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Art, Sex and the State: a Reflection on Certain Encounters between Philosophical Thinking and the Real World

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ABSTRACT

This paper stems from the author's practical experiences in relation to the provision of educational opportunities and the facilitation of organizational development in a number of very different institutions and real-world settings. Contrasts between the realm of philosophical inquiry and that of people in their more usual contexts of practice are noted. Basic aspects of the nature of the 'real world' are outlined whilst the fact that philosophy has touched and influenced a great many aspects of the actual human condition is underlined. Murdoch's observation that philosophy is an 'unnatural activity' is referenced in order to sharpen the distinction between our everyday forms of discourse and those particular to philosophy itself. The reach and impact of philosophy is demonstrated as the paper moves on to consider how the fruits of philosophical thinking have come to shape a) the practices of an advanced contemporary form of art b) the appreciation rather than the denigration of human sexual behavior, and c) the emergence of recent totalitarian states - along with a note about the ideology of 'the American dream'. The specific examples included in the text invite further reflection on how philosophical thinking, either directly or indirectly, influences many other aspects of human existence and experience. The paper concludes with a sobering observation about the recurring human tendency to allow individual and communal desire to triumph over the achievements of reason. Written in a deliberately accessible style, the paper is intended to appeal to a readership beyond that of the philosophical community.

Keywords: Philosophical Discourses; The Real World; Philosophy and Literature; Conceptual Art; Sexual Conduct; The State

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1. Introduction

This essay is written against the background of the author's professional experiences as an applied academic working directly with people in a variety of institutional and educational settings. These included maximum security prisons, Colleges and Universities, 'high-tech' multinational corporations and retail businesses. The experiential grounding in these different cultural, social and economic realms surfaced marked contrasts between the types of discourse and the social norms prevailing within them. The academic conventions and ethos of the University, for example, differed from the intelligent adaptations made by people actively immersed in the particular practices of their distinct occupational and organizational cultures. These latter individuals were inclined to distinguish themselves as participants in the 'real world' on those occasions when they were presented with or encountered some of the debates, theories and analyses of academic philosophy. Philosophers, within or outside university departments, also participated in whatever it is that might be considered the 'real world'; however they practiced what Murdoch (1978) [1] thought was an 'unnatural' and intellectually unusual way of deliberating upon some named aspect of that world. Zizek (2022) [2] echoes Murdoch's view by observing that the kind of critical thinking exemplified by philosophers 'is an effort that goes against the grain of our spontaneous inclinations'. According to him, 'strong pressure is needed' if people are ever to reflect seriously and systematically on the validity of their beliefs and the nature of their fundamental assumptions.

Despite the fact that, prima facie, ordinary practical everydayness is contrasted with the impressive refinements and erudition of philosophical analysis - and the apparent separation of the one with the other - this essay takes as its subject a reflection on the relationship between philosophy and the real world. (See: End Note 1) In a limited way it explores what part philosophy or a distinct aspect of philosophy plays or has played in some of the actual situations of people. Three examples are chosen to illuminate this complex relationship: the first outlines the role philosophy has played in the emergence of a distinct category of 'advanced art' known as 'Conceptual'; the second features the articulation of an humanistic and sensitive philosophical perspective on human sexual activity; the third example concerns the ideas underlying the political design and subsequent manifestation of certain nation states. These examples show, following Bronowski and Mazlish (1963) [3], that the actual authentic, conventional or even iconoclastic discourses of philosophers have a practical influence which goes well beyond philosophy itself.

2. Setting the Scene

There is clearly something called the 'real world' - as it is named, framed, lived, taken-for-granted, experienced and understood by people. Within a part of that real world there emerged something called 'philosophy'. Standardly, Plato's dialogues (e.g. Whitehead, 1929) [4] and his works such as 'The Republic' can be taken as starting points in the unfolding intellectual history of Western philosophy. Whilst Plato's writings remain relatively accessible, subsequent developments in philosophical thinking and their expression were often so complex as to render them obscure. For a majority of people they remain simply incomprehensible: Kant's (1993) [5] 'Critique of Pure Reason' and Hegel's (2010) [6] 'Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences' are obvious examples. On top of this, as Ebels-Duggan (2011) [7] observes, the increasingly 'professionalized' discipline of philosophy, which has developed from the dawn of the 20th century onwards, has meant that the discourses of philosophy have become particularly esoteric in nature. Moreover, the contemporary ways of doing philosophy have tended to eschew or avoid addressing existential questions concerning the meaning of life, or, how best to live a life. Nor has there been seen an emphasis on explorations of our personal and social being as it is situated in the world. This latter set of questions has come to underpin and dominate some of the inquiries of psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, cultural theorists, social historians and all those domains of theory which take as their subject an aspect of the human condition.

In consequence, philosophy in the University departments, as the various inclusions in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy attest, presents itself as a highly specialized and technical enterprise. In consequence, it remains somewhat detached, rarefied, and (seemingly) remote from the actual problems of living faced by people across the

globe. In general, as Heidegger's (1962) [8] philosophical anthropology has emphasized, people are practical 'coping beings'; they are enmeshed in real-world situations which largely determine their actions and conduct. Philosophical considerations - such as the painstaking logical and rational analyses into, for example, the nature of knowledge, the categories of metaphysics or the study of ontology - are not generally at the forefront of people's minds as they confront the challenges of daily living. In addition, the fact that contemporary philosophy is disinclined to offer advice and guidance to people as they go about their disparate business in their 'real world' situations merely underlines its contrast with the varieties of home-spun practical wisdom deployed by ordinary people.

One exception to this might be those ways of life governed strictly by an unswerving spiritual commitment and a commensurate steadfast adherence to the doctrines and practices of an established system of religious belief. But contemporary western philosophy, whilst accepting the reality of religion as a highly significant anthropological phenomenon, does not itself rest on a secure belief in any sort of deity or deities (Frankena, 1973) [9]; it is not based on faith in the supernatural, or the 'other-worldly' and the transcendental (see: Auden, 1962) [10] Tolkien, 1964) [11]. At risk of over-simplification, philosophy privileges an unusually disinterested process of mentation born out of the enduring quest for wisdom whilst religion embraces the supernatural, spiritual or even mystical, in a quest for absolute truth, enlightenment and salvation. The two are decidedly different even though they find some common ground in works on the philosophy of religion (e.g. Smart, 1971) [12].

3. The Reach of Philosophy

However, whilst academic philosophy might now be mainly restricted to relatively circumscribed forms of discourse within the communities of philosophers (and their students), philosophy and philosophical thinking have, directly or indirectly, come to exert enormous influence on the lives of people since their first emergence in the varieties of pre-Socratic thought. Ideas derived from the thinking of philosophers have come to catalyze social and political revolutions; they have effected paradigm shifts in the ways in which nature, people, societies and their political arrangements are understood, designed and implemented (e.g. Berlin, 1978) [13]. The materialist philosophy of Marx and the impact of the political ideology of Marxism is an obvious case (see Taylor, 1978) [14]. Locke and Comte, through their philosophies (or doctrines) of empiricism and positivism, contributed to the progress and achievements of science; they underpinned the dominant role that science, information technology and social media now play in the world as we now know it (Cassirer (2009) [15]. Applied moral philosophy (or 'ethics') has contributed directly to the emergence of social policies concerned with equal opportunities. It has facilitated the emergence of human-rights cultures and their associated binding legislation. The development of both feminist and post-colonial ethics can be seen as a major moral advance enabling certain cultures to become more tolerant and more accepting of diversity (See: Singer, 1993) [16], LaFollette, 1997) [17], Villiers and Adlam, 2004) [18].

At a slightly lesser level of abstraction, philosophies and philosophical thinking have been focused on more circumscribed forms of human activity. For example, (Peters (1966) [19] authored an esteemed and influential work on the philosophy of education. Hodgkinson (1983) [20] presents a 'philosophy of leadership' and Thomas (1978) [21] identifies a 'philosophy of public administration'; Barthes (1982) [22] begins to outline a philosophy in which he focuses on the ontology of the photograph. Furthermore, if one were to look more closely at many of the practical and popular activities which engage and fascinate people throughout the world it is also possible to discern the apparent impact of some underlying philosophy or philosophical school. There are, for example, mentions of the relationship between philosophers, cultures and ways of playing professional football (Qvortrup, 2023) [23]; there are ostensible connections between philosophers, their writings and gastronomy (Laudan, 2015) [24]. The Japanese Zen gardens, renowned throughout the world for their exquisite beauty, are also understood to express a melding of the religious and philosophical outlook (Locher, 2020) [25]. There has even been reference to a certain 'philosophy' involved in running a specific grocery business (Thatcher, 1993) [26]. Finally, Warnock (1992) [27] in her work on 'The uses of philosophy' shows how philosophical thinking can

make a marked difference in relation to a) the treatment of animals, b) attitudes towards the wider ecology and environment, and c) the degree of subject-specialization in schools and universities. Thus, if anyone begins to reflect, in an informed way, on the overall relationship between philosophy and the real world they might quickly come to appreciate the impact or connection of the one on the other. The ideas of philosophers shape, and variously determine, our modes of existence - as they are constituted by material conditions, cultural configurations, ideologies, political institutions and the spectrum of practical activities that have emerged over time.

4. A General Statement Concerning Some Characteristics of the Real World

What though, at its simplest, can be said with confidence about the nature of this 'real world' in which people, including philosophers, find themselves embedded? To answer this the philosophical work of Heidegger, that of anthropologists such as Malinowski (1960) [28] and Jackson and Piette (2015) [29], allied to the findings of the humanistic psychologists such as Rogers (1980) [30] Schaffer (1978) [31] Rowan (1976) [32] and Heron (1977) [33] is particularly helpful. Thus, it is reasonable to characterize the 'real world' primarily as a practical and social world in which the problems of living are encountered and in which solutions to those problems are variously presented; it is a world in which human wants, needs and interests are expressed and pursued - usually in some sort of relation with others (Heron,1989) [34], Harré (1979, 1984) [35,36]. Human life is replete with emotions and desires. It is increasingly understood as a world in which language and symbolic systems of communication play a dominant role in the actual construction of human personal and social being (e.g. Derrida, 1976) [37], Wickberg, 2007) [38]. The 'real world' is, following Popper (1962) [39], 'theory-impregnated': theory, in whatever guise, shapes our understanding of reality and unsettles any belief in the possibility of achieving purely objective and unbiased observation of the world. Our socially-shared as well as idiosyncratic personal theories and assumptions inevitably influence how we interpret and understand the physical and social facts that we determine. On top of this, ideologies pervade the construction and apprehension of the world(s) we encounter. For example, in the West - and perhaps even more broadly - there exists a tension or conflict between the ideology of modernism and the emergence of the new zeitgeist of 'post-modernism' (see: Moult, 1990) [40].

Finally, there is little doubt that whatever progress may have been made in the appreciation and understanding of human beings, it is also the case that, as Warnock (1971) [41] recognizes, humans are beset by a number of limitations; those of rationality and sympathy are most likely to thwart the ideals of morality and the aspirations of the ideologue. When we get 'emotional' our reason may desert us - as might our sense of sympathy for others. It is the purpose of morality to curb our limitations.

But the real world is also, as Dreyfus, (1987, 2001) [42,43] emphasizes, a world of specializations and specialist knowledge. Amongst those specializations is the domain of the academic philosopher. But what is it that actually distinguishes this domain? And what identifiable impact does it have on the 'real world' in which people find themselves? Following Murdoch (1978) I will now turn to identify something of the character of contemporary academic philosophy by contrasting its writings with the writings of literature.

5. Illuminating Discourses: A Comparison of Philosophy with Literature and the Arts

Murdoch enjoyed the comparatively unique position of both philosopher and acclaimed literary author. She addressed the contrasts between philosophy (as it comes to be written) and that of literature. Murdoch thereby sharpened an appreciation of the difference between the two. For her, philosophy 'aims to clarify and explain'; it 'states and attempts to solve very difficult highly technical problems' and the writing 'is subservient' to this aim. She stressed the fact that philosophy is read 'by very few' but literature, in its numerous guises, 'is read by many people'. Art, of which literature is a distinct form, has 'innumerable intentions and charms'; it does many things - such as entertain, stimulate the imagination, shock, disturb, or depict models of virtue and vice - whilst philosophy seeks to ad-

dress the kinds of questions (such as 'fate', 'responsibility' or 'choice') that yield no obvious answer. In that sense, as Murdoch puts it, philosophy only 'does the one thing'. Compared with the great variety of literary styles she also finds herself tempted to say that 'there is an ideal philosophical style which has a special unambiguous plainness and hardness about it'. She characterizes it as 'an austere unselfish candid style'. In general, philosophical writing minimizes self-expression: it involves a 'disciplined removal of a personal voice'. She exemplifies this by noting that people can read Kant's philosophy (e.g. Kant, 2011) [44], and yet be left with scarcely any idea about the nature of Kant as a person. By contrast, literature always reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, the self-expression and personhood of its author. The communications of philosophy are unlike those of literature or of art more generally. Whilst literature manifests itself in innumerable ways and can be in the works of, for example, Shakespeare or Tolstoy, 'very large' in scope, philosophy, in her analysis, is 'very small'. It is small in the sense that:

> 'The problems stated at the beginning [by, for example Plato, on subjects such as the nature of reality] are mostly the same problems which occupy us today, and although the problems are vast there are in a sense not all that many of them. Whilst philosophy has had a tremendous influence the actual number of philosophers exerting the influence has been comparatively small.' (Murdoch 1978: 232)

This is primarily because, as Murdoch says, 'philosophy is so difficult.' It is the sheer difficulty of philosophy (proper) that separates it from the day-to-day living and practical problem-solving of most people. She notes that literature moves on, changes form, expresses and explores the height, breadth and depth of humanity. By contrast, 'philosophy does not move on in the same way that', for example, even 'the sciences move on'. It is repetitive: it revisits the same topics and is continually re-thinking and critiquing the conclusions that it has reached. Nonetheless, philosophy does progress as new ideas begin to find themselves established, new empirical findings emerge and technological advances create new kinds of unforeseen problems. Biomedical ethics is a case in point; the emergence of a more extended and elaborate concept of gender is another.

Murdoch also pinpoints something about a very real and radical contrast between literature and philosophy: the greater part of literature involves fiction, central to which is storytelling. People, if they are moved to communicate, tell stories to those around them - even if the story is just a précis of the day. As word-users, 'we all exist in a literary atmosphere, we live and breathe literature … we are all constantly employing language to make interesting forms out of experience'. In short, Murdoch identifies the fact that storytelling is natural whereas philosophy, because it involves a critical examination of our beliefs, concepts and presuppositions, is counter-natural. It remains as Murdoch puts it, 'a very odd unnatural activity.' In consequence, most people do not find themselves easily drawn to philosophy nor the enormous and unsettling challenges that it poses. Indeed, Hegel himself was to remark that a life spent in serious philosophical inquiry was often a lonely business (see Spencer and Krauze, 2012) [45]. Murdoch also identifies what might be termed 'boundary-case' philosophers (such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) who she categorizes as independent 'original thinkers' - as opposed to those figures who are located in the long and established traditions of philosophical thought, speculation and analysis. Whether they are classed as philosophers 'proper' or not, their thinking remains informed by an intellectual tradition and their influence has been considerable. In more contemporary times it may be that Zizek is such a case in point (see; Zizek, 2022) ; in the field of a post-Heideggerian existential and humanistic psychology, Heron (1998) [46] can also be classified as an original and independent thinker whose main body of work remained grounded in the 'real world' of human experience.

In the second part of her analysis Murdoch moves on to highlight some of the commonalities between philosophy and literature. She contends, with justification, that despite their differences both are 'truth-seeking and truth-revealing' activities. Literature for example, explores and reveals the experiences of individual's personal and social being in time and place; it contemplates the farther reaches of human nature as well as our inevitable suffering. It names various states of being with which its readers can identify. It also demonstrates how we, in truth, inhabit not

just a sensory world but the world of imagination. Warner (2014)[47], in her authoritative analysis of 'fairy tale', underlines the fact that even this literary genre has a significant truth-telling function: she highlights the fact that these tales convey some basic reality-based messages. They include: 'Beware of what you wish for', 'Beware what you promise' and 'Beware what you utter' (Warner, 2014). And she reminds us, that, after all, people, wherever they may be, 'can never take back' what they have said. Philosophers, in their search for truth, will necessarily override, disregard or remain unaware of some of the possible consequences of what they utter (or write); but there seems little doubt, for example, that both Nietzsche's depiction of the 'Superman' (Stern, 1987) [48] and Heidegger's language of the 'Volk' (Steiner, 1978) [49] have either contributed to, or at least been implicated, in the rise of both national socialism, fascism and the horrors of genocide.

Murdoch also invites her reader to consider the wealth of 'truths' found in the canon of great literature: in Sophocles' tragedy of 'Antigone' (see: Watling 1947) [50], a drama of conflicting conceptions of morality (including a rule-breaking individual morality) is presented. Not only does this classic play raise questions about the uses and abuses of authority it also suggests a powerful feminist challenge to a male-dominated social and political order. Proust (2022) [51] portrays the richness, refinements and idiosyncrasies of 'the life of the mind' and the pleasures of introspection. Ganeshananthan (2024) [52] convincingly traces the process through which a person becomes a terrorist. Moreover, her text speaks directly to the reader with its insistence that he or she 'must understand' the desperate psychological conditions in which her characters find themselves. And some of the seemingly simplest forms of literature, such as the lyrics in songs of popular music, also reveal truths about the fundamentals of human existence: for example, Bruce Springsteen (1984) [53] tells us, in the song 'Bobby Jean', that he 'learned more from a three-minute record' than he ever did in 'school'; his (1982) [54] 'Highway Patrolman' states that if a man 'turns his back on his family' well, he just 'ain't no good'.

Although Murdoch does not dwell on any specific 'truth' that is revealed through philosophical inquiry she is surely correct to define it as 'truth-revealing'. From its earliest beginnings (e.g. in the Socratic dialogues) it indicates that many (if not most) people proceed on the basis of un-inspected assumptions and are disinclined to examine the concepts which provide the psychological lenses through which they live. Philosophy shows that the discipline of unswerving critical thinking is rather rare.

Overall, Murdoch persuasively defines the contrast between philosophy and literature: Literature reflects the everydayness as well as the extraordinary varieties of human beings; it is often close to the grain of 'real life'; it serves as a simulation of the 'real'. Philosophy might well be an 'unnatural' activity and its distinctive and original content confined to a relatively limited readership. Yet somehow it can exert a profound effect on people and their societies.

The following three examples consider some of the different ways in which philosophical ideas have impacted the actual real world in which we find ourselves. These examples reveal something of its often perplexing and sometimes rather puzzling role: ideas taken from the sophistications of philosophical thinking (as if under the cover of darkness) do become embodied or even 'mis-embodied' in the world of human activities, artefacts and socio-political arrangements. The following lengthy sections aim to illustrate the different ways in which philosophy has encountered and palpably influenced the real world in which people (including the author) find themselves.

6. Example 1: Philosophy and Conceptual Art

One of the campuses of the UK's University for the Creative Arts is situated in the center of a medium-sized town in the south of England; its main gallery hosts 'Fine Art' exhibitions featuring works by both leading artists and graduate students. The exhibitions are free and open to all. But apart from people who are personally involved with the culture of Fine Art, only a tiny number of the actual townspeople ever visit the gallery. Why might this be so? It is because, for them, the gallery emerges as an alien space and the art on display is strange and puzzling: it is not, in the main, figurative (and representative of something familiar); instead, it is categorized as 'Conceptual'. The internationally-recognized artist Yoko Ono produces works of Conceptual art - and one of her note-worthy pieces features a large, beautiful chess board and chessmen.

However, the various chessmen lined up on opposite sides to each other - cannot, in her work - be distinguished from those on the opposing side. An actual game of chess can only be played if it consists of two distinct and recognizably different sets of 'opponent'. Thus, it is no longer a chess set equipped to perform its original function. And so this raises the question, 'Why did Yoko Ono do this?' To understand her intentions it is necessary to grasp the relationship of philosophy to Conceptual art.

The art critic Matthew Collings (2000) [55] enjoyed a lengthy and very close association with the communities of leading successful, internationally-known and celebrated artists. His familiarity with their culture led him to conclude that artists are not, in most cases, 'intellectuals' or philosophers; rather, they are people who find ways, in their work, of expressing and embodying various ideas. Although recognized artists might think seriously about questions of identity, ethics, or even the nature of knowledge, most do not dwell on the specialist discourses of philosophy per se. Nonetheless, philosophy does exert a significant influence on art (see e.g. Heidegger, 2008) [56], Clark, 1969) [57]. This is especially evident in the emergence of art known as 'Conceptual'.

The early origins of Conceptual art can be traced to forms of Art that began to appear at the beginning of the 20th Century. The work of the artist, Marcel Duchamp, through, for example, the exhibition of his 'ready-mades', has been identified (see: Kuh, 1962) [58] , and, Cabanne, 1968) [59] as a signal moment in the first glimmerings of this new art. Duchamp had impressive philosophical credentials: he was, for example, grounded in the early Greek thought of Pyrrho - as well as that of Poincaré and Bergson (see: Sanouillet and Peterson, 1975) [60]. Against a wider philosophical mood of nihilism, made salient because of the iconoclastic writings of Nietzsche, Duchamp successfully inaugurated a radical questioning of the very nature of art. At the same time, he subverted the institutional power-structures and hierarchy of the art establishment as well as its definitions of aesthetic taste and value (see: Lund and Wamberg, 2019) [61].

The fact that Duchamp's work appeared quite alien and unrelated to any more conventional forms of art inevitably provoked questions about its 'meaning'. In short, it moved people to try and make sense of what they were perceiving; art was now self-consciously transcending sensory perception and becoming connected more tightly with cognition - with thinking. Duchamp's 'ready mades' effectively opened new possibilities and extended the boundaries of what counted as art. Then Picasso's (1937) painting 'Guernica' amplified the earlier achievements of artists such as Otto Dix who depicted not only the horrors of war but revealed the now obvious dark side of modernism. A deep paradigm-shift in philosophical thinking had therefore begun to take root in the 20th Century: it plainly reflected a growing disaffection with modernism and its philosophical underpinnings.

Sontag (2009) [62] showed that, overall, the art of the 20th Century clearly expressed at least three different sensibilities: one featured the continuation of a commitment in art (stemming from its classical origins), to truth, beauty and seriousness; a second sensibility, emerging in the wake of the First World War and alert to the advances in psychoanalysis and existentialism, reflected tragedy, horror, cruelty, anxiety, madness and the extremes of the human condition; the third sensibility was identified by Sontag as 'Camp': it featured, in essence, humor, performance, decoration, artificiality, satire and the theatricalization of life. The second of those sensibilities (see: Benjamin, (1999) [63] was informed by a pessimistic view of humanity and a loss of faith in the optimistic promises associated with the doctrines of modernism. Benjamin captured this in his essay on 'The concept of history' in which he recognized the recurring destructive aspects of humanity. Allied to the rule-breaking and 'cognitive' ethos established by Duchamp, the reaction to the disillusionment with modernism was to establish the initial foundations for Conceptual art.

Subsequently it came to be framed as a named and distinct category by using the core concept of a 'dematerialization'. This was first articulated in 1967 by Lippard and Chandler [64] in their landmark paper entitled 'The de-materialization of Art'. This paper was then published in the journal 'Art International' in February 1968. Lippard and Chandler had come to perceive the manifestation of what they called an 'ultra-conceptual' art which was characterized by 'dematerialization'. By this they meant an art which privileged, prioritized and expressed the 'idea'. Just as new forms of literature or music come into being, so this new art began to supersede the style and content of preced-

ing forms - such as Abstract Expressionism. Conceptual art was wedded, almost exclusively, to the thinking process - to the charms and challenges of mentation. Lippard and Chandler had located the development of Conceptual art through Schillinger's (1948) [65] unusual work on 'The mathematical basis of the arts'. His analysis of art's historical evolution traced it through a number of major stages. It began with the pre-aesthetic (i.e. before the aesthetic was identified as such, in, for example, dance mimicking animal movements, or animal design representing the power of the beast). It then passed though decorative ritual and religious art - and on through successive developments, until finally a complex 'scientific post-aesthetic' intellectual phase had been attained. This phase was characterized by a fusion of art forms and materials. It was within this post-aesthetic and post-Duchampian era expressive of the disappointments with, or rejection of, modernism that Conceptual art was born.

A more recent and specifically philosophical analysis that focused on Conceptual art was subsequently developed through the work of Goldie and Schellekens (2007) [66]. They asserted that the central tenet of Conceptual art was the notion that 'the idea' was 'king'. They also noted that Conceptual art had explicitly drawn from philosophy and the writings of, for example, Wittgenstein, Austin, Kuhn, and Barthes, and that:

> 'Philosophy thus seems to have served not only as inspiration, but at times even as a source of authority and justification for the work performed by Conceptual artists.' (Goldie and Schellekens 2007 xviii)

Goldie and Schellekens (2007) endorsed Lippard and Chandler's basic premise of a 'dematerialization' and proposed several key features that were intrinsic to this 'advanced' Conceptual art. First, they discerned a change in the role of the art object: thus, a work of Conceptual art was designed not as an end but as an expression of and/or catalyst for 'ideas'. Second, the context in which the artist worked was understood no longer as a studio but more as a study in which degrees of intellectual engagement unfolded. Third, the new art had an interdisciplinary quality: the art object or its performance merged with disciplines such as anthropology or science. And finally, Goldie and Schellekens perceived that Conceptual art was both a response to and an exploration of the cultural 'zeitgeist' - which now featured concepts and issues to do with relativity, multiple realities, chance and indeterminacy, altered states of consciousness and the deferral of meaning.

However, whilst Conceptual art admitted of no straightforward definition, its various manifestations were held together because they shared certain features and had certain 'important characteristics in common'. According to Goldie and Schellekens it, Conceptual art, a) aimed to remove the traditional emphasis on sensory pleasure and beauty by replacing it with an emphasis on ideas b) challenged the very identity and definition of artworks and questioned 'the role of agency in art-making': not only was the audience or viewer required to think in response to the art object but was now, in a sense, a 'maker of the work' c) sought to render art-making a form of art criticism - which inclined towards 'anti-consumerist and anti-establishment views'. Thus, in their reaction 'against modernism', Conceptual artists had come to express aspects of critical theory.

Consequently, Conceptual art predominantly rejected traditional artistic media. Instead, a very wide range of new media were embraced in its production - including photography and film, mixed-media, the staging of happenings - and whatever useful materials came to hand. Finally, Conceptual art replaced illustrative representation with 'semantic representation'. Overall, Conceptual art was to be understood as a semiotic text.

If Goldie and Schellekens may perhaps have erred on the side of a decidedly analytic approach to Conceptual art, Lamarque (2007 [67] posted a cautionary note: he warned against settling on an oversimplified notion that in Conceptual art 'the idea is king or paramount'; instead, he isolated the 'identity conditions' that constitute something typically named as 'Conceptual art': in the course of this, he made the key point concerning the unavoidable and essential part played by the viewer. For him, an exclusive focus on the 'idea' simply misses that which is 'ontologically unusual and interesting' about this category of art. He argued that works of Conceptual art require, or are contingent on, a type of appreciative experience: it must invite a 'kind of perception' and only discloses itself for what it is, if and when it is apprehended in a relatively sophisticated way - a way which entails an informed consciousness. In

the various works of Conceptual art, Lamarque asserted that 'the objects literally seem in appearance to be different from what they are.' What, though, constitutes the 'kind of perception' or informed consciousness which is necessary if the ontological nature of Conceptual art is to be grasped and appreciated? Lamarque answers this as follows:

> '… we should see Conceptual art of the paradigmatic kind as offering a curious hybrid experience having parallels with, but not reducible to, the cerebral reflection of ideas in philosophy, the apprehension of themes or conceits in literature, and the perception of sculpture and painting.' (Lamarque, 2007:15)

And he continues:

> 'To prioritise any one of these is, in many cases, to miss what is distinctive …' (Lamarque 2007:15)

In other words, it is not simply the case that Conceptual art is 'about ideas.' The maker of the work creates a synthesis of a) philosophically-nuanced thinking, b) an identifiable theme or themes (such as 'surveillance' or 'alienation' or issues related to sexual identity), and c) a unique perceptual whole that impacts sensorially on the viewer or audience. Put crudely to 'get' or appreciate the charms of Conceptual art (in any complete sense) a person must grasp it as a hybrid form of entity. If the work is successful, it generates a multi-layered admixture of idea and feeling - as well as no little 'spectacle'.

Yoko Ono's chess set and chessmen can therefore be understood as a clear exemplar of Conceptual art. It invites the spectator (or the consumer) first to note a moment of surprise: here is a chess set - but one comprising two 'opposing' sides that are identical; it is therefore a chess set that is no longer quite a chess set. The surprise may, by design, serve as the catalyst for thinking about the meanings of the work itself. It simultaneously encourages the viewer to recognize that his or her assumptions about the world may not always hold. Ono's work also suggests that all humanity is 'of a piece': it is only cultural configurations that overlay and conceal the shared 'being-ness' of humans. On top of this it reveals the inescapable allure of aesthetics - and alludes to the increasing aestheticization of reality (see: Debord (1967) [68]; Her chess set, in virtue of its rule-breaking character, also invites a consideration of the Jungian trickster archetype and the teasing subversive notion that life is a complex and often absurd game. And, following the endless deferral of meaning suggested by Derrida (1976), Yoko Ono's work resists any final and resolved interpretation.

Her work plainly typifies Conceptual art: her chess set is an example of a 'hybrid form of entity' that synthesizes the affective with the cognitive; it also, in virtue of its aesthetic qualities, reflects Lippard and Chandler's (1968) contention that any work of art stands or falls by what it looks like. It is worth remarking here that, in the early stages of Conceptual art, ugliness, vulgarity, the banal - or other non-traditional expressions of taste - were deliberately chosen by artists to support and defend the communication of a radical idea - the idea that, underneath it all, western culture was alienating, wasteful and dysfunctional.

Overall, the theory and practice of Conceptual art, as it is informed by certain philosophical underpinnings, helps us to understand better the often-strange art-object that we might encounter in the locales of advanced art. It also suggests a radically significant extension of Heidegger's earlier notion that an artwork is the simultaneous expression of earth (matter) and world (culture). In his 'Poetry, Language, Thought', (2001) [69] Heidegger asserted that, at its greatest, art 'grounds history' and allows 'truth to spring forth.' For Heidegger (see: Thomson, 2011) [70] great artworks 'first give to things their look,' and, in so doing, help give 'to humanity their outlook on themselves.' They help shape a community's sense of what truly matters in life (and also what does not). They model which kinds of lives are most worth living, which actions are commendable or reprehensible, what in the community's traditions most deserves to be preserved, and so on. In short, they show us what is and what matters. The emergence of Conceptual art can, in principle, claim to show us what is and what matters. But whatever that may be, for it to be fully appreciated, a great deal of hard or imaginative thinking on the part of the viewer is required. This may turn out to be its most important and telling message. It is plainly a form of art that is only possible because of certain philosophical underpinnings. And since the production and promotion of Conceptual art now lies embedded in a network of various interest groups, a full understanding of its ontological

status would have to include contributions from social and political philosophy (relating not only to the concept of freedom) but also to a philosophy of signs and symbols deriving from the study of semiology.

7. Example 2: A Philosophy of Sex

The recent American television series, 'Mad Men' was set in the late 1950s and early 1960s and profiled, for a 21st century audience, the culture of a New York City marketing and advertising firm. It focused particularly on the sexual interests, desires and conduct of several of the men who worked in the agency. It also showed the relationship between the allure and promise of sex and how it was used in the promotion of various goods and services. The focus in 'Mad Men' on various aspects of sexual desire was unrelenting. During the 1960s and coinciding with the timeframe in which the series was set, the films of Andy Warhol and Barbara Rubin demonstrated how explicit sexual expression was no longer hidden from view and confined to locales of secrecy. These films captured something of the hedonistic ethos of the times. This ethos had begun to privilege and value sexual freedom and foreshadowed the increasingly overt sexualization of society. If the portrayals of such a dominant interest in forms of sexual expression (particularly by men) may have approximated to the truth, there is evidence that the new century has succeeded in amplifying such an interest. Western society has been characterized variously as a 'Raunch' (Levy, 2005) [71] or a 'Porn chic' (Lynch, 2012) [72] culture; in the UK alone, for example, the sex industry is estimated to be worth over four billion pounds to the British economy (Hakim, 2015) [73].

However, the insistent focus on 'sex' has had, for many, a destructive psychological effect: a recent four-part film series entitled 'Adolescence' starkly revealed the crisis of identity and pessimism, in relation to the sexual hopes and desires, that had (and has) befallen certain young males in the UK. Some have turned, by way of vengeance, to violent and even murderous expressions of misogyny. The series provoked a national debate concerning the country's failure to create a culture in which both the attitudes to and the practices of 'sex' are <u>not</u> dysfunctional, prurient, emotionally-conflicted, exploitative and deeply unsatisfactory. It would now be difficult (for any aware and sensitive person) to ignore the fact that the real-world in which contemporary people find themselves has been overtly sexualized. It has foregrounded and profiled sex, sexual attraction and desire, sexual identity and the purely explicit or more subtly-nuanced forms of sexual expression. In the first years of the new millennium Binnie (2004) [74] acknowledged this as the 'globalization of sex'; McNair (2002) [75] perceived a 'democratization of desire' that had been facilitated by socio-technical developments - and Apps such as Grindr and Tinder; Webcam sex-work and online chat rooms now allowed people to pursue mediated sex at a distance (see: Hubbard, Collins and Gorman-Murray, 2016) [76]. In certain ways Freud's (1986) [77] theoretical emphasis on countering the ego-defense mechanism of repression, through permitting manifestations of libidinal eros in varieties of sexual conduct has come to pass.

Some philosophers, as Halwani (2023) [78] shows, have devoted their serious thinking to the concept and meaning of sex. Until fairly recent times several of the most eminent philosophers - including Plato, Augustine and Aquinas - might be classed as 'metaphysical pessimists'; they held a negative view towards the existence of sex - and especially sexual desire. They believed, for example, that orgasmic ecstasy obliterated reason and self-control. However, the early humanistic liberal writings of Montaigne (1991) [79] (first published in 1580) countered this repressive outlook towards sex. Montaigne absented himself from the distractions and pressures of political life and, with the help of his library of over 1000 volumes, devoted himself to a thorough analysis of human personal and social experience along with their forms of conduct. In his long and unusually frank essay, 'Upon some verses of Virgil' he surveyed and reviewed a considerable number of classical Greek, Roman and other authors, in relation to their conclusions and stipulations concerning sexual matters. He observed that, despite some of their insights in relation to love, pleasure and the pursuit of various sexual practices, the free and dispassionate discussion of sexual conduct had come to be avoided. In response he asserted that:

> 'The genital activities of mankind are so natural, so necessary and so right: what have they done to make us never dare mention them without embarrassment and to exclude them from serious orderly conversation?' (Mon-

taigne 1991: 956)

Montaigne distanced himself from the more dogmatic and restricted views on sex; these included the idea of a separation between the body and the mind (lest the body, in some way, corrupt or diminish the rational faculties (the soul)), which were expressed in the classic teachings of Aristotle. He noted that:

> 'Philosophy does not weigh against natural pleasures, provided they be moderate, and only preaches moderation, not a total abstinence; the power of its [philosophy's] resistance is employed against those that are adulterate and strange. Philosophy [also] says that the appetites of the body ought not to be augmented by the mind … But have I not reason to hold … these precepts, which … in my opinion, are somewhat over strict …' (Montaigne, 1991: 1006)

In essence, he rejected those philosophical and religious dogmas that denigrated or even prohibited sex. By way of contrast, he asserted that a great deal of positive value might be associated with sexual expression, including those of lust and desire. He concluded his meditations by finding, as he put it, 'that male and female are cast in the same mould' and that, apart from their differing access to educational opportunities and their subjection to historical and prevailing social customs 'the difference between them [the sexes] is not great'. He thereby helped to pave the way for the emergence of a metaphysical optimism in relation to sex.

However, it was only during more contemporary times that philosophers, beginning with, for example, Russell (1929) [80] and Freud (1949) [81], genuinely countered the pessimists and thought of sex as generally good (see: Soble (2006) (2008) [82,83], and, Belliotti (1993)) [84]. Whilst some philosophers have declared that there is nothing particularly problematic in the more biological aspects of sex, they have also recognized how elusive its successful 'management' continues to be. Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' (see: Foucault (1974, 1984a, 1984b, 2021) [85-86] underlines and reveals how pressures in the wider cultural circumstances (the fact that sexual behavior is embedded in a network of meanings, expectations, obligations, promises and conventions) have conferred upon sexual expression and activity a special and often disturbing emotional charge. Halwani's (2023) careful exploration of an emerging and sophisticated philosophy of sex in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy includes an analysis of sexual desire, activity, interest and identity. He also asks 'What is the value of sex? To this he replies that 'procreation, love, and pleasure are obvious answers.' He acknowledges Mckeever's (2016) [89] (rather obvious) point that sex can also express love and affection for one's partner and thereby strengthen their relationship. McKeever argues that the many 'goods' of sex (such as pleasure, union, intimacy, and care) are shared with those of love - and that sexual interaction enhances and strengthens the love of persons, one for the other. The positive value of sexual encounter and congress is also nicely captured by Thomas (1999) [90] who argues that sex achieves a level of passion which is barely equaled in other forms of interaction and especially so when it occurs between lovers. He writes:

> '.. it [shared sexual pleasure] defines a most significant moment of goodness between two people, where each achieves a most profound moment of affirmation and satisfaction that is inextricably tied to the endeavor to please the other.' (Thomas 1999: 59).

Soble (2002) [91], too, invites a radical re-framing of our consciousness in relation to the intrinsic value of sex and asks: 'Maybe we should construct a theory of human dignity based on our sexual capacities … instead of looking for something 'finer' beyond or above the sexual.' (Soble, 2002: 58, 59).

Halwani's analysis and discussion clearly meet the criterion of disciplined philosophical inquiry; in the main, it remains, in virtue of its impersonality, somewhat detached from the more experiential aspects of human sexual behavior. This issue has been carefully addressed through the work of Heron, the humanistic and transpersonal psychologist - an 'original independent thinker' of the kind that Murdoch identified. Heron's pioneering work effectively anticipated the conclusions of Thomas and the stance advocated by Soble. His theoretical position was set out in a series of papers beginning with his 'Experience and method' (1971) [92], 'Catharsis in human development' (1977) [93],

'Paradigm papers' (1981) [94], 'A philosophical basis for a new paradigm' (1981b) [95], as well as, Heron and Reason's (2008) 'Extending epistemology within co-operative inquiry' (2008) [96]. [See End Note 2] Central to his approach was the careful recording of what his research collaborators revealed as the phenomenological reality of their experiences with all aspects of sexual expression and the meanings of sexual experience. Using his experiential inquiry methods (Heron, 1981) [97] which were underpinned by the wider theoretical background of the human-potential movement, Heron was able to outline his 'sex-positive theory'. The articulation of this brief descriptive theoretical statement came at the end of a text on the role and function of catharsis in human development. The main thrust of the text was to identify the consequences of living in a 'non-cathartic', emotionally illiterate and repressive society. Heron was aware that, in cultures generally, a great deal of unease, fear and anxiety surrounded the subject of 'sex'; in consequence, its positive life-enhancing potential was continually under threat. The sex-positive theory confronted the fact that restrictive societal norms and taboos had come to distort the experiences and conduct associated with (our) sexual life. Countering the distortions effected by the wider society, his theory revealed the multiple and diverse ways in which sexual congress and/or exchange could be framed and enjoyed. His inclusive approach also allowed an integration of some of the more esoteric meanings of sexual intercourse that are part of, for example, tantric sexual yoga (Richardson, 2003) [98] or intrinsic to other eastern philosophical approaches to the understanding of sex and its role in life (e.g. Langenberg, 2018) [99], Frantzis, 2012) [100], and Ruan Fang Fu,1991) [101]. Heron's (1977) 'sex positive theory' held that in the realm of authentic human encounter and intimacy, sexual activity can be 'a celebration of many things' either 'singly or in a variety of combinations.' These may be experienced in some sort of sequential order or happen simultaneously. He categorized the several different forms of such celebration as follows:

The celebration: of sharing and friendship; of mutual tenderness, love, affection, nurturance; of life, energy, vitality; of the aesthetic: i.e. of sexual interaction as one of the great dynamic plastic arts - two human forms interwoven in elegant and dramatic variations of mobile intimacy; a celebration of the beauty of the human body.

The celebration of human joy and delight in being, the sharing of personhood; of the playful; of the comic and absurd; of passion, desire, lust; of the dynamic ease of the animal

The celebration of the transpersonal and sacramental; sexual interaction as a means of attunement to wider alternative realities, to archetypal principles of being, to the divine - as in, for example, tantric yoga.

He also made the obvious point that sex may be the past, present or future celebration of parenthood, of the procreative process, and of the generation of new life.

Heron was deeply critical of the typical non-cathartic and repressive society, in which sex was (and is) made more complex, more anxiety-laden and rendered far more problematic than it should ever deserve. The subject of 'sex' suffers from what he described as 'a lack of freedom and lightness'. Echoing the now distant humanism of Montaigne, he proposed that, in the emotionally-open society, 'sex may be seen as one of the many delights open to humans, one of many possible ways persons can share and celebrate their human identity'; as a result 'it becomes an elegant option, related to a physical need but not bound by it.' Finally, he added that because of advances in scientific, social and cultural knowledge in relation to our biology, its regulation and the understanding of our acculturated being, that:

> 'Perhaps for the first time in history, human beings can claim fully the heritage of the flexible ecstasy of their bodies. In a society where humans take charge of their feelings, take responsibility for their lives, and act very awarely in relation to others, we may expect that this claim will be taken up in all kinds of sensitive, exciting and imaginative ways.' (Heron, 1977: 12).

However contemporary media-dominated consumerist cultures appear to have steered themselves away from the rigors of self-awareness and the kind of 'self' work that enables people to be free from dysfunctional and limited ways of expressing themselves sexually. If a liberating social philosophy in relation to sexual matters along with the adoption of a theory of human dignity based on our sexual capacities (e.g. see: Soble, 2002), is to make a realistic

contribution to sexual well-being it clearly faces many challenges. It would entail finding ways for different cultures to adopt a re-visioning and re-vivification of the kind of ethos originally expressed in Montaigne's humanism. Since contemporary cultures have now become so wedded to individualized addictive 'pleasure seeking' (see: Christensen, 2017) [102] any such culture-change appears increasingly unlikely.

The tradition of feminist scholarship (Schneir, 1995) [103] has revealed that the philosophy of sex and judgments about the value of sexual expression have been overwhelmingly male-dominated. The apparently authoritative texts that have emerged have reflected the cultural conditions, assumptions and belief systems in which their authors have been embedded. Even Heron's (1977) 'sex-positive theory' was articulated in the context of an enduring patriarchal culture (see: Moi, 2002) [104]. Sex-positive theory initially gained attention through the work of men such as Reich [105] (whose original 1927 monograph was eventually published in English in 1980), certain psychoanalysts - and various figures, such as Heron, who were positioned in the human potential movement. But, whilst it served a quasi-liberational purpose and expressed a metaphysical optimism of sorts, it fell short (or was seen to fall short) of confronting the oppressive patriarchal shaping of gender and the manifest denial of equal opportunities for women. If anything, it enjoined men to enjoy themselves and inadvertently sustained the construction of women as objects of desire. This was radically challenged through the emergence of the feminist critique of culture, society and the history of male-defined oppressive belief systems.

The precursors of a feminist sex-positive theory became apparent in the 1980s. In part they were a reaction to the entirely justifiable critique of pornography, female objectification and the ontological diminution of 'woman'. (See for example, Dworkin, (1974, 1981) [106,107] and in her classic work on 'woman hating'). Sex-positive feminists did not ignore Dworkin's work but turned to propose and articulate some major tenets of feminist sex-positive theory. Amongst them Rubin (1975) [108]captured the cultural situation of women and argued that they were oppressed as women and 'by having to be women' (Rubin 1975: 204). Mackinnon (1989) [109] analyzed the restrictive nature of sexuality (both of women and men) and indicated how male and female sexualities were socially conditioned: she asserted that men were programmed to find women's subordination 'sexy' whilst women had been socialized to express their erotic power in terms of sexual submissiveness. Another aspect of sex-positive feminist theory was provided by Greer [110] (1999); in her work, 'The whole woman' she argued that women are neither obliged nor should they live out lives approximating or mirroring those of men; instead they should work towards forms of liberation based on assertions of difference in which they might as she put it: '… define their own values, order their own priorities and decide their own fate.' (Greer 1999: 2)

Following Rodriguez's (2005) [111] lecture on sexology, sex-positive feminism emphasized certain permissions to do and to be. It stressed the importance of a woman's right to explore her body and to acknowledge or validate all manner of sexual desires and expressions. Sex-positive feminist theory has also underlined the fact that pleasure and sexuality are human rights that have been subjugated through the legacies of patriarchal social construction [112] (see: Kismödi, Corona, E., Maticka-Tyndale, Rubio-Aurioles and Coleman, 2017)

Throughout the 1990s and the first decades of the new millennium it is difficult to resist the conclusion that, by way of resisting the legacies of patriarchy, an intense interest has been devoted to the study of women's sexuality. Mikkola's [113] (2022) 'Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender' bears witness to this. And yet, part of this emphasis has stemmed from the clarification, by philosophers, of the concept of freedom and liberty (e.g. Berlin, 1969) [114] - and by Feinberg's [115] (1973) work on 'Social philosophy': thus, women have increasingly a) engaged with a redefinition of their agency b) sought to be free from the chains of oppression, and c) found themselves free (in principle) to conduct and comport themselves in ways of their own making and choosing.

Recently Rowland (2020) [116] has provided a valuable critique of the prevailing cultural conditions in the West (and beyond) in relation to the situations of women: she found that because of 'culture's troubled relationship with women's sexual expression' there remains a persistent 'pleasure gap' or deficit between men and women. Overall, women were not satisfied with their erotic lives. Her analysis suggests that this can be accounted for in terms of the

distorting voices and messages of the wider society; in her view these need to be silenced. Rowland endorses the view that, rather than acquiesce and absorb the dominant ethos of the wider society, women should 'listen' to their bodies and minds. In so doing she reiterates the earlier consciousness-raising approaches of certain feminists as well as those committed to the 'women's movement' (e.g. Ernst and Goodison, 1981) [117], the 'écriture feminine' of Cixous and Clement (1986) [118], and the achievements of a radical philosophically-grounded humanistic psychology.

The 'problem' of sex and the widespread sexualization of culture in contemporary societies underlines the profound difficulties in achieving the harmonious unfolding of the sexual life of people in general. Nonetheless relatively recent developments in the philosophy of sex have, however, contributed to its liberalization. However, in the light of Foucault's (1976, 1984a, 1984b, 2021) studies of 'The history of sexuality', the place of sex in the real world remains deeply troubled. Enduring and emerging cultural traditions, the dynamics of interpersonal power-relations, the mystification and unrealistic idealization of sex all indicate that the subject has been rendered more complex and conceivably more problematic and contentious than ever before.

8. Example 3: Hegel's Dialectical Method, Marx's Dialectical Materialism, and the 'Absolute' or Totalitarian State

The Eagle comic for boys was published in the UK from the 1950s onwards. It was undoubtedly an educational but also an ideologically-suffused publication. Amongst its various cartoon-series was one entitled 'The happy warrior' featuring the life-story of Sir Winston Churchill. One episode in this lengthy comic strip appeared on 7th March 1958; it included a depiction of Adolf Hitler who, whilst giving the Nazi salute, declared:

> 'Our glorious fatherland will take its rightful place at the head of all nations. We will conquer all Europe, Asia. The World! The hour is at hand!' (See: The Eagle Comic for Boys: 07.05.1958)

Hitler's Nazi Germany went on to wage war against and invade much of Europe and beyond. Its leader had come to believe that this was Germany's ultimate destiny. How, though, could Hitler have arrived at the view that Germany was somehow rightfully destined to be the dominant nation, not only in Europe, but also 'the world'? One answer reveals something fascinating and yet ominous about the uses to which ideas taken from philosophy can be put: this can be demonstrated through a very brief consideration of the philosophy of Hegel and its subsequent revision and 'application' through the thinking of Marx. In this section I will provide a) a thumbnail sketch of some basic and relevant aspects of Hegelian theory b) refer to Marx's reformulation of that theory through his 'dialectical materialism' c) note the impact of ideology on perceptions of reality, and, d) conclude with a brief comment on Hegel and Marx's philosophical legacy.

Bronowski and Mazlish (1963), and Singer (1987) [119] - successfully communicate the essence or core of Hegel's thinking. However, these authors were obliged to avoid the obscure technical details of his analyses for the simple reason, as Magee (1987) remarks, that Hegel's writing had become 'a byword' for impenetrability. Nonetheless, a key aspect of Hegel's thinking came to exert a profound effect on the lives of millions of people: thus, as Bronowski and Mazlish (1963) note:

> 'Hegel was … a professor of philosophy and his life was devoted to problems which other philosophers had left him. It is therefore remarkable that out of his academic work would grow a way of looking at persons and states which has overturned empires …' (Bronowski and Mazlish 1963: 527)

A fundamental aspect of Hegel's thought can be seen as a development of, or reaction against, Plato's earlier dialectics - itself understood as the process of contradiction - an approach also reflected in the method of 'disputation' practiced in Medieval Universities (Kenny, 1987) [120]. Hegel contended that Plato's method could never fully overcome profound skepticism and lack of confidence in relation to achieving certain knowledge. His particular dialectics are set out in the first part of his 'Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences' (Hegel, 2010). Maybee (2020) [121]

adhering closely to this original text shows how, in ways not dissimilar to Plato's dialogues, 'a contradictory process between opposing sides' leads to 'a linear evolution or development from less sophisticated definitions or views to more sophisticated ones …' She then notes that: 'Whereas Plato's 'opposing sides' were people' (i.e. Socrates and his interlocutors), the 'opposing sides' in Hegel's work depends on the subject matter he discusses.' (See: Maybee, 2020) Hegel's dialectic came to be focused on history, on people and on politics.

His dialectic (or 'dialectical method') comprises three moments (usually referred to somewhat abstractly as, thesis, antithesis and synthesis). The first moment is the moment of 'fixity' when a concept or form is understood to have a stable definition. The second moment is the moment of instability when a limitation or 'restrictiveness' is discerned in the original moment of fixity. The original moment is thereby unsettled, negated or contradicted. However, the original moment of fixity whilst being negated is also preserved. The third moment, as Maybee writes, 'grasps the unity of the opposition or is the positive result of … the conjoining of the first two moments.' (The well-known terms, 'thesis', 'antithesis' and 'synthesis' might therefore be re-written: first, there is fixity and certainty, then instability and uncertainty, and then a resolution - along with the higher attainment of reality and truth.) Intrinsic to Hegel's thought is the recognition that the state of synthesis or resolution is itself always liable to a contradiction: thus, the synthesis may itself be rendered a thesis which meets its antithesis - and so on.

Hegel's dialectical method was then applied to matters beyond the mind. It sought to explain the movement from simpler to ever more sophisticated states; transitions, ruptures, or syntheses were (and are) necessary if those more sophisticated states are to be achieved. Moreover, if, as Hegel proposed, the original earlier state is always preserved in the process of higher evolution - a regressive reversal into the original opposite (as Zizek, 2022) shows) is always a possibility. This is why a more basic if not crude rendition of Hegelian thinking has always assumed that something contains its opposite or negation. For example, the male contains its opposite, the female; the saint embodies the devil; freedom entails control - and so on. Zizek (2022) endorses this view and acknowledges that Hegel himself thought that, instead of there being the attainment of a stable once-and-for-all secure rationality, the potential for madness was intrinsic to human beings.

Central to Hegel's philosophy is the idea and belief in the inevitability of change and development - of some sort of progression and movement. Magee, (1987) [122] summarizes this as follows:

> 'The core insight is that understanding reality means not understanding a given state of affairs but understanding a process of change.' (Magee, 1978: 202)

He continues by considering the goal towards which Hegel thought the process of change was inexorably moving: it was to culminate in 'Absolute knowledge' and the perfectly rational 'Organic society'. Singer (1987), in his discussion with Magee, went on to identify a central principle governing Hegelian thought in the following terms:

> '… Hegel's idea of ultimate reality and … what is ultimately real is mental rather than material.' (Singer 1987: 201)

Hegel contended that everything could never be independent of the mind and its omnipresence in a historical process of progression. He has therefore been considered the model 'Idealist' philosopher. Moreover because he saw the rational in the real (in the sense that whatever it was humankind encountered it necessarily reflected the rational), and because the dialectical process was always progressing to higher and higher stages, Hegel was bound to conclude that the ultimate expression of the rational would find expression in the absolutely rational political state. Moreover, if the individual were to be free, Hegel's conception of a person's freedom lay in aligning him or herself with the perfect rationality of the state. The state, in virtue of its perfect embodiment of rationality, would determine, for the individual, the nature of his or her 'real' interests. Understood in such terms, Hegel's philosophy was almost bound to lead to forms of authoritarianism. It is also significant that Hegel's thought, as Bronowski and Mazlish (1963) suggest, reflected his interest in the advances made in the biological sciences and the associated conceptions of movement - of evolution - towards ever higher states of development and sophistication. His dialectic of 'progress', informed by his belief in higher organic forms, once allied

to the Nietzschean idea of the Superman (the Übermensch) (see: Nietzsche, 2003) [123], prepared the ground from which a figure such as Adolf Hitler could emerge. The subsequent appalling catastrophe that was to befall Europe and beyond was among its consequences.

The immensely influential figure of Karl Marx emerged in the wake of Hegel's thinking, and, in effect, he inverted Hegel's philosophy (Marx (1885) [124]. Whilst Hegel saw the dialectical process as essentially happening in the realm of ideas, Marx saw it happening in something material. In his rejection of the 'ideal' in Hegel's idealist philosophy, Marx applied the dialectical method to the material conditions of life. What mattered to Marx was the material world and not Hegel's 'metaphysical abstraction'.

Magee and Taylor's (1978) [125] dialogue about the theory and philosophy of Marxism outlined its relatively well-known basic tenets. First, they noted that the things which 'really matter about a society' are determined by whatever it is that has to be done to keep that society in existence; they recognize that it is upon the 'means of production' that everything else, such as the organization of labor, social relations, attributions of value, education and belief systems, are based. And, as Magee (1978) asserts, for Marx:

> '… the truly decisive thing at any given time in any given society is what the means of production are.' (Magee, 1978: 45)

If, as Marx contends, 'what really matters is what it takes to keep a society in existence' then both the conduct of people and their psychological outlook (as well as their forms of art) will be radically different in dramatically contrasting societies; thus, in an early tribal form of society, if the means of production rely on the sheer physical efforts of the people - such as the hewing of wood and carrying of water - then what really matters for that society will be a strict adherence to behavioral norms, a ritualization of conduct, some sort of division of labor and a certain degree of specialization. In addition, a belief system designed to keep people 'secure' through its provision of explanations and types of justificatory rationale would be apparent. It's art, too, would emerge in a distinct material and psycho-social context.

One therefore might ask, 'What keeps a contemporary society such as the UK or Japan in existence? And, since these are highly complex, specialized and interlinked societies depending, *inter alia*, on the circulation of money, its people are essentially 'specialist' functionaries who do all the things, such as consuming goods and spending money, that keep it in existence; they themselves have to be 'produced' in a certain way; to that end, Foucault, (1991) [126] has charted the rise of the 'disciplinary' society which, through its techniques and discourses of discipline, equips its people to be both ideologically programmed and efficient operatives in relation to task-accomplishment. A consequence is that the art of 'developed' nations reflects its material conditions, its associated values and a pervasive commercial ethos (see Collings, 2000).

Second, if the means of production are the determinants of what really matters in a society, then it follows that whenever the means of production change, people's ways of life will change. As Magee and Singer observe, 'the way they [people] relate to each other has to change and the socio-economic class relations associated with the means of production have to change.' It is this latter point that led Marx to foresee an inevitable conflict between the classes - between the owner-class and the 'worker-class' - which would ultimately lead to revolution. In all likelihood, violence would precede the formation of the quasi-utopian communist state.

Magee and Taylor (1978) identified the philosophy that underpins the economic and material basis of Marxist theory. Taylor summarized this as a 'philosophy of liberation.' The notion of 'liberation' carries a positive emotional charge. It accounts for the early and widespread affection held out by the utopian promise of Communism. Taylor argued that, at its inception, Marxist theory focused on humanity's gradual liberation from nature, and a subsequent (potential) liberation from the chains of alienated labor. It grounded the possibility of liberation in the capacity of humans both to reflect on their practices and to change them. It also recognized that the very exercise of these distinctly human powers was, in itself, satisfying. Marxist theory, according to Taylor, drew from a long-established 'Messianic' European tradition of sensing that a new era - an era promising a better life - was at hand. Allied to a belief in the promise of science (see e.g. Marx's (2013) [127] 'The science of capital') Marxist theory held out the conviction that the

future was destined to be better than today.

Marxism and ideology

The basic assumption of Marx (see: Holt (2014) [128] in relation to the social analysis of persons is materialist: it is our concrete circumstances, which themselves are tightly related to the means of production, that make us who we are; and these circumstances always exist in an historical moment: we are, at birth, 'thrown' into an already and pre-existing material and historical context and our psychology is produced accordingly. As Bourdieu's (1977) [129] (1998) [130] theory of practice points out, our belief systems reflect the pervasive ethos which penetrates and constitutes our material and historical situation. Marx, though, understood this belief system as 'ideology' the clearest articulation of which is presented in Marx and Engel's (1845/1947) [131] text, 'The German ideology'. Ideology emerges through the concrete and real social relations over which we have little if any control. An ideology may be classist, sexist, racist, or consumerist; both science and religion, in their distinct ways are ideologies; an ideology may even privilege and engender a sensibility or a cult (Sontag, 2009) [132].

At its most basic Marx and Engels proposed that our forms of life did not originate as a result of our conscious deliberations; instead, it was the very conditions of life that formed the nature of our consciousness. And ideology was perhaps the most interesting and significant aspect of that consciousness. Marx and Engels aimed to show how an ideology not only served the interests of the dominant or ruling class in a society, but which also functioned to obscure or veil actual realities. For almost a century one such ideology has been referred to in both serious and popular media as the 'American dream'; it is worth underlining the fact that something not dissimilar now prevails in the UK. Considering the emergence of international neo-liberal political economies (Hilgers, 2011) [133], it is likely to be more and more a feature of countries across the globe.

Tyson (2015) [134], in a clear educational exposition concisely outlines three constituent elements comprising the ideology of the 'American dream': it stresses a) individual achievement b) the quest for status, as well as personal and social esteem along with the accumulation of 'capital' and c) vigorous self-assertion. In many ways, the expression of these characteristics determines what it is to feel 'OK' as an American. However, she then provides a memorable and devastating description of the way the ideology of the 'American dream' denies actual truths about life in America itself. She writes:

> '… the American dream blinds us to the enormities of its failure - both past and present: the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the virtual enslavement of indentured servants, the abuse suffered by immigrant populations, the widening gulf between America's rich and poor, the growing ranks of the homeless and hungry, the enduring socio-economic barriers against women and people of color - and the like.' (Tyson, 2015: 55) And she continues:
>
> 'In other words, the success of the American dream - the acquisition of a wealthy lifestyle for a few - rests on the misery of the many. And it is the power of ideology, of our belief in the naturalness and fairness of this dream, that has blinded us [i.e. we Americans] to the harsh realities it masks.' (Tyson, 2015: 56)

The key point about the role of ideology is that the 'American dream', through the processes of cultural transmission, has so successfully installed itself at the heart of a widely shared American psyche that it is not fully recognized as a product of cultural conditioning; instead, for Tyson, it is understood as something 'natural'. It seems so normal, so taken-for-granted, that it is difficult to 'haul it out' of the unconscious and see it for what it is: a constructed way of both seeing and believing that denies the 'real'. Marcuse (1978) [135] also understands the role of ideology in similar terms. He even thinks that it must have created a deep psychological cast of mind because, as he has underlined, the realities of advanced capitalist life in America are anything but commendable.

In addition to the insights about the role and power of ideology, what might be the most important contributions of Hegel and Marx's contrasting philosophies in relation to the development of human knowledge and understanding?

First, as Bronowski and Mazlish (1963) contend, they have, mainly through Hegel, secured the idea of history as

a process not only affecting every aspect of our thinking - but also of ourselves as the inheritors of ways of 'being'. In turn people in social systems then produce the conditions for subsequent ways of human beings and becoming. Bronowski and Mazlish (1963) go so far as to argue that Hegel's thinking was mainly responsible for the emergence of our now well-established appreciation of that which is 'history' itself.

Second, Singer (1987) concluded that Hegel and Marx contributed a particularly important idea about freedom. He puts this as follows:

> 'We cannot be free unless we control our destiny, unless we, instead of being blown about by the winds of economic circumstances (for Marx) or, steered by the unseen hand of reason (for Hegel), actually take control, realize our own power, realize the capacity of human beings collectively to control our destiny …' (Singer, in Magee, 1987: 207)

But, although Marxist theory might be understood as a theory of liberation and Hegel's as a movement towards the ideal organic state, their ideas have been linked directly with the totalitarianism that manifested itself and continues to manifest itself in various parts of the world. (Indeed Zizek (2022), a self-avowed post-Hegelian thinker, argues that now even the so-called free neo-liberal societies are themselves vast cages in which humans are knowingly or unknowingly confined.) Hegel has been closely associated with the admiration and glorification of the state along with the concept of 'the world-historical figure' which found expression in Hitler and Nazi Germany. Marx was understood as the intellectual founder of Communism - the programmes of which, after the optimism of Lenin, led to the ruthlessness of Stalin and his regime of appalling and cruel tyranny.

What then may have been the flaws in the ideas of Hegel and their inversion in Marx's theory? Rather than accept that there was something intrinsically wrong with either, Singer (1987) contends that their ideas were 'mis-embodied'. What is it - outside the confines of philosophy per se - that leads to the misapplication or mis-embodiment of the ideas derived from philosophical reflection? The problem appears to lie in the fact that, as Singer put it, 'you don't get rid of the divisions between reason and desire'. Zizek (2022) more recently endorses this theme: his cultural analysis proposes that we are now in a world of 'surplus enjoyment'. Beguiled by mediated images and seductive promises, we proceed as if wedded to the relentless pursuit of individual pleasure and happiness. In effect, desire is always likely to depose reason. Thus, the apparent ideals of Communism or Hegel's apotheosis of the rational state collided with the realities of past and present human beings. Rationality is an achievement which is often fragile and temporary. It is always liable to be overridden by our pervasive irrationalities, fears, anxieties, malevolence or worse. In consequence the more recent scholars of 'change', such as Egan (1994) [136], have acknowledged that a first condition, if ever we are to remain in touch with reality, has to be met. We must never underestimate the fact that, in human affairs, the arational, non-rational and irrational are always more pervasive, prevalent and powerful than the purely rational.

9. Conclusion

This paper underlines the unavoidable fact that whilst philosophy has impacted and continues to affect the lives of people (perhaps all people) across the globe, there remains a striking contrast between the measured achievements of an academically 'pure' philosophy and the ways in which certain of the actual writings of philosophers are understood and implemented in real-world contexts. This may be inevitable. The positive and valuable achievements of philosophy are sometimes destined to find themselves, as Singer (1987) puts it, 'mis-embodied' in practice. The outcomes of dispassionate thinking can always be made oppressive and dangerous because of human fallibility.

Nonetheless, the paper hopes to have shown how even the most abstract ideas yielded by the fruits of philosophical inquiry can, either directly or indirectly, make and shape the world(s) in which we find ourselves. The relationship is not straightforward: the ideas of philosophers are refracted through the psychologies of individuals and groups in unpredictable and sometimes peculiar ways. However, they can and do come to determine the nature of our cultural artefacts such as works of art, the particularities of our interpersonal conduct, including our sexual

intimacies, and the socio-political ideologies and structures that govern our ways of being. Their impact is very real. On top of this, the study of philosophy never lets us forget that we may always be wrong. But at the same time the study of psychology, and particularly psycho-dynamic and depth-psychology (e.g. Zizek 2022), suggests that we continually overlook, forget or deny this simple truth.

The late political philosopher, William Ker Muir, drew his studies of personality and power [137,138] (see: Ker Muir 1974, 1977) to a close with the conclusion that we have yet 'to civilize the beast out of man.' The relevant facts of our condition, past and present, surely confirm this. He acknowledged that we humans are susceptible to a range of limitations and liabilities which frequently or even systematically oppose and over-ride cool rationality and humane sensibility. Even in social contexts where, prima facie, reason and the usual virtues of character are *de rigeur*, 'we' regularly fail to attain or sustain such standards. Kant (2003) [139] also recognized this in his 'Critique of Pure Reason'. Thus, whilst the world includes that of the philosopher in his or her study and the social milieux of philosophical reflection, it is more typically a world characterized by expressions of human fallibility. The long traditions of both social psychology [140,141] (e.g. Schein, 1988, Egan, 2017) and depth psychology [142] (e.g. Freud, 1986, Bion, 1961) have shown how persons in contexts of practice are as much concerned with their psychological well-being and the pursuit of their self-interest as they are with the formal aims, principles, ethics and the normative demands of their group(s) or social organizations. As Schein puts it, the real world is one where basic culturally-nuanced existential questions are continually asked: they take the explicit or implicit form: 'Will people like me?', 'Will I fit in?, 'What are the priorities in the place(s) in which I find myself?', 'How do I maintain my status and esteem?' 'To what extent am I a 'somebody', and not a 'nobody'?' etc. etc. On top of this, as the cultural anthropologists have shown, distinct and particular cultural norms exert enormous influence on the discourses and conduct of people wherever they may be. All this defines what it is to 'be' in 'the real world'.

In some ways, it follows that the basic features of our consciousness, conduct and 'being', as they are produced by and produce our experience of the world, constitute a basic challenge for philosophers: if it is the case that persons are indeed a) prone to limited rationality whilst embedded in particular social situations governed by power structures, interpersonal norms and conventions of practice, and, b) are subject to flows of experience in which psychological issues outweigh the moods and modes of philosophical reflection, then philosophy, as a practice, may be likened to something of a cult. It is nonetheless a cult marked by exquisite achievement. But it finds itself almost analogous to a little-known planet - an obscure strange-attractor - located somewhere in a faraway part of the universe. In fact, historically, the challenge to philosophers (at least in the west) is nicely demonstrated in the dialogues of Plato: We read, for example, how Socrates found himself pitted against the hard-bitten realism of Thrasymachus in 'The Republic', whilst the dialogues in 'The Symposium' show him countering the romantic but vacuous musings of Agathon - to such a degree that Agathon himself is obliged to admit that he does not know what he is talking about. Crucially, though, we discover Socrates's tragic fate in 'The Crito': we learn that the exemplary philosopher, in virtue of his or her unsettling questioning and unswerving appeals to logic and reason, is, in an important sense, alien to the real world of the people and the polis. Here it is relevant to remember that Nietzsche [143] (2008) even rejected the achievements of Socratic reasoning and his deontological commitments by noting that no one really wants to be argued into the ground as Socrates was wont to do.

Nonetheless, applied philosophers (such as, Singer (1993) in his 'Practical ethics) and others who have sought to integrate philosophy with action (such as Dreyfus (2001) in his 'On the internet' and Derrida (2001) in 'On cosmopolitanism and forgiveness') have demonstrated that philosophy need never remain remote from the business of living and coping, of understanding and care, of helping us all to edge more towards a world of decency, security and social peace. The three examples featured in this article hope to have shown the reach, impact and generative power of philosophy as it shapes the world around us. Even something as seemingly inconsequential as the look, gesture and words of a political figure portrayed in a cartoon strip in a comic for boys owes its very existence to the ideas of philosophers and the outcomes of philosophical

inquiry.

All this may mean that more time and effort is devoted to illustrating how even the most commonplace features of daily existence owe so much to the genius of philosophy. But it also suggests, as Rorty (1997) [144] has emphasized, the need for developing a 'sentimental education'. However, more fundamentally, radical and disturbing questions remain: Do our cultures provide anything like the enabling conditions in which any such sentimental education allied to the rigors of critical thinking might 'really' be achieved? And, how successful are those same cultures at integrating the achievements of philosophy with the everyday worlds of contemporary living?

End note 1: A note on the concept of 'the real world'

Nagel's (1974) [145] 'something it is like' criterion of consciousness provided a central principle underlying the meaning of the term, 'the real world' as it is used in this article. For Nagel a being is conscious if there is 'something that it is like' to be that creature. In other words, there is some subjective way the world seems or appears from a creature's (a human's) mental or experiential point of view.

And, following Wittgenstein (1953) [146], 'the real-world' is here conceived partly in relation to its ordinary language use: people, in a very wide range of situations (in the United Kingdom), perceive something about which they use the term 'the real world' in order to distinguish abstract ideas or ideals from the concrete conditions in which they might find themselves. They would also refer to different domains of practice to the extent that they reflected different degrees of 'real world-ness'. For example, prisoners contrasted the world of the prison (which was real enough) with the 'real world' beyond its confines. Police officers similarly contrasted the benign environments of their training establishments with the adversarial 'real world' on the outside. Families contrasted the informalities of their domestic settings with the 'real world' beyond the home. Parents would advise their offspring on what to expect 'out there in the real world'. The varying concrete conditions or practice, of social and personal being, following Heidegger (1927) [147], present circumstances (in prisons, colleges, department stores, domestic settings etc.) with which people must cope. The 'real-world' is one in which people continually 'navigate the next wave'.

The meaning of the term, 'the real world' is here understood to entail an intrinsic self-perspectuality: in short, the 'real world' is that which appears to - and is experienced by - the subject (from his or her point of view). This perspective acknowledges the phenomena of both 'ordinary state consciousness' (which is task-oriented) and 'altered states of consciousness' (which transcend the 'ordinary') as these latter have been documented in the field of transpersonal psychology (see: Garcia-Romeu and Tart, 2013) [148].

A deeper conceptual analysis of the real world would have to trace a history of conceptions of 'reality' from Plato to, for example, the theoretical physics of Hawking and those of his critics. Here, though, an appeal is made to the term's meaning in ordinary language use. It reflects the study of a) being-in-the-world as it has been revealed through the methods of the humanistic psychologists, and b) to some of the characteristic features of consciousness detailed in the philosophy of mind. [149–152] (Dennett, 1991, 1992, Van Gulick, 1994, 2000.)

The substantive outcome of this approach derives from the 'experiential worlds' of a) prisoners, prison officers and prison governors b) police in conditions of practice and reflections on their practice, c) the specialist cultures of academics in universities d) the specific and often radical cultures of self-help groups e) the ethos of high-tech organizations and their control and reward systems, and f) discourses manifested in the cultures of Fine Art. These all contributed to the outline statements about the 'real world' noted in the text.

End note 2: Heron's 'extended epistemology' was recently summarized by Reason (2022). It consisted of four inter-related moments viz.: Experiential knowledge, (which was largely tacit and outside full awareness), Presentational knowledge, Propositional knowledge and Practical knowledge. His research had shown that people everywhere had accumulated a vast amount of Experiential knowledge; however, it was only in situations of actual communication that a fraction of this was ever made explicit. Thus, 'Presentational knowledge' referred to that which, through one means or another, came to be given form and content through language and other symbolic communications. Propositional knowledge refers to specific or general learning that could be abstracted from the knowledge made conscious in the presentational phase. Practical knowledge

- including sexual knowledge - referred to the expression of actual skill in action - in the real world.

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