to the interesting and sensitive article by Simon Blackburn, which starts off from a principle, first formulated by Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* and given canonical expression in our time by Richard Wollheim as 'the acquaintance principle'. This is the principle that judgments of aesthetic value cannot be made at second hand, but must always be grounded in acquaintance – in other words in the direct experience of the sound, look or feel of the thing. Blackburn connects this principle with the distinction between propositional knowledge (knowledge *that*) and knowledge by acquaintance; and he upholds Frege's important observation that propositions exist objectively, detached from the feelings and associations that might accompany the thought of them. As Blackburn acknowledges, I make much of this distinction in *Art and Imagination*, arguing that the cognitive significance of works of art lies in what they show, as much as what they tell, and using this to develop a theory of the distinction between representation and expression.

Blackburn goes on to connect the acquaintance principle with Hume's thoughts in 'Of the Standard of Taste', concerning the perceptual capacities of the ideal critic. Art, Blackburn suggests, is an object of experience, and its value lies in the experience. If there is knowledge contained in art it is not propositional knowledge, which comes in 'sentence-sized packages wrapped in public language', but the kind of perceptual knowledge that is exemplified by recognition – as when a bird-watcher recognizes the species of a bird, or a wine-critic recognizes the grape in the glass. In places it seems as though Blackburn is generalizing the acquaintance principle to cover all forms of sensory discrimination, so that it is not special to aesthetic judgment, but simply the basic law of taste, in all its forms.

Here is where I would wish to return to Kant's discussion. For Kant the acquaintance principle was one half of an antinomy, the other half of which was given by the universality of aesthetic judgment. It is true that you must experience the object of aesthetic judgment for yourself, and that the ground of the judgment is always a subjective impression. But, argued Kant, what makes the result a genuine *judgment* is precisely that you do not refer it merely to your own subjective preference, but regard it as valid for all rational beings. Your judgment does not take the form 'this is beautiful for me', but 'this is beautiful, simpliciter'. In aesthetic judgment, he

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insisted, we are 'suitors for agreement', holding forth our subjective experience as a valid response to the object as it is in itself. The antinomy consists in the conflict between the subjective ground and the universal conclusion. The first, for Kant, requires that aesthetic judgment be 'free from concepts'; the second that it be founded in reasoning and therefore be expressed in concepts.

Kant's position is extreme, and one might wish to retreat from the claim that aesthetic judgments are universal and to argue, instead, that they are aimed at consensus, the kind of consensus that constitutes a cultural tradition. Nevertheless, what makes Kant's position so appealing is that it shows why we value the objects of aesthetic judgment as we do, searching in them for the connections to human life that will justify the elevated place that beauty plays in our wider attempt at home-building. I have argued in this connexion for a radical distinction of intentionality, between aesthetic experiences and the experiences of sensory connoisseurship, such as those discussed by wine critics.[1] Aesthetic experiences are connected to their content not by association but by presentation. They are *about* their content, while the taste in the glass, whatever its associations, is about nothing, not even itself. Hence we can argue about the meaning of a work of art, and can persuade others to our point of view in something like the way we can persuade them to see another aspect in an ambiguous figure. The role of imagination in capturing a thought, and presenting it in sensory form, is the underlying topic of *Art and Imagination*, and the nature and significance of this imaginative capture remains, for me, the central topic of aesthetics. The true critic shows not only how an idea, a feeling or a state of mind is captured by the sensory forms of the art-work, but also how the result enters and transforms our perception of the world. Such is exemplified by the remark of André Gide, quoted to such effect by Blackburn, that the still-lives of Chardin show 'la vie silencieuse des objets'.

The question of the precise standing of aesthetic judgment, in the scale that ranges from the Facebook 'like' to the scientific 'proven', takes the topic of imaginative capture a stage further. To take two more of Blackburn's examples, Leavis's damning criticism of *Calais Beach* shows that the poem, through its lazy and cliché-ridden style – does not capture what it purports to express. Its failure is a matter of *form*. Nietzsche's criticism of Wagner, by contrast, shows that the works *do* capture the excited and neurotic states of mind that Nietzsche discerns in them, and that this is

[1] See *I Drink Therefore I am*, Contiuum, 2009.

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precisely what is wrong with them. Their failure is a failure of *content*, not of form. And they illustrate the two principal ways in which works of art may fail. However, Blackburn goes on to say, of the Wagner example, that Nietzsche's opinion, which he shares, is not the only legitimate opinion, that in cases like this two equally sound and equally persuasive opinions may compete for our endorsement and, in the last analysis, there can be no closer approach to objective validity than that implies. And this raises again Hume's question, of what might be meant by a 'standard of taste'.

Here and there Blackburn quotes approvingly T.S. Eliot's view of criticism, as a 'common pursuit of true judgment'. By 'true' Eliot does not mean 'true to the facts'. True judgment is judgment in the spirit of Hume, in which the critic is maximally and sincerely responsive to what the work of art has to say to us. By 'common pursuit' Eliot means the search for a consensus, rather than an independent standard. Critics might come up with rules, like the 'unities' of French classical theatre or the common practice of Western harmony. But they will be *a posteriori* principles, summaries of what has been accepted and built upon by those who have created or responded to the relevant works of art. Such *a posteriori* principles define a *tradition*, and they are flexible and adaptable in the manner of all living traditions. The aim of judgment is to understand works of art in relation to the tradition that contains them, to set them side by side with the 'touchstones', to use Matthew Arnold's image, and to weigh them for what is genuine and durable in their message. To speak of 'objectivity' here is to mistake the nature of the critical enterprise. The goal is intersubjectivity, leading to a store of cultural knowledge, which will be also a form of belonging, a way in which we share our artistic heritage .

Moreover, there is no difficulty in maintaining, as Blackburn does, that two equally plausible critical views may exist side by side in the critical legacy. As in every imaginative process there can be double aspects in art, and what strikes us as tragic one day may appear comic the next; what is urgent and life-changing at one moment may switch to banal and pointless a moment later. It is up to the critic to justify any particular view of the work, and to describe it in such a way that the preferred aspect becomes stable and compelling. That is what I have tried to do with *Tristan und Isolde* and also with *The Ring*, partly by way of rebutting Nietzsche's scepticism.

On the other hand Wagner is undoubtedly a problem case, and one that takes us straight to the issues discussed by Samuel Hughes, in his interesting account of my rival theories of tradition and cultural decline. Hughes argues that I give two accounts of the flight from

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tradition and the rise of the transgressive forms of modernist art. One version speaks of the way in which so much 19th century art failed to recognize that the old sacramental meanings were no longer available, and in trying to express them nevertheless declined to fakery and kitsch, as in the religious art of the pre-Raphaelites or the musical evocations of Albert Ketèlbey. The other version speaks of the banalisation of artistic idioms and forms, which become vacant and mechanical and so incapable of expressing either the old life of sacraments or the new life of modern disillusion. Modernism arises from the rejection of those worn-out forms, and the adoption of new artistic idioms that permit the truthful confrontation with modern life, without the baggage of banality and kitsch. The result may be ugly or transgressive, but such is modern life.

Hughes discerns in both accounts the vestiges of an end-of-art thesis, of the kind first proposed by Hegel and made foundational to modern aesthetics by Arthur Danto. But, as he recognizes, there is more going on than that implies, and my two accounts of the flight from tradition are not merely records of decline but also attempts to find a way to resurrection. This partly explains the importance of Wagner in my thinking. Wagner was perhaps the first great artist to have a sense of the essential historicity of art. Like his mentor Hegel, he believed that history unfolds by a kind of necessity from one epoch to the next, and that the possibilities of expression must keep pace with the evolving experience that provides their content. Old idioms decline, become moribund and academic, and will die if they are not renewed. They are renewed, Wagner thought, from the fount of popular sentiment, as he sets out to dramatise in the last act of *Die Meistersinger*, and if this renewal does not take place then the result is a sterile and mechanical art, which has fallen out of communication with the public.

The danger of that historicist view of things is that it leads to the empty avant-gardism of so much modern art, in which novelty of form disguises a banality of content – a uniform pursuit of the shocking and the transgressive for their own sake, and without any real attempt to show what they mean. Whatever we think of Wagner we should acknowledge that his exploration of new musical forms was impelled by the attempt not just to convey modern life in all its stress but also to provide it with a kind of closure – a 'redemption' (*Erlösung*) to use his favourite word. Art, for Wagner, as for so many of his post-romantic contemporaries, was a profoundly serious exercise, the one spiritual recourse available to us in a world of declining faith. My genealogies of the passage from tradition to modernity are really attempts to say what that exercise involves,

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and to ask the question whether it remains available to us in our consumerist age.

Can there be such an aesthetic redemption of the world, so as to overcome its alien and threatening quality, and restore our ways of belonging? The possibility of this has inspired my literary writings, whose underlying theme of home and homecoming is well set out by Alicja Gescinska. Art is not just an amusement, a source of pleasure and distraction. For all that we might wish to conclude concerning the connection between art and experience, art also has a cognitive dimension. Works of art *show* the world to us, and make connections in experience that we could not easily make through abstract thinking alone. (A well-known illustration of this is given by metaphor, which involves an imaginative leap from one thing to another so as to *create* the connection between them.) Our experience of art fills out the *Lebenswelt* as a web of meaningful connections, so making the world familiar to us as an object of our own emotions. We don't learn a theory of jealousy from *Othello*, but we are shown how it colours the world completely, traps its victim in a snare of suspicions, and enables a sinister nothingness to triumph over love and duty. We are shown what jealousy is *like*, taken into the very heart of it, so as to be acquainted with its subjective reality.

This 'knowledge what it is like' is not to be assimilated to 'knowledge by description' or to the 'knowledge how' of the philosophers. It is a direct and non-translatable *given*, made available by our imaginary encounter with the other so as to know his or her state of mind from within. It is the great gift of art in our tradition, and why art, properly understood, completes the work of philosophy, by revealing the subjective meaning of the world. Gescinska shows this very clearly in her survey of my literary works, in which I have explored what it is like to search for home, to reach it and to lose it, in the fragmented reality of our world today. She rightly suggests that the theme of home unites my fiction and my philosophy, and that both should be seen as explorations of the concept that lies at the heart of my cognitive dualism – the concept of the person. As she argues, the same concepts of person and home underlie my complaints against architectural modernism. I see the modernist emphasis on mechanism and function, at the expense of fittingness and harmony, as a kind of scientism, at odds with the inter-personal feelings which are the true motive for building. Much of my cultural criticism is, as she discerns, an attack on the mechanistic ways of thinking and feeling that have marginalised the subjective aspect of personal life. And my fiction is an attempt to restore that subjective aspect, and to show how it might unfold towards some kind of fulfilment, as it does for

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Sharon in *The Disappeared*. It is a response to the 'depersonalisation' of our world – a response in Sharon's case to rape and enslavement – and an attempt to find the places where love and nobility can flourish.

Gescinska connects those themes with a concept that animates *Green Philosophy* (2009), a book that I wrote in response to the environmental agenda. This concept is *oikophilia*, the love of the *oikos,* which, to me, is the foundation of any coherent environmental philosophy, and which Gescinska rightly links to the love of beauty, as one of its manifestations. Zoë in *A Dove Descending*, Betka in *Notes from Underground* and Sharon in *The Disappeared* are all oikophiles without an oikos. But oikophilia, properly exercised in circumstances in which it can find fulfilment and joy, is the root of community, and, as Gescinska notes, the heart of my conservative philosophy too.

This point is made in other terms by David McPherson, in his account of what he calls my 'existential conservatism', which he identifies as an attitude distinct from political conservatism. He interestingly compares my political conservatism with the luck egalitarianism of G.A. Cohen, arguing that both of us are existential conservatives. By this he means that we both are guided by respect for the given – what is naturally given, and also what is culturally and politically given. McPherson's description of this posture is subtle and persuasive, and I entirely agree that this respect for the given is at the heart of the *affirmation* that is the core of conservatism. I also agree that it is present in Cohen's later work just as much as in mine. And I am persuaded by the way in which McPherson traces it in G.K. Chesterton and Michael Oakeshott, as well as Pieper and Burke. The result is, to my mind, a major statement of the metaphysical heart of the conservative worldview.

Cohen's account of intrinsic value raises a further question about existential conservatism. As Cohen rightly argues, when we attribute intrinsic value to something, we do not value it merely for the intrinsic value that it possesses: it is not replaceable by another thing, with the same intrinsic value. We value *it*, for what it is, and are attached to it for that very reason. Cohen takes the example of attachment to one's present house, and the reluctance to move from it. And he acknowledges that such attachments form the root of our experience of belonging. In this connection Simon May, to whom McPherson refers in a footnote, has written eloquently of the 'ontological rootedness' which is at the heart of all our loves – the sense of depending on a person, a place or a community for the ground of one's being. And all these thoughts tend in a direction that is of the greatest relevance not only for political conservatism but also for the crisis through which

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our civilisation is passing, as globalisation and mass migration uproot the old identities and the old forms of belonging.

Existential conservatives are not merely attached to the 'given'; they *belong* to it, and experience their belonging as a kind of rescue from randomness and contingency. From this stems the longing for home and the desire to protect it as 'ours'. And in current circumstances those feelings are in the foreground of politics, as well as lying deep in our self-understanding. But, as I illustrate in *Souls in the Twilight*, these feelings, arising in a world of ontological uprootedness, lead to a profound loneliness. It is one task of fiction, it seems to me, to imagine the avenues out of that loneliness, and by imagining them, to make them possible. That is one reason why I think that existential conservatism, of my variety, leads of its own accord to the artistic enterprise.

McPherson writes eloquently of Cohen's 'luck egalitarianism', and is surely right to think that this is not only in conflict with existential conservatism, but also an inadequate basis for any account of social justice. Much of my own suspicion of the social justice agenda comes from the sense that it belongs to that 'metaphysical crusade against contingency' that David Wiggins discerns in the theories of Rawls. In accepting the 'given' one is accepting contingency in all its varieties. The task is not to smooth out the bumps into a 'level playing field' of advantage, but, as McPherson suggests, to provide the opportunities for each person to obtain what is sufficient. But those opportunities should not themselves be random; they should be part of a continuous exercise in home-building, by-products of an inherited community in which all members are included, knowing that they are side-by-side with others in the shared task of survival. The alternative is the struggle for domination, in a competitive free-for-all in which the only standard of justice is the 'envy test' espoused by Ronald Dworkin.

Here it should be said that I find the discussions of social justice in the tradition of Rawls to be singularly irrelevant to the real questions of political order in the world today. The background assumptions of Rawls's *Theory of Justice* are that goods come into the world unowned, that 'society' exists as a kind of distributive mechanism established by a social contract, and that the question of justice is simply a matter of who gets what in the ensuing hand-out. But goods come into existence because people strive for them and are therefore already marked by claims of ownership; 'society' is not an agent, and in any case exists prior to any alleged social contract; and the distribution of goods and advantages is only one of our concerns when living in a political community. There are far more

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important matters, both socially and politically – defence against enemies, religious submission and the problem of heresy, the duties of honour, piety and gratitude, the shared practices that Rawls marginalises as 'conceptions of the good' but without which no one would have much of a conception of anything. And all these other concerns are dismissed from the picture, in order to describe political order as a kind of universal welfare state, with everyone living at the level of assumed safety and unimpeded consumption that characterises the average American campus. So much of history has been taken for granted, and so much of the armchair speculation bypasses the real questions of how we live together at peace in real communities, that I am naturally disposed to think that we should move on from there, and embrace a new philosophical agenda when it comes to thinking about the foundation of political order. That is what I have tried to do.

Alas, however, I have not been loved for the attempt. Although I never intended to become the voice of intellectual conservatism there are so few contenders for that title in the intellectual world today that I have been singled out as the one who is principally to blame for the manifest defects of 'the given'. It is not an exaggeration to say that I have been more attacked than any living philosopher, for the most part by people who have neither read what I have written nor discovered what it is about. Character assassinations regularly appear in the national press, and the specialists in 'offense archaeology' have devoted much of their valuable time to my case. By way of helping them I have opened a 'sin bin' on my web-site in which my faults appear in easily digestible form. But it contains no reference to my principal failing, which is the one pointed out by Fiona Ellis. I have not, as I had hoped, found in cognitive dualism an escape route to the divine. All I have managed in that direction is to discover the real place of forgiveness in a world where persecution is the norm. This is the theme of my next book, *Wagner's* Parsifal: *The Redeemer Redeemed*.

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