ISSN 2516-2292 (Online)
ISSN 2516-2284 (Print)

Issue No. 217 05/08/2026

The *Wednesday*

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Naked Thoughts for Summer

The hot summer this year made me think of the philosophy of clothes. My late mother-in-law told me once that in cold seasons, you can always add another layer, but in hot seasons, there is a limit to how much you can remove. I thought there is a wisdom in this, but I did not apply it intellectually. I also once came across the idea that clothes have two functions, one is aesthetic, the other is ethical. I think it might have come from the Algerian thinker Malek Bennabi (1905 – 1973) who wrote on dress in the Muslim world in his book *The Conditions of Renaissance* in order to motivate social change and progress. More recently Iread a section in *Thus Spoken Zarathustra* in which Nietzsche criticises the clergy for their attire. However, two more sources of thought about clothing came to my mind: one is *Sartor Resartus* (or The Tailor Retailoring) by Thomas Carlyle, the other *The Penguin Island* by Anatol France. The first was written before the birth of Nietzsche, the second almost a decade after his death.

Let me start with Nietzsche. In Book Two of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he writes *Of the Priests*: 'They thought to live as corpses, they dressed their corpses in black; even in their speech I smell the evil aroma of burial vaults'. This is a harsh criticism, but I think Nietzsche has deeper point to make, which is that such attire covers up the truth he is searching for. However, he says that they were corpses and hence had no life left under their clothes. Similarly, he attacks their churches: 'Oh, just look at these huts that these priests have built themselves. Churches they call their sweet-smelling caves!' He adds: 'Oh this counterfeit light! Oh this musty air! Here, where the soul may not fly up to its height!' Contrast this with what he believed philosophy should be. In the Preface to *Ecce Homo*, he borrows a phrase from the Roman poet Ovid who wrote 'We strive for the forbidden' to write: 'Philosophy, as I have so far understood and lived it, means living voluntarily among ice and high mountains-seeking out everything strange and questionable in existence, everything so far placed under a ban by morality'.

Philosophising in the fresh air was a recurring theme in Nietzsche's thought and it is connected with health and righteousness. From the rare anecdotes we know of Nietzsche's life, he was a well-dressed person. In Basel, Switzerland, he was said to have followed the latest English fashion and was well remembered for it, although in his writing he was always critical of English writers and philosophers, including Carlyle - whom you would imagine to be on the same page, especially with his heroes and hero-worship, beside his book on the philosophy of clothes. Nietzsche was also known in Turin, Italy, where he spent his last sane months, he was known as the professor, because of his appearance and his manners. However, when Nietzsche became mad, the first sign was when his landlord found him dancing naked in his lodging. Years later when he was in the custody of his mother and sister, he ran out of the house and was later on found naked in a park. Is this what his unconscious mind urged him finally to do: reveal himself naked to the world?

Perhaps this is in line with what Carlyle thought, that clothes are a human invention and not imposed by nature. All other creatures have their clothes provided for them as a birthright. However, humans made clothes to show their ranks and powers. It is all symbolic. Carlyle writes: 'Matter exists only spiritually, and to represent some Idea, and *body* it forth. . Hence Clothes, as despicable as we think them, are so unspeakably significant. Clothes, from the King's mantle downwards, are emblematic, not of want only, but of a manifold cunning Victory over Want. On the other hand, all Emblematic things are properly Clothes, thought-woven or hand- woven: must not the Imagination weave Garments, visible Bodies, wherein the else invisible creations and inspirations of our Reason are, like Spirits, revealed, and first become all-powerful…'.

Carlyle goes on ontologising the idea of clothing, raising it to the highest level: 'It is written, the Heavens and the Earth shall fade away like a Vesture; which indeed they are: the Time-vesture of the Eternal. Whatsoever sensibly exists, whatsoever represents Spirit to Spirit, is properly a Clothing, a suit of Raiment, put on for a season, and to be laid off. Thus in this one pregnant subject of CLOTHES, rightly understood, is included all that men have thought, dreamed, done, and been: the whole External Universe and what it holds is but Clothing; and the essence of all Science lies in the PHILOSOPHY OF CLOTHES '.

I would argue that some ideas are difficult to cloth, and hence their thinkers, or those who experienced them, went silent. Such was the case with the visions of St. Aquinas that lead him to silence before his death, and the *Seventh Letter* of Plato where he argued that writing distorts the intention of what is thought, and I wish to add, what was seen.

This editorial on the philosophy of clothes, may be continued on another occasion, but it complements the article on food by Dr. Alan Xuereb published in the last issue of *The Wednesday*, and William Bishop's thoughts on living, which you can find inside the present issue. Although these topics of everyday are usually left to sociology and other disciplines, I suggest that there is a lot for philosophy to contribute to this field.

The Editor

The Living That's Lost In Life

Can the wisdom in living, deadened by thought, find resurrection?

WILLIAM BISHOP

As a youth I tended to daydream. While present I was absent. This was the accusation Heraclitus leveled at people, although he might have meant that most people are half-asleep. I wished to participate in and comprehend *living*, but living is experienced from within, so tends to elude the abstract concept. Helpfully I finally discovered *'The Philosophy of Living'* by François Jullien.

Living is often associated with vitality in sport and an active social life. This suits the extrovert, yet quieter though nonetheless intense living can be had through participation in the natural world - a walk in the woods, or gardening. I recently heard someone speaking of the intense feeling of incorporation within the abundant vibratory life above the canopy of trees in a rain forest. 'Living' also thrives in many professions, and devoted artists identify living with their art. Numerous activities provide exhilarating and joyful experiences of living. The entanglement involved in living shows up in friendship where mutuality enhances and enriches living. And living can be felt and appreciated or endured in inactivity or illness.

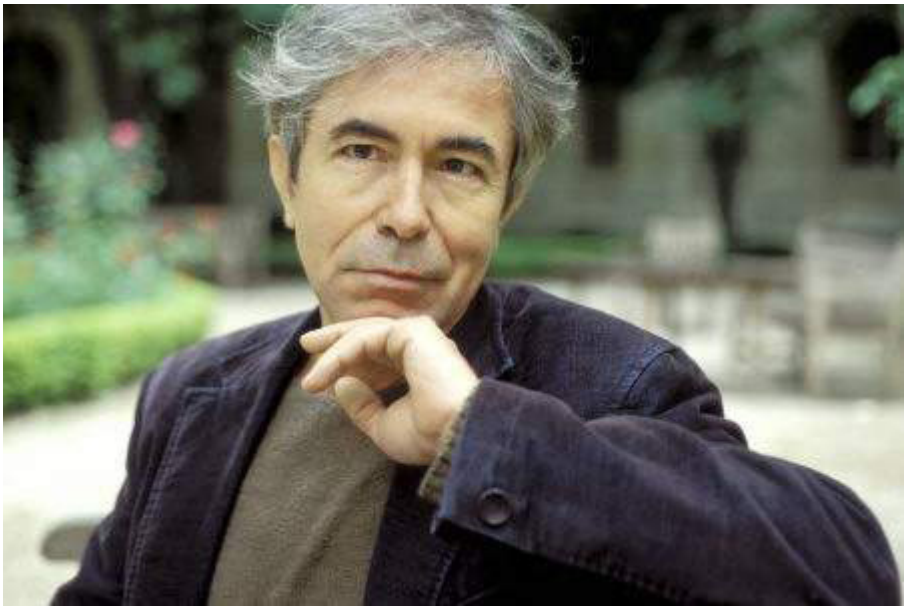
Metaphorically speaking, consciousness is the flower produced by the living plant. Similarly the nervous system and senses support consciousness at the biological level. Even within the body bacteria thrive - particularly in the gut - indicating that the living world is highly interdependent. But consciousness is necessary for *awareness* of living. If a *bio-logical* evolutionary process involves consciousness then the logic of 'bio' suggests maintenance of continuity from physical to mental. This implies that thinking can be considered to be 'living'. Indeed there is a *felt quality* to living while 'life' is an abstract concept. Life can be 'preserved' to a degree when a life is documented, but living engages the spontaneous moment. It is the past that informs the record. We may desire to remain living, yet we do not wish to lose the value of accumulated experience. Paradoxically thinking tends to suppress the *feeling of living*, yet philosophers like Socrates or Heidegger suggest the possibility of living intensely within thinking.

François Jullien mentions Montaigne as a person who gave philosophical attention to living. This was in the form of the essay, but exploration of living seems suited more to the novel and poetry. The substance of a novel can enact living and the reader is imaginatively drawn into an experience of living along with the movement. This 'experience' resembles the intensity of a child living inside its imaginary play world.

The poetic form of *Haiku* aptly captures perception in its spontaneity. For example, Basho: *'As lightening flashes / zig-zag screeches of the heron, / flying in the dark'*. This is likely to be expressed better in the original language. According to Jullien, Chinese avoids the 'discursive linkage' of the Western logos tradition (avoiding self-subject). This allows immediate confrontation with the living moment. Haiku fixes the 'springing-up freshness'. As Basho explained: '*The light that emanates from things has to be fixed in words before it might be extinguished in the mind'*. These lines from Stephen Mitchell's translation of *Tao Te Ching* convey something of the Tao as expressed by Basho: *'The Tao is called the Great Mother/ empty yet inexhaustible/ it gives birth to infinite worlds ... Since before time and space were,/ the Tao is./ It is beyond is and is not./ How do I know this is true?/ I look inside myself and see ... You can't know it but you can be it ... Only in being lived by the Tao / can you be truly yourself ... It is older than God'.* (There is no God when there is nothing *but* God.)

The Logic of Living

Anthropology informs us that perception, thinking, and comprehension of the world by a cultural group is embedded in the structure of



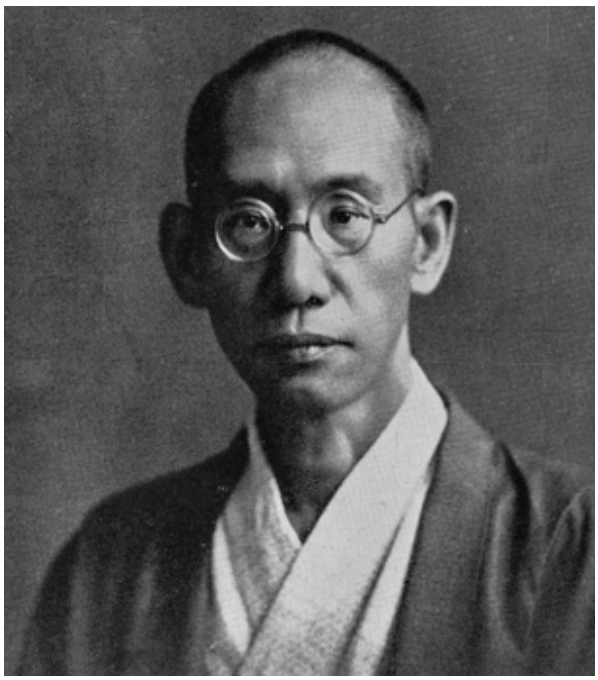
François Jullien

language and this conditions what it is possible to think in that language. European philosophy, beginning with the Greek language, employed a conversational and logical mode of enquiry and speculation. Jullien explains: *'By sharpening (at least since Parmenides) the principle of non-contradiction and by posing the idea that wisdom (traditionally bearing on living) is identified with science - sophia with episteme - philosophy becomes committed to the adventure of logos as a discourse of knowledge taken as 'truth' for its objective'*.

According to Jullien, Plato produced the *dialectic* to allow participation between essences or identities. By establishing the realm of Being, Plato was able to separate essences so that they could be distinctly thought. The living realm where essences blend was regarded as non-Being not the opposite of Being but the Other that it expresses. *'True life'* for Plato is the universals, and discursive thought operates according to the subject/object paradigm, but 'living' demands synthesis to address the 'in between'. *'Let us think of living',* says Jullien, *'without refraining from the concept, but in the crux of a conceptual contradiction which diverges it within itself by disclosing and tightening it'*. This refers us to the logic of non-dual identity, which the Tao exhibits.

'Living' in a down-to-earth way, differs from 'life'. The actuality of 'living' is not readily caught in thought, unlike what has already manifested and to which object-logic can be applied. The *fixity* in the objective world contrasts with the *ever-moving* flux of living. It is possible to conceive 'life' as an object, but 'living' requires another logic, so let us welcome 'paradoxical', or 'concrete' logic. This form of non-dual logic conceptualizes the unity of interacting opposites where *difference* can activate continuous movement. Reflecting on logic, the Japanese philosopher, Nishida Kitaro, suggested: *'logic is the discursive form of our thinking and we will only be able to clarify what logic is by reflecting on the form of our own thinking'*. Nishida identified non-dual logic with the logic of Zen Buddhism, which acknowledges direct intuitive understanding. It is indeed this form of *thinking* that is embodied in the ancient Tao, which speaks of the Way that withdraws in order to allow manifestation. Disappearance is the condition of the appearance. The Way (Tao) is the respiration of the world springing up and settling down. The notion of what presents itself as an appearance which then withdraws, accords with the thinking of Heraclitus and Heidegger that saw truth as an 'unveiling'. Significantly, Heidegger thought early European philosophy departed from 'Being' as a concern and source of the living world at the point when logos as *reason* became for practical purposes interpreted as *ratio*. However, logo-centric thinking appears to be an *evolutionary* development in consciousness onwards from the Taoist empty mind or clear instinctive knowing.

Basho



Nashida Kitaro

The ancient Tao preceded the evolution of the Ego, when ego-centric thinking gave rise to individual self-consciousness. While it was possible to be 'lived' by the Tao, now the intellect intervenes via the ego, inhibiting instinctive living by distancing *self* from *object*. Yet the Tao remains foundational in the evolutionary process.

Energy and Evolution

There are different ways of looking at living. One of these is to propose that there is only one source of everything and that is *energy*, with a wide frequency range. Our physical space-time dimension contains a spectrum of energy vibrating at a rate low enough to support material form. Like the mythical *Proteus*, energy through its vibrations manifests particles that combine into atoms and molecules and so on. This Protean energy projects itself into a multitude of forms. The ancient Chinese opposition between heaven and earth finds its parallel here in the sun (+) impregnating the earth (–) in the way sperm infiltrates an egg to create the movement of life through polar interactions. An evolution of consciousness depends upon the ability of a life-form to access and utilize subtle energy rhythms beyond its present condition. Falling back to a lower rhythm is to degenerate. Such a *single Source* as energy aligns with Spinoza's *original substance* as God or Nature. Energy is the source and driver of our life, yet as a conscious living being our *reality* is limited to the level of the consciousness we have reached.

If the Source withdraws when appearances arise, if we can channel will into our thinking then it may be possible to shift our consciousness energetically upstream towards the source and to think the source incrementally. This assumes that *will* is closely linked with 'living'. If this is possible then *'living thinking'* or penetrative *'thinking will'*, should connect with the higher conscious level of Being. At the sub-atomic foundational level, science speaks of the 'principle of uncertainty' and 'entanglement', terms that could certainly be applied to the life of citizens in our post-modern world. And if by the intervention of measurement the 'uncertainty' of a situation can be resolved to certainty, it would seem that at this quantum level , the *consciousness* of an observing agent interconnects with phenomena to indicate that the 'observer' is inside 'reality'. This possible situation opens up potential for inclusion also of the feeling and thinking of the 'observer' within this quantum flux, implying that thinking, feeling and will participate in the energetic fabric of reality.

Derrida's *Deconstruction* can be interpreted as a postmodern desire to recapture the early Greek

and Taoist sense of the flux and fluidity of life, by destabilizing the fixity of the conceptual building blocks at the foundation of the logo-centric universe. If we accept that a concept includes its negation, then Derrida utilizes this 'polarity' by engaging a process in which oppositions confront each other - one prevailing initially and then subdued by the other. Such binary oppositions include that of life and death in a pendulum-like rhythm that deconstructs the main fixed idea into a fluidity of relations resembling breathing. The deconstructionist appears therefore to inhabit a world conditioned by the motion of the quantum mechanical world, while the rest of us remain happily fixed in the rational world of Newtonian physics.

Ayurveda (the science of life) speaks of five elemental states of the world: ether, fire, air, water, earth, and in the related Samkhya philosophy ether (*akash*) is said to arise directly from 'unmanifested reality' through the soundless sound of 'aum'. Ether energizes the other 'elements'. When ether's life-giving formative forces are withdrawn the organism dies. As *'negative space'*, the ether is also the medium that supports *thinking,* which then finds reflection in the brain. Goethe wisely saw the distinction according to which the *intellect* connects the *idea* with the finished object, the thing-in-itself, while *reason* connects the *idea* with the *coming-into-being* of the object. 'Coming into being' is the living process. Spirit is always in movement.

It is said that originally the *divine-spiritual* in its essential *Being* was the cosmos, but now the cosmos represents the 'dead thoughts' of the divine-spiritual. If our thinking can connect with the Source, then such *living etheric thinking* would have a revitalizing effect individually and on humanity as an organic whole. The crucial difference here is between 'Be-ing' and 'Thingness'. Manipulation of dead thoughts, especially by 'artificial intelligence', is qualitatively different from i,mmanent living thinking in accord with the 'flow of *Being*'. The qualitative difference here is between *life* and *death*. While it has been possible to be 'lived by the Tao', with the introduction of the ego (the 'I') through evolutionary and historical development, a human being now has the potential to *co-operate* with the cosmic 'I AM' as higher

Proust

self – not merely to have life, but to have it more abundantly. As one sacred text among others, the *Bhagavad Gita* supports the idea that the purpose of creative evolution on Earth is development of *personhood* with all its developmental potential right up to Krishna at the ineffable height of the spectrum of personhood. Arguably the potential for subtle discernment of the moving evolutionary process exists at the juncture of the *present* where future turns into past and where living has *presence*.

So returning to a logo-centric stance, perhaps a suitable response to my question about living can be found in Proust's biographical novel, *In Search of Lost Time*. Here Proust relives in imagination his experience of living, which has passed, but cannot be regained in the sense of being relived. However the gain in the loss is *meaning*. According to Clare Carlisle, at the conclusion, Proust understood that the living that had passed in his lifetime constituted his 'soul', and in that sense he was able to understand the *self* of that lifetime. The concept of *eudemonia* (happiness) may apply here since Aristotle intended this for a complete life. Loss and gain construct the paradox of living, but humanity's living is not lost if the cosmic memory of the *Akashic Record* maintains its living image.

The Logic of Change

Before and after a change the subject must be different, and yet the same. Logical analysis can resolve this apparent paradox.

CHRIS SEDDON

Aristotle writes:

Therefore, when the change is in respect of quantity, it is growth and decay; when in respect of place, locomotion; when in respect of an affection and quality, alteration; but when nothing remains behind of which the other is an affection or an accident at all, it is coming-to-be, and the other passing-away.

On Coming to Be and Passing Away. Translated by C.D.C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2023. *De Generatione et Corruptione*, 1.4, 319b10–14.

The phrase 'logic of change' is not meant to suggest that change is a matter of logic. Far otherwise, because change is normally a contingent matter, in that whether a certain change has occurred or not is usually subject to contingent evidence and implications. Whilst strictly speaking one could also use the concept of change in mathematical a priori contexts, this is so far from the usual use that some might regard it as merely metaphorical. Neither is the phrase meant to suggest that there is a single pre-eminent and definite idea of change. Ideas used to express contingent propositions are typically subject to an even greater degree of vagueness and variation than those used to express analytical propositions, and this applies also to the concept of change. However, it is still possible to clarify the concept of change through considering its logical structure - that is, to identify a logically-defined concept which, through its operation on contingent terms, can express contingent propositions about specific changes.

Summary
In summary, I suggest that
1. Change requires continuity
2. Continuity does not require identity

1. Change Requires Continuity
A change occurs when a subject was in a certain state at one time and a different state at a different time.

For example, suppose my passenger says 'The lights changed'. Depending on the context, I might interpret that to mean that the signal controlling our lane of traffic has just changed. Perhaps the signal was amber a second ago. Now it is red. These are the two times and states to which my passenger may be drawing my attention.

As another example, someone might notice I changed my car. Last year it was a Vauxhall. This year it is a Skoda.

Global temperatures have risen since the last ice age: then they were cold; now they are warm. Those are temporal changes, but change need not be temporal. Local temperatures also rise towards the equator: here they are cool; there they are warm.

It is easy to see that a change requires a difference. If there were no difference in the states between the times being compared, there would be no change.

It may be less obvious, but a change also requires continuity. In the terms above, this continuity is represented by the subject. After a change the subject is in a different state, but

Aristotle

it is still the same subject. Without a common subject there would not be a change, there would just be a difference.

When the signal controlling our lane of traffic changes from amber to red, this is a change not only because red is different from amber, but because both red and amber describe the same signal at different times. In normal circumstances, by saying 'The lights changed', my passenger is saying two things:

- A second ago there was something which was the signal controlling our lane, and was one colour
- Now there is something which is still the signal controlling our lane, but is a different colour

In other words, they are asserting both difference and continuity.

Even if the same difference were still present, without a persistent subject there would be no change, and with a different persistent subject there would be a different change.

Suppose, for example, that our passenger had no concept of traffic signals, but merely saw the road junction as a place with different coloured lights changing for no apparent reason. Then, if they said 'The lights changed' they might merely have meant that the colours of the lights in that location changed, rather than more specifically the colours of the lights representing the signal controlling our lane. They would be reporting - and meaning - a different change, even if as it happened they only saw the lights controlling our lane. This example illustrates that the persistent subject being changed is as essential a part of the change as the varying states of that subject.

Similarly, pointing out that a car was a Vauxhall before and another car is a Skoda now, does not represent a change, or at least, not the same change, as pointing out that my car was a Vauxhall before and is a Skoda now, because there is no persistent subject.

The concept of change has many forms, but these considerations suggest that one useful definition might be:

That a *subject* ***changes*** from *state1* to *state2* between *locus1* and *locus2* means that in *locus1* the *subject* is in *state1* and in *locus2* the *subject* is in *state2*.

2. Continuity does not Require Identity

Natural language has evolved for pragmatic efficiency in everyday life, rather than precision in logical analysis. For example, required parameters are often implied by the context, rather than explicitly stated, as illustrated by the examples of change above. Another ambiguity of natural language is that it is often unclear whether a phrase is intended to convey a relationship of identity, rather than simple subject and predicate. Of crucial importance for the current discussion, the existence and scope of generalisations is usually implicit rather than explicit, and this further obfuscates the precise interpretation of the relationship of subject and predicate.

For these reasons, I use artificial language for logical analysis, however I am aware that most readers of the Wednesday are unfamiliar with any form of artificial language, so I have not included artificial language versions, and will try to state the last part of the definition as clearly as I can in something more like English.

The phrase 'in *locus1* the subject is in *state1* and in *locus2* the subject is in state2' means, more explicitly, that:

For every *x* and *y,* if *x* and *y* are both instances of the *subject* and *x* is in *locus1* and y is in *locus2*, then *x* is in *state1* and *y* is in *state2*.

One of the most important features of this definition is the treatment of the *subject* not as an argument of the *state*, but as a function with multiple arguments in its own right - each of which may also be arguments of the *state*. One way to think of this is that a *subject* such as the signal controlling our traffic lane is an idea which describes any number of experiences. We understand it when we can reliably understand when it does or does not apply. That is one way to think of it, but crucially it is not the only way to think of it. The definition does not make any claims about the nature of the variables *x* and *y*, other than that those which fit the description of the *subject* and *locus1* also fit the description of *state1*, and those which fit the description of the *subject* and *locus2* also fit the description of *state2*. Another way to think of this is that the signal controlling our traffic lane is an

idea which describes any number of instances - any instance of the signal that fits within the approximate range described as a second ago also fits the colour amber, whereas any instance of the signal that fits within the approximate range described as now also fits the colour red. But the strength of this analysis of subject and predicate as functions of shared arguments - as exemplified in the definition of change - is that it makes no assumptions about the nature of the argument, other than that they satisfy the definitions of the specified subject and predicate.

The strength of this analysis is not that it proves that the continuity required by any particular change is not identity. This introduction of an inessential assumption would be a weakness. The strength is that it does not assume the nature of the continuity, whether it is absolute identity, some other form of transitive equivalence, or some other form of non-transitive approximate equivalence, instead leaving this up to the actual specification of the subject of change.

Compare this with a more traditional formulation of the last part of the definition.

The phrase 'in *locus1* the subject is in *state1* and in *locus2* the *subject* is in *state2*' is more traditionally taken to mean, more explicitly, that:

The *subject* is in *state1* at *locus1* and *state2* at *locus2*

At first glance this formulation looks simpler. There are no variables. The loci before and after the change are supposed to be parameters of the state before and after the change, with the subject as the other argument. The function and argument notation has been extended to allow two arguments, one interpreted as the place or time within which the function applies to the subject.

To logicians focusing on the foundations of mathematics, the weakness of this analysis is not readily apparent. It is easy to assume that every state can readily be defined relative to well-understood coordinate systems, or absolutely with no coordinate system, and that every subject can be uniquely defined as having but one instance. However, this is an unwarranted assumption even in the foundations of mathematics, and certainly does not apply to contingent change.

Firstly, it is not practical to limit every state description to a specific coordinate system. We will want to understand what it means for something to be red, for example, without reference to a particular model of space, or time, or spacetime, or whatever other coordinate system may or may not be relevant. Rather than define a different form of every possible state for every possible locus, it is more practical to define each state and each place separately, as the need arises.

Secondly, the assumption that a subject has one and only one instance goes beyond what we wish to assert. Consider the definition of "the signal controlling our traffic lane". We cannot assume that whatever criteria we adopt will fit absolutely one and only one subject, yet if our definition supposes that this subject is an argument without arguments of its own, then our definition has included that untenable and unwelcome assumption into anything we wish to say about it.

My article on Identity in *The Wednesday* issue 99 contrasts absolute identities with equivalence and approximate equivalence relations. It is tempting to think that the continuity required for change requires some kind of "essence" which remains constant in the subject of change, but these examples and this analysis of change indicate that the only essence required is the definition of the subject of change as a property, which applies to its different instances.

The Boy

When young he did not seek shells for their beauty,
for he was one with them, from the same world.
The scent of hyacinths did nothing for him,
nor did he value mirroring his face.

Yet all his days were like they had been opened
and spread out like a valley, oval-shaped,
where he was master and also the servant
of a white life that did not offer choice,

for one who often did something improper.
But not for long he took a winding path.
He longed for knowledge of himself and others
and learn to find the words when coming home.

Before they tamed him, told him what was proper,
he drank some of their flood with bitter taste.
Then he recovered in a strange light mood
and walked along a shore in emptiness.

He stepped on shells buried beneath his feet,
and hyacinths he carried in his hair.
He knew about their beauty now and too
of a great life embellished and in style.

When growing up he dropped the flowers soon,
because he saw the prison in all things,
and through the prison bars he watched his fate,
his beautiful and unknown destiny.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

The Timeless Way of Building:

A Philosophical Interpretation of Christopher Alexander's Vision

DR. ALAN XUEREB

My colleague and friend, Mark, shared with me a video feature on Christopher Alexander's philosophy of architecture, which sparked my imagination and inspired me to jot down a few reflections. Here they are. Christopher Alexander's notion of 'the timeless way of building' extends beyond a merely architectural proposition; it constitutes a substantive philosophical account of order, meaning, and the conditions under which human environments acquire vitality (Alexander 1979). At its core, Alexander's thesis challenges a central presupposition of modern design theory - namely, that architectural form is principally the outcome of deliberate planning, stylistic preference, or technical optimisation. In contrast, he contends that genuinely successful environments emerge from a more fundamental, pre-conceptual order, which he designates as *wholeness* (Alexander 1979; Alexander 2002–2005).

Within this framework, buildings are not conceived as discrete artefacts imposed upon an otherwise neutral space, but rather as emergent configurations generated through the interaction of *patterns* - recurrent spatial solutions that mediate local tensions while simultaneously reinforcing global coherence (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977). Although this conceptual apparatus is elaborated in Alexander's wider corpus, most notably *A Pattern Language*, it is in *The Timeless Way of Building* that its metaphysical implications are most explicitly articulated (Alexander 1979).

Wholeness as an Ontological Primitive

Alexander's principal philosophical innovation lies in his treatment of *wholeness* as ontologically prior to design activity (Alexander 2002–2005). Rather than construing built environments as aggregates of constituent parts, he posits that any given site already embodies a latent relational structure that may either be intensified or diminished through human intervention.

This position entails an implicit critique of reductionist ontology. Space, in Alexander's account, cannot be fully understood as the sum of its measurable attributes - materials, geometry, or functional specifications - but must instead be apprehended as a field of relational intensities. Certain configurations - those involving gradients of light, well-defined boundaries, transitional zones, and centres of gravity - exhibit a form of coherence that is experienced as 'alive', whereas others appear inert or arbitrary (Alexander 1979). Crucially, Alexander treats this distinction not as a matter of subjective taste but as indicative of an objective, albeit subtle, property of organised reality.

In this respect, his thought exhibits affinities with process philosophy (Whitehead), phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), and elements of Aristotelian metaphysics, wherein *form* is understood not merely as geometric shape but as an organising principle intrinsic to being.

The 'Quality Without a Name'

Among the most philosophically elusive aspects of Alexander's theory is his notion of the 'quality without a name' - an immediate experiential apprehension of harmony, appropriateness, or vitality in a built environment that resists precise conceptual articulation (Alexander 1979).

This notion should not be dismissed as mysticism in a purely religious sense; rather, it constitutes an epistemological claim regarding the limits of formalised knowledge. Alexander suggests that certain forms of understanding are pre-linguistic and cannot be exhaustively represented within propositional or computational systems. The recognition of well-formed space, therefore, aligns more closely with moral intuition or aesthetic judgement than with calculative reasoning (Alexander 1979; Merleau-Ponty 2012).

Such a view challenges dominant epistemological paradigms within modern design, which privilege explicit representation, quantification, and rule-governed processes. According to Alexander, these approaches frequently fail to capture what is most significant, precisely because they operate at an excessively abstract level (Alexander 1979; Salingaros 2006).

Pattern as Mediating Structure

The concept of the *pattern* constitutes Alexander's central technical and philosophical contribution. A pattern is not to be understood as a rigid template, but as a relational schema that articulates how specific spatial configurations can repeatedly resolve recurring human concerns (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977).

Christopher Alexander

Patterns occupy an intermediate position between universal principles and context-specific contingencies. They are neither wholly abstract laws nor arbitrary stylistic decisions, but rather situated regularities that function analogously to a grammar governing built form (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein 1977; Salingaros 2006).

The implications of this concept are far-reaching. It suggests that meaningful order is not imposed through top-down design, but rather arises through the iterative application of context-sensitive rules. The resulting environments embody a form of distributed intelligence, in which coherence is generated through local interactions rather than centralised control (Alexander 2002–2005; Salingaros 2006).

A Critique of Modernist Design Rationality

Alexander's critique of modern architecture is fundamentally epistemological rather than purely stylistic. He argues that much of twentieth-century design is deficient because it privileges centralised abstraction over processes of organic emergence (Alexander 1979). Large-scale planning frameworks—often driven by professional expertise and bureaucratic imperatives—tend to sever the feedback loop between lived experience and the generation of form.

The consequence is the production of environments that may satisfy abstract criteria of efficiency or functionality, yet fail to sustain human flourishing at the experiential level (Jacobs 1961; Alexander 1979). Such critiques resonate with broader philosophical objections to technocratic rationality, echoing themes found in phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), Heidegger's analysis of *enframing* (Heidegger), and more recent developments in complexity theory (Salingaros 2006).

Toward a Participatory Ontology of Building

One of the most radical implications of Alexander's theory is its reconceptualisation of building as a participatory ontological process. In this account, the distinctions between user, builder, and environment are not absolute; rather, these elements are co-constitutive participants in the unfolding of spatial order (Alexander 2002–2005).

This perspective disrupts the conventional subject–object dichotomy that underlies much of modern design theory. Space is no longer understood as an object external to human activity, but as something that emerges through ongoing interaction. Architecture, in this sense, approximates an ethical practice: it involves aligning human action with the intrinsic tendencies of the world, rather than imposing abstract schemas upon it (Heidegger 1977; Alexander 1979).

Conclusion: A Theory of Living Structure

The enduring significance of *The Timeless Way of Building* lies in its reconfiguration of architecture as a theory of *living structure*. Alexander's work advances the claim that there exist objectively preferable modes of spatial organisation, grounded not in stylistic convention or ideological commitment, but in the degree to which form supports coherence, adaptability, and human experience.

Irrespective of whether one ultimately endorses Alexander's metaphysical commitments, his work compels a reconsideration of the relationships between knowledge, perception, and order in the production of the built environment. It functions simultaneously as a critique of modern abstraction and as a proposal for an integrative design paradigm in which beauty, functionality, and vitality are understood as inseparable manifestations of an underlying structural order.

Cadence

And what, then, is belief? It is the semi-cadence which closes a musical phrase in the symphony of our intellectual life.

Charles Sanders Peirce

The meaning of a poem is in the cadences and the shape of the lines and the pulse of the thought which is given by those lines.

George Oppen

CHRIS **NORRIS**

1

Let things else turn out as they may,
Life's course run as it will,
There's cadences to grant each day
A rapt conclusion still.

No morn so mournful, sky so grey,
But some composer's skill,
Wit, grace, or genius shows the way
To lift the spirit's chill.

How, otherwise, should notes convey
Or melodies fulfil
That shared desire that music play,
As headlines shriek and shrill,

Its role in having souls allay
Each doom-scroll-fevered thrill
With modulations that defray
Pent passion's overspill?

2

‘Like sky, like earth, like breath, like air,
Like life, like love, like you,
So with that cadence, always there,
And each time felt anew.’

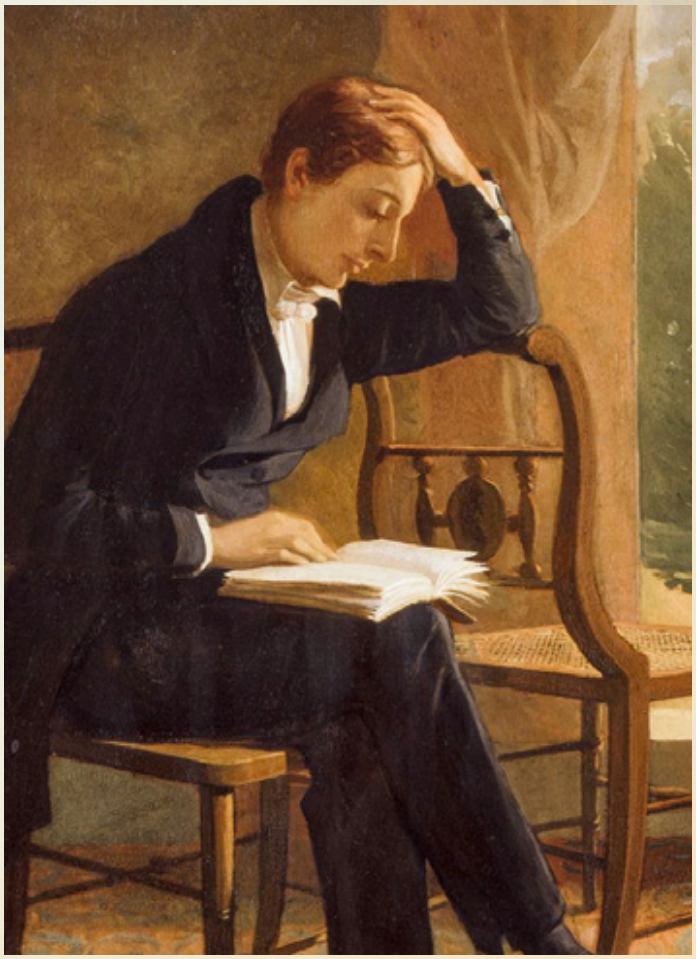
Yet they best listen and best share
Its dying fall, those who
Most cherish it but who least care
To count repeats their due.

For how should mortal listeners dare
Suppose the notes ring true
On each successive hearing where
Time rings its changes too?

What cadence so drawn out, so rare
The moods it leads us through,
That, twice heard, we can truly swear:
‘Same feelings, right on cue’?

For that’s where Plato’s adepts err
And Keatsian youths pursue
Their girls in frozen-limbed despair
Of what the urn can do

To show libido’s vectors bear
The lovers forward, not glue
Them down, that Eros-famished pair,
In timeless *déjà vu*.



John Keats

3

So with those cadences that sigh,
Or gladden, or suspend
The outcome long enough to try
How other notes might lend

Yet further pause, and so supply
The listener who'd attend
More closely as the moments fly
With no fixed point to end

Her sense of hearing what's gone by
As straining to transcend
What's yet to come. So she'll deny
Cadential means to mend

Straight off those lapses that belie
The ear's desire to blend
Such false relations as defy
Time's rule, have it distend,

If momentarily, till by
Their means we apprehend
What tin-eared timelords certify
A most unwholesome trend.

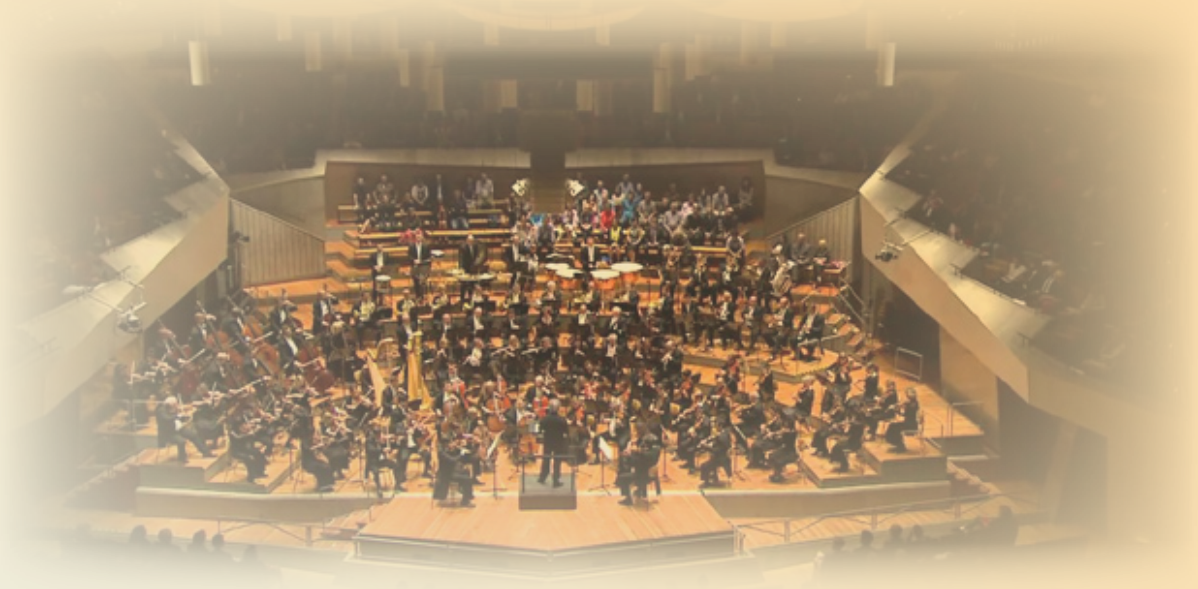
• • •

4

No cadence but suggests we pause,
Not crave the promised close,
But note each qualifying clause
A well-timed utterance owes.

Like forced or premature applause
There's naught more plainly shows
How any punctual cadence draws
A line where forethought chose.

It's music's gift to sound the flaws
In all that might dispose
Lax listeners to press on because
That's 'just the way it goes'.



The way it goes is what so awes
The cadence-lore of those
Who'll clutch at tonic-seeking straws
To still such errant flows.

• • •

5

Cadential is the dying fall
Whose every sad reprise
Says 'don't look forward to but recall
Life's transient ecstasies'.

Cadential, too, what might forestall
Such sombre tones as these
By holding out against the pall
Of fading memories

And finding comfort, after all,
In some slight swerve that frees
A restive listener else in thrall
To end-time's harsh decrees.

For each swerve reenacts, in small,
The shifting range of keys
That yields the long symphonic haul
Its moments of heart's-ease,

While cadence lends its seal withal
Its drawing-out may tease
Those who'd prefer last notes not fall
As temporisers please.

Does time shape us?

Does Time shape us or do we shape Time,
But if only what is in space has causal powers
How can Time shape anything?
'Time is not space'. In four monosyllables
Bergson summed up his whole metaphysics.
Proust was, so I have heard, the best man
At Bergson's wedding. Where is Meseglise?
Where are the young girls in flower?
Where are Albertine's kisses?
Where are the notes of Vinteuil's violin sonata?
Vanished into air, into insubstantial air.
Only the paintings of Elstir survive
For they are in space.
Is History itself also still alive?

Edward Greenwood

The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.
To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk