

INTRODUCTION: TRANSCENDING THE DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

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This edition begins with a tribute to Brian Goodwin. Brian was not only an original member of the editorial board of *Cosmos & History*, but was the patron of the *Joseph Needham Centre for Complex Processes Research* from within which this journal was conceived. His work and life symbolizes all that the journal stands for. The central question that Brian was concerned with throughout his life was: What is life? It seems appropriate therefore to retrospectively dedicate last year's two volume special edition on this question to him.

However, I believe that this edition of *Cosmos & History* would also meet with his approval. If there is a theme uniting the papers in this edition it is the problematic state of existing disciplines and the fruitfulness of transcending disciplinary boundaries, something that was of increasing concern to Brian.

The first paper by Carlos Frade examines and attempts to explain the parlous state of sociology, contrasting what now passes for sociology with its promise as a free form of enquiry proclaimed by Max Weber and C. Wright Mills. Frade is concerned to work out how sociology could be revived, but in order to do this he attempts to explain not only its failure to live up to its promise, but also its complicity in the debasement of universities. Free enquiry has been undermined by the way universities have functioned and the internal dynamics of disciplines, which have tended to sideline and silence those who have resisted specialization and the trivialization of research, defended provocative theses or questioned the state of their discipline. However, sociology has also been undermined by the lack of the virtues required to sustain a free form of enquiry. The revival of sociology and of the university will require, as Frade put it, 'love', 'insight' and 'courage'. While in this paper Frade focuses on sociology, his analysis is relevant to the way free enquiry is being stultified in all disciplines.

The second paper by Adam Scarfe is firstly an historical study of the origin and influence of the notion of the 'Baldwin effect' in evolutionary biology, but it is much more than this. It is an attempt to synthesise Baldwin's insight with Alfred North Whitehead's

metaphysics to develop a process-relational evolutionary cosmology. This is itself a courageous work, combining history of science, theoretical biology, natural philosophy and metaphysics. Being over 25000 words long it is the kind of paper, academically rigorous yet written for a broad audience, that tends to be regarded as too short for a book and too long for a journal article, yet this is exactly the length required for the project Scarfe has attempted.

Another ambitious paper crossing a number of disciplinary boundaries is 'Complexity, Sustainability, Justice, and Meaning' by Horacio Velasco. Focussing initially on how the conflict between the directional chronological time of history and the reversible dynamical time of classical physics has been resolved by the invalidation of the dynamical sense of time by non-linear dynamics, Velasco then shows how non-linear dynamics has been complemented by symbol mediated language. Engaging with limitations of economic theory and ethics in dealing with ecological constraints he then attempts to show how indefinitely evolving complexity, sustainability, justice and meaning are indissolubly bound with chronological time.

Glenn McLaren also crosses disciplines to engage with science, natural philosophy, metaphysics and ethics in a study of climate change. Taking Alfred North Whitehead's *Science and the Modern World* as a starting point, McLaren argues that existence is essentially vibratory. Conceiving nature in this way shows promise as the basis for all the natural sciences, McLaren argues. However, if nature is essentially vibratory, we should not be trying to eliminate vibrations. Using defective attitudes to health to illuminate defective attitudes to climate change, McLaren calls for a new kind of ethics of participation.

The notion of time is investigated from a very different perspective from the preceding writers by Frederic Will in 'Temporal Foundations in the Construction of History.' In this paper Will offers two essays on time which converge on a description of cognition as subject-centred. The first essay on 'Multiple Nows' argues that the present and the past are generated in infinitely diverse combinations whenever a new 'now' establishes a past for itself, while 'History of a House' asks what is the 'historicity' or that object, and suggests that the answer is 'nothing'. The historicity is ascribed to it by the historian/perceiver who is standing before the house, Will argues.

The following two papers reveal the fruitfulness of Peircian semiotics as a transdiscipline. Steve Mackey uses semiotics to reveal the parallels between the ideas of John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas, two thinkers who are seldom considered together. Inna Semetsky's uses Gauss' interpretation of complex numbers to explicate Peirce's notion of abduction as an aspect of the production and interpretation of signs. Each paper illustrates how Peircian semiotics, which is a relatively new and vigorous field of research, is enabling scholars to make connections and offer insights that would have been precluded by older disciplines.

One of the peculiar features of the divide between the sciences and the humanities, with the humanities having been severely reduced in status in recent years, is that there has been recourse to evaluative terms taken from the natural sciences and applied to people's psychological states. The most important of these are 'health' and 'illness'.

Seamus MacSuibhne questions this tendency, examining the promotion of ‘solstalgia’ as a new mental illness.

Jacques Derrida achieved a cult status in the humanities in 1990s, a status shared with Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. This status has been inherited by Slavoj Žižek. While having common sources of inspiration, there are huge differences between these thinkers. Alzo David-West analyses a late interview with Derrida on ‘Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides’ and reveals Derrida to be ‘unremarkable, expounding an ambiguous and eclectic pre-Marxist prophetism.’ Terry Lovat and Inna Semetsky argue that Deleuze’s philosophical method and unorthodox ontology facilitates a naturalistic interpretation of the functioning of mysticism, while Daniel Hourigan finds Žižek to be a fruitful starting point to examine the ‘mythologization of technology.’ Hourigan at the same time provides an analysis of Žižek’s philosophy of what in the past might have been called ‘the human condition.’

In ‘Philosophical Anthropology, Ethics and Political Philosophy in an Age of Impending Catastrophe’ Arran Gare argues that if we are to provide the ethics and political philosophy required to reorient people to address the global ecological crisis, then it is necessary to reintegrate philosophy with the quest to understand the nature of humanity and its place in the cosmos. It is necessary to revive philosophical anthropology to oppose the Hobbesian view of humans that has dominated modernity. What is required, Gare argues, is a reinterpretation of Hegel’s philosophical anthropology, ethics and politics taking into account Schelling’s critique of his Idealism, a reinterpretation of Marx’s work based on this reinterpretation of Hegel, and then a reinterpretation and development of such humanism through recent developments of hierarchy theory and biosemiotics.

In ‘Dark Matter, Dark Energy and Modern Cosmology’ Jorge Horvath argues that contemporary cosmology is in the throes of a major reorientation in thought in its effort to account for a major anomaly in existing scientific theories. The anomaly, and the deep change in the conceptual framework required to overcome this anomaly, qualify as a textbook Kuhnian paradigm shift, Horvath argues. He then goes on to identify some of the actual elements ‘in the works’ of contemporary science associated with this revolution in thought.

The edition concludes with a review by Arun Sladanha of Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, placing this work in the context of recent discussions of the relationship between science, philosophy and the humanities.

It was hoped that our special edition on the question ‘What is Life?’ would also come out as a book. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, we have not been able to find a publisher. Those we have contacted have pointed out that although the papers are outstanding, they are available free online. Under these circumstances publication in book form is not a good commercial proposition. This has meant that it has not been possible to make corrections that we intended to make. The most important of these pertain to acknowledgement. The tables in Floyd Merrell’s paper ‘Life Before Matter, Possible

Signification Before Tangible Signs: Towards a Mediating View' drew on the work of Steven M. Rosen, notably Table 1 and associated analysis which was adapted from Table 3.1 of *Topologies of the Flesh, A Multidimensional Exploration of the Lifeworld* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006, p.75) and Table 5.1 of *The Self-Evolving Cosmos*, (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008). This was not acknowledged. The editors of *Cosmos and History* (and Floyd Merrell) apologize for the omission of this acknowledgement.

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