PHILOSOPHY PATHWAYS electronic journal

Issue No. 191
23rd February 2015

Edited by Nicole Note

CONTENTS

I. 'Why 5+1 is not always 6' by Ignaas Devisch

II. 'Jean-Luc Nancy, myth, ideology' by Pieter Meurs

III. 'Ceci n'est pas la solidarite: On public mourning, identification and political solidarity' by Femke Kaulingfreks

--

From the List Manager

IV. An evening with Wittgenstein

V. Joad Exhibition

VI. CFP: Mind, Body and Self

-=

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Issue 191 of Philosophical Pathways is dedicated to the contemporary philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy.
Jean-Luc Nancy was born in Caudean, France, in 1940. In 1963, he graduated at the Sorbonne in Paris, having written his master thesis on Hegel's philosophy of religion. In 1973, he obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on Kant's analogical discourse. Although he published extensively on Hegel and Kant, his thinking is primarily linked to the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida. Indeed, 'occasionally, it is insinuated that Nancy is a 'French Nietzschean', a 'post-Heideggerian' or even a 'Derridean'' (Hutcheson 2015, 24). However, Nancy takes their thinking (legacy?) up to its limits. If anything, Nancy can be considered a highly originary thinker because he endeavours to let sense speak for itself (Meurs, Devisch 2015). He uses words and sentences so that they stand outside themselves and open up to a regime of sense beyond their own specific traditional meaning. According to Morin, 'Nancy's ideas make sense, but this sense arises more from moving across sentences than from the internal signification of any one particular sentence taken into isolation' (Morin 2012, 2). Indeed, Nancy's peculiar style not only makes him a pioneering writer, but also helps him to write originally, thinking things anew, rephrasing and retracing their meaning.

A good example of this is the work he did together with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe for the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political between 1980 and 1984 (Nancy, Lacoue-Labarthe 1997). In their texts, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe literally try to retrace or re-treat the essence of the political. They question the space and meaning of what is considered the political, doing this in such a way that the political is problematized or re-defined. Their deconstruction of the notion of the political has had a significant
impact on key contemporary political thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Claude Lefort, Jacques Ranciere and others.

Nancy has employed the same style and movement in his thinking on community (1991), religion (2008), ontology (2000), and more generally, the sense of the world (1997b, 2007). Each time, he deals with conceptual assumptions and systems in this way, he engages with and pushes the limits of their originary meaning.

The three articles contained in this issue of Philosophical Pathways focus on his contribution to political philosophy, each from its own perspective.

Ignaas Devisch starts with one of Franz Kafka’s short stories (‘5+1 is not always 6’). It is about five persons living together and a newcomer joining them later on. Devisch introduces the story to problematise what it means to belong. What is interesting in this story is that it brings to light the haphazard nature of the small community of these five persons, and by extension the contingency of any community. It also displays how these persons introduce a distinction between an inside (the community of five) and an outside (the newcomer), even if the former are dimly aware of the (previously) uncommitted nature of their relationships on which their communality is founded.

Inspired by Nancy, Devisch invites us to rethink community, or our being together. While in previous times, community was usually something that was simply there and to which people belonged due to shared characteristics, today we no longer know how to express this being in common; the concept has lost its very meaning and so does our ability to organise society. In order to reconsider community, we have to understand, as the story of Kafka reveals, that all criteria...
to enclose a community are contingent. A community can never be closed based on essential characteristics; it is always incomplete because of its very disposition of being formed by singular individuals. Hence, incompleteness does not stand for a lack, but is constitutive of community.

To grasp on a still deeper level what community, or collective identity, entails, Devisch has to show how Nancy's approach to community is inherently linked to an altered perception of subject or identity, one that is formed neither through collective nor through individual essences. Rather, its main characteristic is fluidity through time, a non-essence that is both singular and collective (or plural). What is particular about this view is that both terms do not stand next to one another, but intrinsically refer to one another. Singularity is always being with others, to be exposed to others and yet to differ from them in a non-substantial way. Identities (both collective and individual), then, are each time, through each encounter, recomposed, transformed, reshaped.

This take on the communal, while requiring a certain amount of intellectual effort, opens up new and challenging perspectives. These perspectives will remain blocked from sight if we keep perceiving community from traditional standards -- essentialities -- that newcomers have to adapt to.

Pieter Meurs' article is of a more abstract nature and investigates the relationship between myth and ideology, more particularly how myth enters into ideology, in order to briefly indicate why we are experiencing a loss of sense in modern times.

Nancy highlights the all-pervasiveness of myth (e.g. religious stories are also mythical), because of an intertwining of logos, community and reality. Myth presents itself
as the prime manner of understanding reality, as the very language of the things manifesting themselves. It is representation itself. It needs no interpretation or explanation. As such, it founds reality, it reveals the reality of community to itself. In myth, the cosmos structures itself in logos, and logos structures itself. Myth explains and founds community, providing it with a reason to be. And yet myth is always an invention. Needing no legitimation, it turns its own foundation into fiction.

For a long time, ideology did not have this mythical aspect but, as Meurs shows in Nancy's thinking, its totalitarian tendencies can be considered as an entry of myth into modern political thinking. As myths, totalitarian ideologies (including capitalism) are truths in themselves that cannot be proven wrong. Today, however, this correspondence between truth and reality has been seriously problematised. Since our representations no longer designate the objectivity of the world, we are at a loss about how to understand reality, having lost its signification. It is this loss of sense we are experiencing in modern times.

Femke Kaulingfreks compares in her article two cases of public mourning entwined with political protest. Some time ago, in the United States several people of color were killed by the police (Michael Brown, Erik Garner). Here, public mourning is considered to be the expression of identification with a shared humanity, regardless of whether there was an actual identification with the victims. Recently, in France people were massacred in the attack on the staff of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. Mourning, expressed under the slogan 'Je Suis Charlie' rather seems to ventilate a strong identification with Western liberal ideals of
freedom of expression and creativity. Kaulingfreks starts from this distinction to question public mourning as an act of political solidarity, if drawn on an appeal to identification. She relies, amongst others, on Nancy's insights on freedom and subject that differ from the liberal interpretation, a-being-on-my-own position that the autonomous subject can attain or be deprived of. Instead, freedom should be thought as the very being in the world with others, sharing existence, regardless of whether we acknowledge or appreciate the existence of these others. Being free is the very experience of coexistence, confronting us with the limits of autonomous, substantiated subjects; an ontological condition needing no further qualifications. Nancy's interpretation has political implications, indicating how the political goes beyond the founding of a coherent order amongst like-minded people. It likewise points to the limits of an established and necessary justice system and the compelling force of protesting against injustice, in order to each time render justice.

References


J. L. Nancy. The sense of the world. Minneapolis: University of
I. 'WHY 5+1 IS NOT ALWAYS 6' BY IGNAAS DEVYSSCH

1. Two short stories

To introduce what is at stake in Nancy's work, let me start with a short story from Franz Kafka. A very short story it is, and Max Brod, who edited Kafka's work, entitled it posthumously as 'Gemeinschaft' -- the English translation is entitled with 'Fellowship', a very questionable translation. (1983) It is a story of no more than fifteen lines about five people living together in a house. They were five friends we are told, everything was fine, but then a sixth wanted to join in and he refused to budge. The sixth came to disturb the party and throw the mathematics overboard. Though the friends wanted to include the sixth if the 5+1 would have become 5 again, which means they would still be one community, a whole or a totality. Before the sixth arrived, the five were one, not because they really enjoyed each other but they were one; they lived together and therefore they are a community; the intruder came to turn this order
upside down because the 5+1 isn't actually 5 but 6 or even more than that.

To summarize the story: we were with five friends, we once came out of a house and people said, look, these five came out of this house. Since then, we live together and all went well until a sixth arrived. As such, we don't mind the sixth but the five of us are fine as it is; we don't know him and we don't want him. Although we don't know each other, we are used to each other now and we don't want to be six. Being with six doesn't make sense but being with five neither, but we are used to it and we don't want a new community. We could make strong statements or detailed declarations but we won't do that. We don't declare anything. The sixth keeps on coming and although we push him away, he always returns. End of the story.

Kafka's short story obviously discusses the matter of belonging to, of being part of a group or a kind, of being included or excluded. While Borges explicitly mocks about the attempt to classify living beings of all kinds, Kafka discusses the mathematical order we are familiar with. Apparently, when it comes down to being together, mathematics comes in trouble. Many social scientists, sociologists or philosophers have claimed this in the past: people living together in a community generate a reality of which a total sum is always more than the parts of it. (Lopez 2003) Consequently, the question of living together is not a problem where 1 and 1 is always 2. Kafka's short story poses this problem in the starkest terms: 5+1 isn't five and therefore, the sixth, the intruder by coincidence, is not allowed to enter the house, not because the five hate him but simply they are five and belong together and he's not one of them. If 5+1 would have been 5, then it would have worked, but apparently 5+1 will even be more than 6.
2. Singularity

Franz Kafka’s tale exposes a metaphysical problem we want to reveal throughout this article. The way five friends leave the house is quite everyday scenery. It could have been workers leaving their company by the end of the day. People come together, fall apart, make agreements, cross each other in the street, curse one another in traffic, etc. To be sure, we all have more in common and more intense contact with some than with others; indeed, while some will strike us as completely strange, there may be others that we feel are our soulmates. Not all experiences are equal, or even important, but all fall within the frame of what we could describe as everyday encounters.

Kafka’s story is intriguing because the five also operate in this everyday mode, but nevertheless privilege one meeting so as to surmount the everydayness and attain an authentic existence. They exploit a banal meeting in order to set up a community to which only they belong, excluding everyone else. Despite their vague awareness that their community is nothing more than a banal meeting, they institute a communality where the shared experience of their contingent meeting undergoes a sort of process of concretization and seems to harden into an essence, a first cause or principle to overcome the order of contingency. They take this proclaimed essence to erect a barrier between themselves and others.

What Kafka’s story indicates so beautifully here is that this barrier is itself of the order of the contingent, so that the whole operation of marking out the community is supported a priori by a failure. Every community is also a contingent community but most often forgets this contingency in order to put up a barrier
between the inside and
the outside, between the members of the
community and the intruders.
Then community becomes an imaginary whole
(Anderson 1999), an organic
entity which seems to be natural in the way
its barriers are installed.

3. Community

Someone who profoundly thought about the
importance of community in
our contemporary world is French philosopher
Jean-Luc Nancy.
Community, he keeps on repeating, is one of
the major problems of our
era. Why indeed do we have to think community
today? Undoubtedly, the
most obvious answer Nancy would give to the
question is that
community today is an issue affecting every
kind of formal
organization in society.

It sounds rather banal to say we have to deal
with something because
it is a problem but the question is of
course why today community is
a problem or at least a question and why we
cannot but deal with it.
(Nancy 1991) There were times where it was
self-evident who belonged
to the community and who didn't, you were
simply born in it. You were
inside or outside of the house. Community
then could not be a problem
because the question of what it means to be
in common did not even
arise. (Devisch 2010) Whether these periods
were better, simpler or
rosier is yet another, at the same time very
necessary, question to
be asked if we are to avoid any nostalgic
romanticizing of times
past; the fact is that community has not
always been under
discussion. In some periods, community was
simply there, as the
foundation and final cause of existence and
the being of community
was a sufficient reason for living together
in a community. (Nancy
1992)

Obviously today, this is not the case and one
does not have to
consult philosophical or ethical literature
to see that community is indeed a problem or at least is being conceived as problematic, and it is thus imperative to look for an answer to the problems that present themselves in thinking through our times. (Macintyre 1981)

Since having clear insight into a problem is just as important as finding an answer, the question is: which problems are we dealing within the context of community? The most basic and tautological answer is: the problem that we no longer know what we are talking about when we talk about community.

Here, too, the triviality of this answer speaks volumes but again, this is to Nancy a crucial insight in nowadays' society: the fact that we no longer know whether and how we can still speak about community, this is the fundamental challenge of community today. The most foundational evidence of a community -- who belongs to it and why -- is at loose ends and this is at least a challenge, not only to philosophy but to society as a whole. (Nancy 2000) If every barrier of a community is contingent -- think about Borges: if every classification fails -- then the fundamental question raises how to organize society, since we cannot simply pretend that we are one world community and then presuppose all of our problems to be solved.

As far as Nancy concerns, we need new words and concepts to think our being together today, because the words by which we thought about community -- community is all about sharing the same essence: a color, a race, a nature, a nationality or a culture -- is being eroded by the way society has evolved. (Collective MR 1991) A variety of cultural, political and social developments have led to the disappearance of traditional social bonds. A quick recounting of these developments would include the economic reduction of the importance of the old nation states through
the increasing significance of transnational and global economic and cultural organization, rapid urbanization, greater complexity in terms of social and institutional structures and the progressive disintegration of ancient social connections and traditions. These have all contributed to the appearance of new insecurities and an increasing precariousness of our situation, both at the individual level and in the field of the social. All this has contributed to the appearance of new insecurities and created increasingly precarious situations for both individuals and society as a whole.

Insecurities have troubling effects not only on a number of social and political structures but also on our personal identities. Consequently, one of the most important uncertainties of today’s society is that the traditional social bonds have dissolved and that we are confronted with the most basic questions. This is of course a golden age for philosophers who are most often fond of fundamental questions. So is Nancy. One of his major books on community is called Being singular plural. (Nancy 2000) He argues that there is no singularity which is not plural and, the other way round, that there is no plurality which is not singular. To translate this into layman’s terms: to be always implies to be more than one.

To Nancy, the 'more than one' is crucial: being never means being-alone but always being-with. (Nancy 2008) Although this idea seems the most banal oneliner since decades, it is crucial in many discussions on identity and community. It implies that every enclosure of a community will always also be disclosed or disturbed from outside because the criteria used to enclose it are contingent. There will always be a sixth.
Nancy states that such insufficiency constitutes in principle every community. This must be regarded as fundamental, he concludes. The disclosure of a community is not derived from an originary or still-to-be-constituted completeness nor from a lack that the community is designed to sublate. (Nancy 1999) Rather, such incompleteness is something constitutive because we are, be it as an individual person or as a collective identity, always exposed to others. For Nancy, the incompleteness is never located in some sort of quest for a closed totality. Insufficiency never stands for a lack, but for something that fundamentally cannot be perfected or finished and therefore is constitutive for every community. In short, closure goes hand in hand with disclosure and this challenges profoundly our thinking of identities.

Next to the incompleteness, a second characteristic Nancy puts forward is what he calls the singular character of identities. (Nancy 2000) Singularity is not an easy concept. It refers to something that is rather ungraspable and unique, something hasty or fluid. These are, of course, no characteristics that will lead us towards a substance or essence of a society. It rather appears to be the other way round: the lack of any essence seems to be the only essence of singularity. (Nancy 1992b)

Singularity represents the idea of a temporal identity, a non-substantial given changing all the time while existence goes on. In yet another text of Nancy, The Experience of Freedom we find an interesting passage that might help us to answer this dilemma:

For us, existence is above all what is singular. It happens singularly and only singularly. As for the existence, its own existence is above all singular, which means that its
existence is not precisely its 'own' and that its 'existing' happens an indefinite number of times 'in' its very individuality (which is for its part a singularity). Singularity is what distinguishes the existent from the subject, for the subject is essentially what appropriates itself, according to its own proximity and law. Yet the advent of a subjectivity is itself a singularity. (Nancy 1993)

To accentuate the non-essential and temporary character of our identity as an individual or as part of a collective, not only Nancy but a lot of contemporary continental thinkers have used the notion of singularity. Many of them are or have been looking for a suitable concept to think identity in a non-substantial or non-essential way. Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze, to mention just a few names, have tried to make progress in thinking our identity in this way. (Agamben 1990, May 1997, Patton 1996, Derrida 1997, 1988) Most of them have an almost inborn fear from the political, philosophical, and social claim that identity can be seen as something that one owns. This does not only hold for an individual essence but also, and perhaps more urgently, for essences that believed to be shared collectively. Twentieth century politics have shown all too clear where the claim on closed substantial identities might lead to. Therefore, all of the thinkers named (and others), want to undo the possibility of this claim by thinking identity or existence in another way, in order to prevent us from totalitarian thinking. (Traverso 2001)

While many thinkers put forward a strong individual identity against the risk of totalitarian collectivities, Nancy's specific touch in this debate is the explicit relation he
establishes between singularity and plurality. He argues that there is no singularity which is not plural and, the other way round, that there is no plurality which is not singular: being is always being-with, singular is always singular plural, being one is always being more than one. The singularity is a plurality, with and between other singularities (which are, by the same token, also pluralities). Nancy speaks of the 'singular plural' in such a way as to make clear that singularity is inextricably bound up with plurality. Singularity is being-with-many. (Nancy 2000, 2008)

To singularize oneself means to be exposed to others and to differ from others. The relation between singularities is their incommensurability. They can never be reduced to one another, but their mutual differences never boil down to substantial characteristics which can lead towards the closure of a collective of similar singularities. We are different from one another, but not out of a substance or archetype. Characteristics like ethnicity or culture are contingent, in a way that they are not the exclusive and substantial key terms to include or exclude a person to a certain community. Admittedly, there are Germans and others who are not, there are laborers and others who are not, or there are Muslims and others who are not, but here Nancy crucially points out these people do not differ in a substantial way from the others since there is no infinite and everlasting native essence called 'German', 'laborer', or 'Muslim'. Because of their singularisation, identities differ from themselves and can no longer be thought of as a substance to which one, depending on whether one shares the putative essence of the collective identity, belongs or not. Identities, be it collectives or individuals, are contingent in a way that they change with every
singularization. Each time again, they are recomposed, rebuild, and modified. Not that they are just like anything or anyone else. They are a 'self' but this self is only in its respective singular moments each time again different from the other moments. (Nancy 2008)

4. Conclusions

Kafka's story in which the five conceived themselves as one and the sixth represented their 'more than one' reveals the starting point Nancy stands upon in his writings on community and singularity and the way he develops a new thought on individual or collective identity. Identity, he claims, is no vast and steady entity, grounding itself. Neither is a collective, thought out in terms of a substantial criterion that allegedly marks the frontier between inner and outer. Both the individual and the collective exist in their respective singularization. They change all the time and so do their characteristics.

Thinking changing identities is as such not innovative -- of course, we change all the time -- but it gets radicalized in Nancy's thought. Nancy does not start with the essence of an identity which then is subject to some changes. It is just the other way round: identity is nothing but the gathering of singular differences, the infra-individual differences that make someone always plurally, locally and momentarily different.

Existence is without essence and that is what Nancy's singularity is all about. If we all are singular and thus plural, we neither do have an essence nor are we substantial individuals:

At this exact point, then, one becomes most aware of the essence of singularity: it is not individuality; it is, each time, the punctuality of a 'with'
that establishes a certain origin of meaning and connects it to an infinity of other possible origins. Therefore, it is, at one and the same time, infra-/intra-individual and transindividual, and always the two together. The individual is an intersection of singularities, the discrete exposition of their simultaneity, an exposition that is both discrete and transitory. (Nancy 2000)

Consequently, we do not differ just from others but also continuously from ourselves. With a friend we behave differently than with family. In different contexts we can also behave differently toward the same person. People never meet person Y as such, but always person Y with specific infra-individual qualities or characteristics. This is why people are not to be distinguished from each other on the basis of whether or not they share a common denominator. There are no archetypal points of comparison or one or another essence against which each character trait can be measured. The smile of an African girl does not typify the girl on the basis of some substantial characteristics of either being black or African. The smile typifies the girl at that moment, at that fleeting moment at which she laughs. Each new situation brings another smile (or tear) and thus another origin or singular moment. (Nancy 2008)

This seems superficial but it implies a lot. As long as we start from identity as a substantial given, an unfruitful opposition is at work: the collective is seen as the enemy of the subject and vice versa. From this perspective, individuals should adapt to enter the identity and if not, they remain an intruder, an outsider. . . .

References

G. Agamben. *La communauté qui vient*. Paris:
Seuil; 1990.


II. 'JEAN-LUC NANCY, MYTH, IDEOLOGY' BY PIETER MEURS

1. Introduction

In a footnote of his La Communaute Desoeuvree, Jean Luc Nancy writes that it is necessary to investigate more closely the entry of myth into modern political thinking and more generally the relationship between myth and ideology (Nancy 1990, 116n). In this paper, I will explore the way in which we should understand this strange relation between myth and ideology. To do so, I will first briefly outline Nancy's now already known thinking of myth. Secondly, I will introduce a modern understanding of ideology. In a concluding remark, I will discuss Nancy's idea of the entry of myth in ideology.
2. Myth

In *La communauté désœuvrée*, Nancy discusses myth within the context of community. We all know myth as a narrative that tells of the beginning of times or of the reason for something. It is a specific set of understandings that shows why things are the way they are and why people do the things they do. According to Nancy, a myth functions not merely as a metaphysical principle for a community: not only does it provide a community with an explanation for its existence, it also guarantees its foundation and continuation. It is a language that is 'the element of an inaugural communication in which exchange and sharing in general are founded or inscribed' (Nancy 1991, 48). Let us analyse this sentence in order to grasp its full potential. First of all, Nancy considers myth to be full, original speech. It is not a discourse that needs to be argued in order to be legitimate. Rather, myth provides the legitimation of arguments itself. It informs us of how we do things, not why we do them. Myth refers to a (mostly implicit) set of understandings by which we encounter the reality of our community. As such, it needs no explanation but is itself the explanation: 'it does not need to be interpreted, since it explains itself' (Ibid., 49). Drawing on Schelling, Nancy would say that myth is *tautegorical*: it simply communicates nothing other than itself. Myth presents itself as the initial or prime language that allows us to understand our reality. Or even better: that provides us with an understanding of that reality. As a consequence, according to Nancy, myth is reality communicating itself: it is the interplay between the practical and the theoretical. 'It is the speech and the language of the very things that manifest themselves, it is the communication of these things: it does not speak of the appearance
or the aspect of things; rather, in myth, their rhythm speaks and their music sounds' (Ibid., 50). In this regard, myth and community necessarily belong to each other. It is impossible to grasp the existence of our community outside myth. 'Myth arises only from a community and for it: they engender one another, infinitely and immediately' (Ibid., 50).

According to Nancy, myth, as a system of meaning, as our regime of sense, tells us what a community is about. It explains our reality. Or in other words: community reveals itself by means of, or, in myth.

Simultaneously, however, in this revealing, myth also legitimates or founds community. Myth is not simply a, or rather: the, explanation of our reality, but it also provides this reality with a raison d'être, a ground of existence. That myth explains reality, while being the explanation itself, means that it founds reality. As foundation, myth is figurative for reality only insofar as it is figuration itself. In other words, myth offers us a representation of reality, not because this would refer to a certain truth, but because it is representation itself. As such, it inscribes itself into the reality of community: 'at the same time as each one of its revelations, it also reveals the community to itself and founds it' (Ibid., 50-51).

In a sense then, myth is 'the name for logos structuring itself, or, and this comes down to the same thing, the name for the cosmos structuring itself in logos' (Ibid., 49). According to Nancy, we can only understand our reality through myth. It is proclaimed through (or presented by) myth, and in this proclamation our reality communicates its myth. In short: myth is simultaneously interpretational and foundational. It offers an original, inaugural frame of reference that inscribes itself into the real and through
which our reality makes sense. Consequently, myth is no innocent story. It refers to the specific interplay between our practices and theories. Myth refers to that story through which we live, know and act. The Nancean account of myth deals with the reciprocal interplay between the physical and the meta-physical. It expresses the fact that a description is never independent of its reality, that it is intimately linked to a certain normative or prescriptive content. Myth not only offers a description and an explanation of reality, it also provides it with meaning, with a direction.

So far, Nancy has explained myth as a narrative or an imaginary that offers us an explanation of reality, while at the same time founding it. We should understand myth from its mythic (or myth/ing) power. What Nancy teaches us in a genuine comprehensive way, though, is not only how this myth relates to the world, but also to itself: he indicates that myth always already is a myth as well. This seemingly tautologic sentence 'means in effect that myth, as inauguration or as foundation, is a myth, in other words, a fiction, a simple invention' (Ibid., 52). Although a myth is an interpretational matrix that gives meaning -- and as such, direction -- to everyday practices, it is, at the same time, a simple fiction as well. Nancy thus combines two quite distinct and opposite meanings of the word myth. He argues, in this respect, that we should not understand myth from one of these meanings (on the one hand: that it is a fiction, on the other: that it is a foundation), but from their internal tension. He considers myth as a foundation by fiction, or as a founding fiction. This has everything to do with the fact that myth is self-communicating, self-explaining. It needs no legitimation: it is legitimation or explanation itself. As a consequence, myth turns its own fiction into
The power of Nancy's thinking of myth lies in the idea that myth is simultaneously myth and foundation. Not only is it a critical account to understand myth, but it also offers a critical way to investigate our modern situation. In order to do so, we first have to explore the meaning of ideology.

3. Ideology

So far, 'nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology' (Eagleton 1991, 1). It is however a 'word that evokes strong emotional responses' (Freeden 2003b, 1). This has everything to do with the way in which Marx and Engels (1998) have influenced the understanding of the concept. Their work has engendered the common conception of ideology (as a smokescreen) that is still influential today. However, as much as the contemporary scholarship is indebted to the Marxist concept of ideology, it also criticizes its pejorative connotation. Geertz aptly summarized this critique stating that 'the term 'ideology' has itself become thoroughly ideologized' (Geertz 1973, 193). For a long time, ideology referred to dogmatic, doctrinaire and closed systems of thought that needed to be overcome. With Althusser (1969), ideology was regarded more and more as the hidden element of specific representations and significations. In this view, ideology is no longer considered as something that needs to be overcome, but is a necessary permanent and organic part of social totality. Althusser argued that 'ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of History; it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies' (Althusser 1969, 232). Ideologies are a fundamental part of social practices. Rather than to false understanding of reality, ideology refers to understanding pure and simple. It is a
structure by which we know the world. And this understanding is not solely a conscious act. In this sense, Althusser indicated that 'ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness' (Althusser 1969, 233). In this regard, ideology has a practico-socio-political function: we live or experience socio-political reality by means of ideology. It is a representation of the relation between men and their world.

Thus, contrary to the Marxist understanding of ideology, more recent studies in the first place question the ephemerality and the deceptive aspect of ideology. Ideology is no longer a smokescreen that blocks true consciousness and as such should be overcome. Rather, it is considered as something permanent that offers a possibility to understand reality. In this sense, Freeden (1996) is right that it would be more correct to speak about ideologies (plural), instead of ideology. Instead of referring to one predominant and deceptive way of understanding the world, ideology, or rather: ideologies, are considered as various 'sets of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organized social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order' (Seliger 1976, 11). It is neither good nor bad, true nor false, liberating nor oppressive. Ideologies are narratives that inform us about our relation to the world. In this regard, ideology has been presented as an ordered system of cultural symbols: it provides authoritative concepts to render practices meaningful.
Ideology, in this generic inclusive conception, is considered as a system of beliefs, a set of moral and political understandings that gives an explanation and legitimation and proposes a specific direction of the world. Now we know what ideologies are, we have to understand how they work. In this, we should read the word literally: ideology is an (not necessary conscious) understanding (logos) of the world by means of conceptual and ideal images (idea). It is Hannah Arendt's critical account of ideology that is very insightful in this sense. In her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she defines ideology quite literally as 'the logic of an idea' (Arendt 1962, 469). She argues that ideology revolves around the application of an idea to history in such a way that the course of events is explained by the idea as one consistent process. It means that 'whatever happens, happens according to the logic of one 'idea'' (Arendt 1962, 469). The idea becomes the foundation for the way in which the world should be ordered. It offers the premise and explanation for everything.

According to Arendt, this form of idealism at the basis of an ideology implies that every ideology inherently contains totalitarian aspects. She discerns three totalitarian elements that are characteristic to ideological thinking. The first concerns the idea that ideology offers a total explanation for the movement of history, in the sense that it justifies what becomes, has passed away and is to be born. This 'claim of total explanation promises to explain all historical happenings, the total explanation of the past, the total knowledge of the present, and the reliable prediction of the future' (Arendt 1962, 470). Secondly, in order to fulfil this promise, an ideology needs to elevate itself to something that stands beyond
ephemeral reality: ‘ideological thinking becomes emancipated from the reality that we perceive with our five senses, and insists on a ‘truer’ reality concealed behind all perceptible things, dominating them from this place of concealment and requiring a sixth sense that enables us to become aware of it’ (Arendt 1962, 470-471). The third totalitarian element is to be found in the foundation for this emancipation: an ideology’s idea functions as its axiomatic premise or ground from which everything else is a logical consequence. Ideologies are thus always a kind of logical deduction, corresponding to the two aforementioned elements. Firstly, ‘because its thought movement does not spring from experience but is self-generated, and, secondly, because it transforms the one and only point that is taken and accepted from experienced reality into an axiomatic premise, leaving from then on the subsequent argumentation process completely untouched from further experience’ (Arendt 1962, 471).

In a sense then, the totalitarian elements of an ideology seek to objectify its narrative. They try to exempt a space from speculation as a place where the ideology’s core concepts can be presented as an absolute and final ground. Ideologies hold on to the realism of the idea. As a consequence, the explanation or understanding about the world that an ideology offers becomes nearly indisputable, almost god-given. The logic of ideas presupposes the steady ground of its own logic. In this sense, ideology claims its logic of the idea to be true: it offers a steady ground to found its political community upon. It withdraws ideology from being a mere narrative and legitimates the claim of its veracity.

4. Myth’s entry in ideology

At this point, it is possible to connect myth and ideology. According
to Nancy: the totalitarian tendencies of an ideology indicate the entrance of myth into modern political thinking (Nancy 1990, 116n).[4] Myth's entry into ideology, implies first of all that an ideology is believed to be an original, true narrative. It becomes the truth of the world. This is the case since the foundational idea of ideology is considered as self-evident, a truth in itself. In a sense, then, ideology works by means of its mythological structure.

In other words, the mythological background of ideology implies that ideology legitimates itself: by means of the logic of its ideas. It needs no legitimation for it is legitimation itself. Or, as Nancy would say: 'it is self-communicating' (Nancy 1991, 50). The entry of myth into ideologies explains the dissolving of a transcendent vantage point into the immanence of a logic of ideas. The political narrative becomes the truth, not because it refers to a vantage point that assures its truth, but 'simply because'. It is claimed to be true in itself. In other words, mythic ideology, becomes the authentic tale of the world. As a consequence, it cannot be simply proven 'wrong' by any other political narrative, because such another narrative could never claim absolute truth itself. Indeed, the entry of myth into political thought implies that this thought and its political outline cannot be easily inverted. The ideas that form the ground of an ideology are no longer simple ideas: they are total, global. They are no longer ideas that can be discredited or fought.

At the same time however, it is evermore apparent that today, the mythic status of ideology can no longer be claimed. Indeed, 'we no longer live in mythic life, nor in a time of mythic invention or speech' (Nancy 1991, 52). Our speech and ideas no longer refer to the inaugural communication in which exchange and sharing in general are
founded or inscribed. They are no longer original. Due to the contemporary crisis of sense, words have lost their originary significance. They are no longer the communication of reality itself. Put otherwise: words or concepts do not simply equate things. Together with philosophers like Lyotard, Derrida, Nietzsche, and others, Nancy wants to debunk the realism of the idea that has been present in the Western tradition (Meurs et al 2009). Words are mere words or representations, they are not the real as such. Our representations don't denote the objectivity of the world around us. And as such, we are not sure anymore what reality signifies. It is in this sense, the loss of sense we experience in modern times, refers to the loss of signification due to the collapse of a direct and objective relation between the real and our concepts. We have lost the significance of things. We do not live in myth anymore.

From a critical point of view, Nancy's account of myth and its entry into modern political thought, reveals the mythical character of the contemporary political narratives. It shows that ideologies, while claiming to offer a steady ground for society, cannot invoke such a foundation.

Footnotes

1. Eagleton (1991, 28) even considers to equate ideology with culture.

2. I am indebted to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's apprehensive use of Arendt's analysis of ideology in their Le Myth Nazi (2005).

3. Indeed, in this sense, Arendt is right to claim that 'not before Hitler and Stalin were the great political potentialities of ideologies discovered' (Arendt, 1962, 468).

4. For a critical analysis of the modernization of myth, see
Edelstein (2007). Basing himself on the works of Sorel, Edelstein argues that in order for a myth to enter into modern politics, it is crucial that it does not draw on the authority from the past, as classical myth would, but that it is aimed at future accomplishments. 'This temporal reversal affects a second traditional characteristic of myths: whereas myths were commonly defined by their narratives -- Plato calls them 'old world stories' in the Timaeus -- their modern incarnations appear much more static, iconic even, as though paused on a single image-frame' (Edelstein, 2007, 33).

References


K. Marx and F. Engels. *The German ideology. Including Theses on Feuerbach and Introduction to the critique of


(c) Pieter Meurs 2015

Email: Pieter.Meurs@vub.ac.be

- =
III. 'CECI N’EST PAS LA SOLIDARITÉ: ON PUBLIC MOURNING, IDENTIFICATION AND POLITICAL SOLIDARITY' BY FEMKE KAULINGFREKS

Over the past months two widely attended cases of public mourning took place. In the United States many mourned the death of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and other people of color who were killed by the police. In France people mourned the thirteen who were killed in the terrorist attack on satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo. In both cases public mourning was entwined with political protest. Masses of people went out in the streets to express their grievances for the lives lost, but also to protest certain unwanted developments in society. Despite the fact that both cases are of a very different nature, caused by different events and stirring different emotions, I wish to compare them here in one respect. A comparison between both cases enables me to investigate what role recognition on the basis of identity plays in the active performance of political solidarity, and how solidarity without identification could be expressed.

1. To identify or not to identify?

In the case of public mourning in the US, the slogan accompanying the protests, ‘Black lives matter’, represents a denunciation of the unequal valuation of different lives by state authorities. The protests voice a demand not only to end racial profiling by the police, but to end all forms of structural racism which are embedded in the American justice system. Contrary to the current situation in which people of color are not protected by law enforcement like white people, this slogan implies a prescriptive claim; black lives should equally matter in general. The expressions of public mourning in this case seemed to be based on the emphasis of a generic, shared humanity,
regardless of an actual identification of the protesters with the victims who lost their lives. Not only people of color took the streets. White people marched in solidarity, not because they identified with the victims, or suffered themselves from police brutality, but because they criticized the prevailing societal structures which make justice more easily accessible to some than to others. The message was: it does not matter what you look like, everyone should be treated with care and respect by the police. This generic claim to a shared humanity was expressed in a more specific slogan, in order to clearly indicate and denounce who is not yet counted as an equally valuable human being. As Judith Butler expressed it:

If we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, 'all lives matter,' then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of 'all lives.' That said, it is true that all lives matter (we can then debate about when life begins or ends). But to make that universal formulation concrete, to make that into a living formulation, one that truly extends to all people, we have to foreground those lives that are not mattering now, to mark that exclusion, and militate against it.[1]

The case of public mourning in France showed a different relation between identification and political solidarity. Immediately after the terrorist attacks took place people gathered in the center of Paris and other major French cities, under the slogan 'Je Suis Charlie'. This slogan seemed to indicate a strong identification with the deceased editors of the magazine, who became the impersonated symbols of Western, liberal freedom of expression and creativity,
frankly mocking any authority of church and state. The slogan also immediately lead to critique. People discussed whether they could claim to be Charlie or not, with some not recognizing the offensive tone of the magazine, and others rather identifying with Achmed, the Muslim police officer, who was also killed in the attack. As a result, the protests encouraged people to choose sides between different camps. Especially Muslims were expected to identify themselves with the treasured liberal values of Western society, and explicitly denounce violent atrocities committed in the name of Islamic faith. In this case, the expressions of public mourning led to a reaffirmation of the already often invoked distinctions between so called progressive, secular Europeans and backwards, dogmatic, Muslims. In the mourning of the attack on Charlie Hebdo it became clear how easily people are both mobilized and divided by claims of identity politics. The emphasis on identification as a basis for political solidarity in this case, seemed to imply that one can only stand up for certain ideals if one feels personally affected by them. The protests under the slogan 'Je Suis Charlie' did not have an inclusive effect, but rather stressed already existing boundaries between dominant and stigmatized groups in Western European societies.

In what follows, I will make use of the work of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy to problematize the performance of political solidarity on the basis of an appeal to identification. I will refer to his basic political-ontological ideas, and his writings on justice and freedom, in order to further analyse the cases of public mourning in France and the US. An engagement with his work will clarify that political solidarity based on the proposition 'I am...' could imply a form of inappropriate appropriation, because it presupposes that people can
only support each other if they are the same, or could at least pretend to be the same. When people express their solidarity while saying 'I am...', this implies that they fully project their own perspective on the events, even if their personal experiences are not at all related. The awareness that some are privileged and others are not, and some identities are preferred while others are repressed is clouded by this kind of appropriation.

Nancy's philosophy enables an imagination of political solidarity which emerges in full recognition of irreducible otherness, and simultaneously in a recognition of a shared embeddedness in the same society. Solidarity should not only emerge in a situation in which we can appropriate the suffering of others as our own, where we can say 'this could have been us, this could have happened to us'. It should also emerge in situations in which we cannot personally relate to the suffering which takes place, but nevertheless we make an appeal to stop the suffering of others.

2. I am

After the terrorist attacks took place in Paris people immediately felt the need to come together in public and collectively share their fear, disgust and grief about the terrible events. The following days marches were organized, not only to commemorate the victims, but also to protest attacks on the secular, liberal culture of Western Europe. The public mourning went hand in hand with political statements about the need to safeguard a public climate in which different, often opposing, and sometimes harsh and offensive opinions can be freely voiced. People held up pencils and front covers of the magazine Charlie Hebdo, stating the importance to defend freedom of speech and press against fundamentalist Islamic beliefs. The slogan 'Je suis Charlie' fits well in this liberal tradition and its conception of
freedom. Freedom is a core principle of liberalism. It enables the self-chosen development of the individual, independent from doctrines or the influence of others. Restrictions of this personal freedom through coercion by authoritative forces related to the state, the church, or the community are only acceptable in case of a very compelling justification. In the contemporary culture of neoliberalism this focus on individual self-determination is coupled with a belief in the free and unrestricted pursuit of economic interests. The gaining of individual success and profit is stimulated, and in a society driven by competition personal interests are seen as a primary motivation in both social and political life. The invocation of the 'I am in the 'Je suis Charlie' slogan could be seen as a symbol of this dominant neo-liberal strive for individual self-realization. The slogan expresses a form of solidarity which is based on a sense of personal identification, reflecting the idea that only the freedoms to which we feel personally attached are worthy to take action for. In addition, the slogan seems to appeal to self-interest as a motivation to express political solidarity. Currently we seem to live in a time in which people no longer take the streets because they wish to express solidarity with the marginalized or excluded. Political ideals seem to be only inspirational if they relate to one's personal wellbeing. If one's individual freedoms threatened, this seems to be the strongest incentive to take action.

3. Ontological freedom

Already at the end of the '80's of last century Jean-Luc Nancy stated that we are predominantly occupied with the concept of freedom in a negative sense (1993). We are mostly concerned with any kind of 'evil' which could threaten or destroy the freedoms most frequently
described by the epithet 'democratic' (ibid., 2). This sentiment became explicitly apparent in the reactions on the terrorist attacks in Paris. It seems completely self-evident that we need to defend our freedom and its uncontested relation to the Western, liberal, democratic notion of the free will. Nancy observes this as a curious obsession, since one seems less eager to thoroughly think about the essential meaning of the notion of freedom. If we do not think through the meaning of freedom we fail to notice that a specifically liberal interpretation of freedom may impede or disqualify other interpretations of freedom. In the case of 'I am Charlie', the slogan does not leave much room to reflect on the interests and freedom of those who are not Charlie, or refuse to identify with Charlie. In this sense, the slogan invites a solidarity which is limited to only one category of European citizens, of the ones who can identify with an image of liberal and secular Western civilization. The freedom which is defended under the slogan 'I am Charlie' can hence also lead to a form of repression. It seems to be forgotten that the stimulation of one persons freedom can easily lead to restrictions on someone else's freedom. Jean-Luc Nancy states in his book 'The Experience of Freedom' that freedom can only be enjoyed in relation to other, and therefore never implies a form of full autonomy (ibid.). This relation leads to an inevitable vulnerability for the boundaries which others can set to ones freedom.

This thought is in line with the ontology Nancy has developed in his other work. Nancy emphasizes that every subject always immediately appears within a relation, and is therefore not characterized by a purely singular, autonomous substantiality forming its identity. Simultaneously, the subject is also not absorbed in a plural entity (e.g. 'society,' 'people,' 'class') that
would give it a collective substantiality forming an identity. For Nancy, the interconnectedness between singularity and plurality characterizes every form of being; the singular is always already plural, the plural is always already singular. Nancy therefore speaks of a singular-plural being (2000). The singular-plural being is itself an irreducible relation that cannot be traced back to an initial entity. 'Being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence.' (ibid., 3). The 'with' is therefore at the core of being itself. Being-with others is not a relation which is added up to an autonomous state of being-by itself, as the origin of being often tends to be understood according to Nancy (ibid., 30-31). Subjectivity should therefore not be understood in the Cartesian sense. 'The singular is an ego that is not a 'subject' in the sense of the relation of a self to itself' (ibid., 32-33). We do not become a subject when we become aware of ourselves in a solipsist way, but rather when we experience something 'other' than ourselves.

For Nancy freedom and being are inextricably intertwined with each other at an ontological level. Like being itself, freedom always implies a relation with something other, and is therefore always shared. Freedom simultaneously emerges with being in the world. Freedom is therefore in essence not something which needs to be gained because it is lost, or which needs to be defended as a scarce good (1993, 13). Freedom is always already there, as part of existence itself. This 'freedom of existence' should not be seen as a substantial thing in itself, as a defined substance (ibid. 55), but rather as a very basic ontological condition, which does not need to be further qualified. Nancy speaks of freedom as an 'ontological imperative' (p. 155), but without
commandment. Freedom is therefore also not something which can be possessed or acquired by a subject, but is rather a feature of subject formation itself. Nevertheless, 'freedom cannot be presented as the autonomy of a subjectivity in charge of itself and of its decisions, evolving freely and in perfect independence from every obstacle' (ibid., 66). Since freedom immediately emerges with every existence in the world, it is also freedom which enables sharing, coexistence and relations. We are never completely free in the sense that we are on our own, as an autonomous self. Being free always immediately implies sharing the world with others, and sharing an awareness of being in the world with others. For Nancy, this realization implies that freedom cannot be seen separately from equality (ibid. p. 71). We are in the world together with others, who are equal beings in the world, equally sharing existence with us, regardless of the fact whether we recognize their right to existence, or whether we positively value their existence. They are there, like we are, and therefore they are equally part of the same world.

4. Politics at a threshold

This experience of coexistence, which always confronts us with the limits of an autonomously operating, substantial subject with a strongly defined identity, has political implications. The political in Nancy’s interpretation is not based on a shared organization, program or identity which brings individuals together in a collective body, but on the understanding that we necessarily coexist with others with whom we share no necessary similarities. A strong identification, such as in the case of the ‘I am Charlie’ protests, is not a prerequisite for political solidarity according to Nancy. It might even create unnecessary boundaries between those who can identify
with each other, and 'outsiders' who are denied a similarly valuable human status. What we share on a basic ontological level, is first of all a lack of a substantive identity. Consequentially, the political is not about the establishment of a coherent order amongst like-minded people. The drawing of horizons, boundaries or frontiers, which create a division between a familiar whole and its strange outside, should instead be questioned. Jean-Christophe Bailly speaks in a joint publication with Nancy of a thinking of the political as a thinking of thresholds instead of boundaries (Nancy & Bailly 1991, 20). In his interpretation, a threshold does not divide the community, but rather creates a connection of co-appearance (comparution), which at the same time does not negate the initial differences that exist within each community. A threshold is not a strict barrier which separates a homogeneous entity from its outside; instead, it is the place which indicates the difference between inside and outside and which at the same time invites one to pass from one dimension into the other. The idea of the threshold marks the necessary connection between any inner and outside space. The threshold opens the inside to the outside and the other way around.

Superficial, binary judgments between a certain sameness, or similarity which is good, and an alterity which is evil, can be contested from an awareness of our irreducible coexistence in the world. The symbolic distinctions which are made on the basis of the 'I am Charlie' slogan, between good and civilized Western citizens and evil, barbaric Muslims are an example of such binary judgments. Political solidarity should not imply an enforcement of such judgements, but rather challenge a seemingly self-evident reference to fixed identity positions. Political solidarity could also be based
on an affirmation of the equality of all in an irreducible difference. This Nancyean understanding of political solidarity comes more to light in the 'Black lives matter' protests in the US.

5. Lives that matter

After the death of eighteen year old Michael Brown, who was shot by a police officer while he was unarmed, people took the streets in Ferguson, and later all over the USA. A variety of protest forms emerged, which became to symbolize a generally shared outrage about the unjust treatment of people of color by the police. Under the slogans 'Black lives matter' and 'Hands up, don't shoot', people marched, performed flashmobs, blocked bridges and highways and closed down police stations and courthouses. One particular feature of the protests stood out. In many places across the country die-ins were staged. In these performative protests, the expression of public mourning and political action came together. People laid down on the streets in public places, blocking traffic, or simply occupying space with their bodies. High school teenagers performed die-ins in their school diners, creating piles of bodies between the tables. The die-ins made a silent, yet dramatic scene. They confronted passers-by with a performance of vulnerability, or a certain staged finitude. By collectively repeating the murder scene that sparked the protests, the performances clarified that this scene is not a singular incident, but one event in a chain of similar events, of numerous people of color lying dead in the streets. The countless bodies spread out on the pavement symbolically underlined the magnitude of the problem at stake. The die-ins brought together a variety of people, using this performance of public mourning to emphasize that black lives matter, exactly by reminding the public how easily these
lives could be lost. White people took part in the protests out of solidarity without directly identifying themselves with victims like Michael Brown. This solidarity was mostly inspired by an understanding of the risk of loss, and an understanding of the fact that this risk is not equally shared, because of the different positions people have in society.

Martin Crowley states that an awareness of the risk of loss could possibly spark an egalitarian revolt against existing injustices (2009). Crowley bases his analysis on Nancy's ontology with political implications. Because of the apparent awareness of finitude, the die-ins could be an illustration of the political agency which Crowley envisions. An appeal to ontological equality should cause an awareness that we do not only equally co-appear in the world, but that we are also equally vulnerable to an end to this co-appearance, to a finitude of our existence (ibid., 23). We are exposed to this finitude, but cannot generally control it or appropriate it. Regardless of our background or social position, we share the fact that finitude can strike us unexpectedly and irrevocably. The awareness that we can be equally affected by finitude should bring about, in turn, a solidarity with those who cannot protect themselves from finitude, because they have lost all affirmative power or all rights to act (ibid., 124). As soon as finitude becomes something to be exercised and decided upon by some at the expense of others, this is a sign of abuse, which should be contested (ibid., 12). The deliberately differentiating of exposure to finitude along certain lines of privilege is an act of injustice (ibid., 24). An egalitarian revolt should fight such injustices in the name of the equally shared ontological status of vulnerable coexistence in the world. The point here is not to save people entirely from
their exposure to finitude, but to safeguard its equal sharing. This was also the central claim of the die-ins. The actions enabled people to express a shared concern for the risk to loose one’s lives by the hands of state authorities, even if this risk does not trouble one personally. Other than the protests in France, these protests were not focused on the protection of already existing freedom, but on the establishment of justice, where it is not yet equally established for all.

6. In search of justice

Where Nancy speaks of freedom as an ‘ontological imperative’, which is always already there, he speaks of justice as something that needs to be ‘rendered’ (2000, 186). Justice is not a natural given, which can be easily defined or pinpointed, since it is intrinsically connected to a world which itself cannot be easily defined. Our world does not consist of a unity or an entity, but of an infinite process of sharing our existence with others. The world is constantly transformed, or constantly transforms itself in interaction, without reference to an external or transcendental authority. Consequently a principle of absolute justice, as a certain general standard, does not exist. ‘Justice does not come from the outside (what outside?) to hover above the world, in order to repair it or bring it to completion’ (ibid. 189). To render justice, implies a recognition of the unique character of everything which exists, and simultaneously recognize that everything is always already shared and therefore never completely autonomous, proper, or untouched. It implies that each and everyone is equally in need of a just treatment, and simultaneously it implies that a just treatment in a singular case does not automatically signify the same in another case. This idea of justice cannot be defined in itself and can
therefore also never be fully, positively realized. A need for justice will always exist, which is expressed in protests against injustice, and not in its own confirmation. These ontological reflections also imply that justice cannot always be safeguarded by institutions that see to the implementation of law and order (Nancy 2007, 17). Sometimes laws need to evolve in order to establish more justice for more people within society. This is exactly what the 'Black lives matter' protesters ask for. At the same time, one should realize that one cannot decide on ones own what it means to be just, since justice is always established in relation with others (ibid. 63). The ongoing strive for justice can be brought into practice if we first of all realize that everyone is in need of recognition and respect, for being a unique person, and at the same time always already involved in coexistence with others. Even though we could not define generally shared conditions for recognition, everyone should have an equal right to be recognized. This recognition should not be based on identifiable character traits, which make the one person more easily recognizable than the other. Not everyone has an equal lifestyle, needs or desires, but everyone has an equal right to be recognized, as an equally valuable human being (ibid. 41, 42). This is why Nancy closely relates equality to justice.

7. Shared humanity

This is also why acts of political solidarity aimed at the establishment of justice do not need to be based on identification. Identification and recognition are not necessarily associated with each other. Recognition can take place on the basis of a very bare, shared humanity, in full awareness of any further existing differences. The die-ins and the 'black lives matter' slogan enabled
people to collectively organize themselves around a shared desire for justice, despite the fact that they did not share a specific identity. These acts of public mourning and political protest are therefore not a performance of identity politics, but rather of a politics which emerges from a shared human vulnerability. They illustrate that traumatizing events do not need to lead to a reiteration of existing fault lines between people with a different religion or race. Expressions of public mourning can bring people together who share little else than their indignation about the injustices which took place, and nevertheless find enough incentives in that shared indignation to take action together. Hopefully, the mourning of possible future lives lost will spark such a solidarity based on a shared humanity, rather than an affirmation of one, dominant identity and its consequent exclusion of those who identify differently.

Footnote


References


(c) Femke Kaulingfreks 2015

Email: kfenke@gmail.com

- = -

IV. AN EVENING WITH WITTGENSTEIN

You are cordially invited to an Evening with Wittgenstein.

Thursday 12th March 2015, 7.00pm

Austrian Cultural Forum London
28 Rutland Gate
London SW7 1PQ

(nearest tube station, Knightsbridge)

Difficult to know and impossible to forget, Ludwig Wittgenstein is remembered as the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century. He published only one book in his lifetime -- a masterpiece that moulded the evolution of philosophy and baffled his teachers. The evening sees the launch of the play text, Wittgenstein -- The Crooked Roads, by William Lyons (Methuen-Bloomsbury Drama), and will also include a talk on the Wittgenstein family by Margaret Stonborough, Ludwig's great niece, and the first showing of a filmed scene from the play.

William Lyons, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Trinity College, Dublin, has written a moving and philosophically acute journey through successive decades of Wittgenstein's career. The play received its world premiere on 19 April 2011 at the Riverside Studios, London, directed by Nick Blackburn and generously sponsored by both the ACF, London, and the American Philosophical Association.

Entry is free, as will be the refreshments. As space is limited, you will need to book -- this can be done online at:
V. JOAD EXHIBITION

Two day event: Friday 10th April - Saturday 11th April 2015

Celebrating the life and work of the BBC Brains Trust philosopher C.E.M. Joad.

A Joad Exhibition is planned for the 62nd Anniversary of the South Downs Philosopher C.E.M. Joad (1891-1953) whose Archives are in Arundel Museum

http://www.the-philosopher.co.uk/symonds.htm

On Friday evening, there will be 'Brains Trust Evening', with Question Master The Reverend Roger Williamson. The panelists will be made up of volunteers and special guests.

On Saturday morning there will be a 'Ramblette', a short walk from Amberley Station to South Stoke Village.

Richard W. Symonds
The Joad Society
2 Lychgate Cottages
Ifield Street, Ifield Village
Crawley, West Sussex

Tel: 07540 309592 (Text only: I am very deaf)
Email: richardsy5@aol.com (preferred communication)

VI. MIND, BODY AND SELF

A three day conference: 24th-26th July 2015

Call for Papers and Presentation

Society for Philosophy and Culture
Victoria University of Wellington

The Society for Philosophy and Culture is an
organisation dedicated
to promoting interest in philosophy and other
related disciplines.
The Society encourages cross-cultural and
cross-disciplinary debate
and discussion. We have branches at Victoria
University of
Wellington, New Zealand, and McMaster
University, Canada.

The Society is organising an international
conference on the topic
"Mind, Body and Self" to be held at Victoria
University of
Wellington, New Zealand, through the 24th-26th of July 2015. *No
entry fee will be required.* We are
requesting submissions of papers
to be presented and considered for
publication. Papers may be
accepted in absentia and arrangements for
video conferencing can be
made if attendance is not possible.

The conference will present an
interdisciplinary analysis of the main
topic of Mind, Body and Self. Papers could be from disciplines such
as: Philosophy, Sociology, Theology,
Psychology, Anthropology,
Criminology, History, Geography, Cognitive
and Neuro-Science,
Physics, Environmental Sciences, Art History,
Medicine, Performing
Arts, Literature, Law, Commerce, Computer
Science/ Artificial
Intelligence and Eastern and Western
Religious Perspectives. (other
related fields may be considered)

The books
http://www.philosophyandculture.org/books.htm
which have
been previously compiled by The Society are
Meaning and Identity: an
interdisciplinary approach and Human Beings
and Freedom: an
interdisciplinary approach.

If you are interested in submitting your
manuscript for the book or
in presenting at the conference, please
contact us. Confirmation for
presentation and/ or abstracts are due by
28th June 2015. The final
papers will be subject to editorial and peer-
review prior to
publishing. Each contributor will receive a copy of the volume.

More information can be found at the Society's website:

http://www.philosophyandculture.org

*Please forward this email amongst those who would be interested or willing to attend this conference.*

---------------------------------------------
Philosophy Pathways is the electronic newsletter for the Pathways to Philosophy distance learning program

To subscribe or cancel your subscription please email your request to philosophypathways@fastmail.net

The views expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect those of the Editors.
---------------------------------------------

[top]