

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *The Enlightenment and the Other*

Many titles suggested themselves for this editorial because they were inter-related but I thought that the chosen title includes them all. We could have called it 'Kant and Racism'. This is a reference to a forthcoming conference in Germany on this topic. It could also have been called 'Enlightenment and Slavery.' There are interesting papers on this topic regarding Hegel but also Kant and Fichte. But these do not go beyond the idea of slavery and how it came about in a European society. They discuss the question of how anyone can submit their liberty to another either from their own free will, or because of the power of the market. But they don't take into account the details of history and the invasion of Africa and other places with modern weaponry and the modern means of managing and transporting this human cargo to the new land.

The Enlightenment was more complex than has long been assumed. This may be because we have more detailed and sophisticated ways of reading texts nowadays, as well as an awareness that we may project our own concerns back onto this movement. One issue that has gained prominence in our time is the conception of the 'other'. The Enlightenment had a universal scope and it happened during the geographical expansion of Europe. But also, more essential to the movement, was its universal claim for reason.

Paul Hazard in his classic book: *The European Mind* argued that the expansion of Europeans into other lands and cultures made them realise that what they took to be innate was not innate after all. Ideas about knowledge, God, governing of the state and societies all changed after the experience of other cultures and societies. It is by contrasts and alternatives people can see the limitations of their own points of view. We could also look at a particular example of the 'other'; for example, Islam. How did the

Enlightenment philosophers see Islam? A book on this topic published this year, *The Republic of Arabic Letters: Islam and the European Enlightenment* by Alexander Bevilacqua details the accumulated knowledge of Arabic and Islam since the sixteenth century. The book argues in some parts that the older religious world in Europe, pre-Enlightenment, was more sympathetic and ready to engage with Islam and original sources than the more secular age of Enlightenment where thinkers took their information from secondary sources, such as travellers, and built their views on their reports. There is also a slightly older book by Ian Almond on *History of Islam in German Thought from Leibnitz to Nietzsche*. Almond found out that German philosophers thought about Islam in a contradictory way, so it sometimes seems as if contradictory ideas were written by the same person. The philosophers he studies were 'as a constantly swirling flux of different forces...a far more unpredictable entity than the orderly display cabinet some historians of ideas present us with.' It is also interesting how the 'other' works as a mirror for the self. For example, Montesquieu in his *Persian Letters* tried to see Europe in the mirror of the Muslim East.

The list could go on. For example, since most of the talked about philosophers and writers of the Enlightenment were males, this raises the question of women and the Enlightenment. We could pick up names and books from the eighteenth century that are worth discussion.

The above are headlines and remarks that help to re-think the Enlightenment in a new light and from new perspectives. We may come to some of them in future issues. We also welcome articles and discussions on these and other topics related to the Enlightenment.

*The Editor*

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# What does it mean to be Enlightened?

**We discussed in issue 37 of The Wednesday Kant's famous essay 'What is Enlightenment?' and its relevance to our time. The article below discusses the response to this article by his contemporary thinker Moses Mendelssohn in his essay 'On the Question, What does "to enlighten" mean?'**

DAVID SOLOMON

In his essay 'What is Enlightenment?' of 1784, Kant made his well-known distinction between public and private use of reason. His purpose was to delineate a sphere for public and what he called 'cosmopolitan' intellectual and ethical discourse, and to distinguish it from the use of freedom employed by subjects of states to carry out their professional and civic functions. He thought that as long as subjects paid their taxes, the soldiers obeyed their officers and the religious ministers in their official functions preached the doctrines of their churches, they should be free at the same time to question and debate general principles. This corresponded to the contemporary policy of the Prussian government, whereby in a number of test cases, the freedom of pastors to speculate on religious ideas was established, as long as they officially subscribed to and preached the doctrines of their churches. It seemed too that Kant's public use of reason corresponded to the intellectual life of the time: the publication and circulation of magazines on a wide range of issues among an educated and 'enlightened' public.

Kant's essay was only one of several contributions in the pages the contributors of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (Berlin Monthly Journal), which in turn was the magazine of a secret society devoted to philosophical, political, and ethical discussion called the *Mittwochsgesellschaft* (*The Wednesday Society!*), which met between 1783-1796 twice a month in the winter months and once a month in summer. Its members were 'Friends of Enlightenment': civil servants, clergymen and men of letters, many of whom were involved in educational, legal and religious reforms of

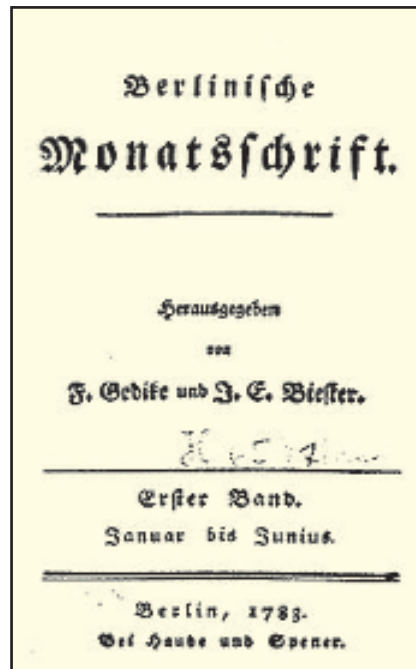
the time, that is, involved in 'enlightenment' in a practical way. One of the group's members was Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1784) who had been brought up in a traditional Jewish family in Dessau, and had come to Berlin, educated himself in languages and philosophy, become the friend of Lessing and had become known as 'the German Socrates'. Mendelssohn contributed a number of articles to the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, as did Kant, although the latter was not a member of the *Mittwochsgesellschaft*.

Kant's essay was written in reply to a question 'What is enlightenment?' posed in the previous year as a footnote to an article in the magazine, by a member of the group Johann Friedrich Zöllner, a pastor, theologian, and educational reformer. The question in turn was contained in a response to another essay written by one of the editors of the magazine Johann Erich Biester, who was the librarian of the royal library in Berlin. In his original article Biester had discussed the question of whether it was necessary for the clergy to preside at wedding ceremonies. Biester had concluded that for both the enlightened and unenlightened citizen it was not. A purely civil wedding ceremony would be sufficient both for enlightened citizens who 'could do without all ceremonies' and for unenlightened citizens, who would learn that all laws and contracts were equally to be respected. Biester was in fact proposing not some proto-modern version of secularism but the establishment of a civic religion in which religious rituals would permeate all of public life.

Zöllner's question sparked off a debate in the



Mendelssohn



Berlinische Monatsschrift (Berlin Monthly Journal)

magazine and in the group that touched on issues that exposed an abiding anxiety among the ‘friends of enlightenment’. These were also practical questions because the members of the society were in their professions involved in social, legal, religious and educational reform: How could the process of enlightenment be advanced? Why had this advance been so slow over the past forty years? Could it be made available to all classes of society including the uneducated? What would happen if the process of enlightenment clashed with the needs of stability in society? This last issue was especially pressing in relation to the sphere of religion. Zöllner himself was opposed to Biester’s proposal. The removal of established religion from the marriage ceremony, he thought, would confuse and undermine the morals of the citizens and deprive the family of the support that traditional religious denominations provided.

When we read an essay such as Kant’s it is easy to forget the context in which these questions were being debated. This is partly because Kant was not, unlike Mendelssohn, a member of the Mittwochsgesellschaft. It was also due to the register of his essay, its philosophical presentation

of the questions, its air of abstraction and eternal truth, despite its fleeting mention of the regime of the Prussian king, Frederick II. When we read this, we do not get a sense of anxiety about the possible undermining effects of enlightenment. According to him the public and private use of reason can co-exist and not be in conflict with each other. Even a clergyman can happily preach one thing to his congregation and speculate freely to his educated readership as long as the disparity was not too great.

Mendelssohn’s contribution to the subject (titled ‘*On the question: What does “to enlighten” mean?*’) had already appeared in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* earlier in the same year. It reveals a level of tension less hidden under the surface than in Kant’s work. First of all, we can see a difference in the two titles. Kant’s essay is titled ‘*What is Enlightenment?*’ suggesting a process that is working its way forward of its own accord. While it is true according to his argument that we have a moral duty to enlighten ourselves and others, the neat division between the private and public use of reason would allow enlightenment to go forward unproblematically, once we have made the leap of freeing ourselves

from our self-imposed intellectual servitude. Mendelssohn's essay in contrast is closer in atmosphere to the debates that had been going on in the *Mittwochsgesellschaft* for some time. The title of his essay ('*On the question. What does "to enlighten" mean?*') places the emphasis on the process of enlightening others, that is, on the point of view of the educator, and reformer. The problems in achieving this are therefore much closer to the surface in respect to the limitations and contradictions in the process of bringing about enlightenment, as well as its unforeseen consequences. One of the contradictions involved in the project of enlightening others was that while some of the members thought that this should be a process of debunking superstitions and fanaticism through education and painstaking scholarship, they could ask how this could happen if the society itself had to be secret?

In discussing enlightenment, Mendelssohn introduces distinctions which cut across Kant's in his essay. Mendelssohn makes an important difference between culture and enlightenment. Enlightenment refers to theoretical, scientific knowledge, culture to social mores, and technical skills:

*Education breaks down into culture and enlightenment. The former seems to apply to the practical dimension, that means-objectively-to excellence, finesse, and beauty in trades, arts and society's mores, and -subjectively-to proficiency, hard work, and skill at those trades, arts, and mores as well as to inclinations, drives, and habits making up that proficiency, hard work, and skill. The more these dimensions within a people corresponds to the vocation of human being, the more culture is ascribed to it, just as a plot of land is said to be cultivated and cared for, to the degree that people's hard work had put it into the position of producing things useful to human beings. – Enlightenment seems, by contrast, to refer more to the theoretical dimension. It seems to refer – objectively – to*

*rational knowledge and – subjectively – to proficiency at rationally reflecting upon things of human life, in terms of their importance and influence on the vocation of the human being. I always set up the vocation of human being as the measure and goal of every striving and effort, as the point at which we must direct our eyes, if we do not want to lose our way.*

**(Mendelssohn: On the Question)**

This distinction between theoretical (enlightenment) and practical (cultural) seems on the face of it seems to map on to Kant's distinction between the public and private use of reason. Moreover, this also seems to be the case where Mendelssohn introduces another division in relation to the two-fold vocation of a human being namely 'first, the vocation of a human being as a human being and, second, the vocation of a human being as a citizen'. The enlightenment that interests a human being as a human being, he says, is universal and devoid of any class distinction. In regard to culture, on the other hand, 'all practical perfections have value merely in relation to the life of society. Hence they must correspond solely and singularly to a human being's vocation as a member of society'. The standing of humans as members of society, their rights and duties, will vary depending on their skills and proficiencies, inclinations, drives, habits, social sense, class etc.

But Mendelssohn departs from Kant where the former considers that even in the practical (professional or vocational sphere), an individual must start to theorise, that is, the question of enlightenment (which is after all theoretical) must enter into this area. This however is the very area that Kant assigned to the province of the private use of reason. Therefore, the vocation of the human being as a citizen also requires not just culture but enlightenment too. Consequently, there opens up a possible conflict between the enlightenment of a human as a citizen and his / her enlightenment as a human, that is, a possible conflict within enlightenment itself. This Kant does not consider because for him, enlightenment proper only relates to the





**Johann Erich Biester Founder of the Berlinische Monatsschrift as the magazine of the Berlin Wednesday Society**

public use of reason which can co-exist neatly with the private use of reason without their affecting each other. Mendelssohn's version of enlightenment in contrast, is at the same time universal (as it relates to humans as humans) and particular / class bound (as it relates to humans as members of society).

In trying to solve the potential conflict that he has set up, Mendelssohn analysed the various factors that make for the enlightenment of a nation. Here he says, a number of variables must be considered:

*First, the degree of knowledge, second, its importance, that is, its relation to the vocation of (a) the human being and (b) the citizen, third, its dissemination through all classes, and fourth, the standards of their professions.*

Mendelssohn seeks to minimise the possible conflict between the two-fold vocation of human beings by drawing yet another distinction in his essay between essential and non-essential vocations. If we do not fulfil our essential human vocation as human beings, we will 'sink down to the level of cattle'; but if we miss out on our essential vocation as citizens, 'the state constitution ceases to exist'. Unhappy the state therefore where a human being's essential vocation cannot harmonise with a citizen's essential vocation. Where it comes to non-essential vocations however, compromise is possible and rules can be established to mark boundaries and make it less likely that collisions will occur:



**Prussian king, Frederick II**

*If human beings's essential vocations have been brought into conflict with their extra-essential vocations, if they are not permitted to disseminate certain useful truths that embellish humanity without thereby in any way tearing down the principles of religion and ethics inherent in human beings, then the virtue-loving man of enlightenment will proceed with caution and discretion and prefer to indulge prejudice than drive away the truth that is so wound up with that prejudices.*

Philosophers will have to use their caution and discretion in not pushing forward (non-essential) ideas that get in the way of social order and stability.

Mendelssohn's account of the project of enlightenment and what it is to enlighten brings out the real problems faced by people who were actively engaged as reformers and administrators in the process of changing society. It is a philosophical essay and as such seeks to put forward general positions and solutions to problems but at the same time shows an awareness of the pitfalls and problems in the whole project.

This partly comes out of his membership of the Mittwochsgesellschaft and engagement with practical problems. It contrasts with Kant's rather too nuanced division between the private and public use of reason and the latter's consequent glossing over of potential problems of conflict and tension.

# Curse of the Gods

## The Early Philosophers: Thales

**In a number of previous issues, we have looked at early philosophers' perceptions of the mind and mental disorders from the earliest records onward. We have looked at the possible reasons that Western philosophy arose in Greece (first in the colonies and then on the mainland). We have also wondered at the fertility of the soil in this small area of the earth. We considered the advantages of trade. We have looked at theories of the 'hundredth monkey,' and theories of Mind Externalism, with a brief glimpse of Bell's hypotheses. We also discussed Faraday, Einstein and Max Planck's theories. Finally, we investigated the various ways of attempting to deal with mental disorders in primitive times from Trephiny to Asclepius.**

**The article below discusses the life and ideas of Thales, one of the Seven Sages of Greece.**

**NONA FERDON**

**I**n the era of the sixth and fifth centuries BC and in various places in the Greek-speaking world there appeared a number of thinkers who have come to be known as the Pre-Socratic. Although their major concerns seem to have been the questioning of what true reality is some of them began to question and examine their method of inquiry. How do we define questions, discuss questions, analyse questions or talk about questions? These men have properly been regarded as the first philosophers in the Western world, but the emphasis on their doctrines rather than on their language and their attempt to formulate a new approach to discourse has obstructed their stature as true pioneers rather than on their attempt to formalise a new approach to the philosophy of their time.

This heterogeneous group of men had much in common. Histories of philosophy, beginning with Aristotle's sketches of the development of philosophy down to his day,

have tended to discuss the Pre-Socratics from the point of the content of their teachings, through their doctrines. They began to develop the basic abstract definitions and vocabulary of various philosophical and physical thoughts. They defined 'mental' and 'mind' and characterised the latter as that which organises and abstracts. They distinguished two modes of thinking or two modes of discourse: the physiological (natural science) and the methodological. They asserted the superiority of the psychological discourse calling it a language of war, of true being. They equated the methodological with sleeping, dreaming, becoming, and dying. They asserted the superiority of those who think abstractly and of all abstract mode of thought. Perhaps they are best represented by Thales of Miletus.

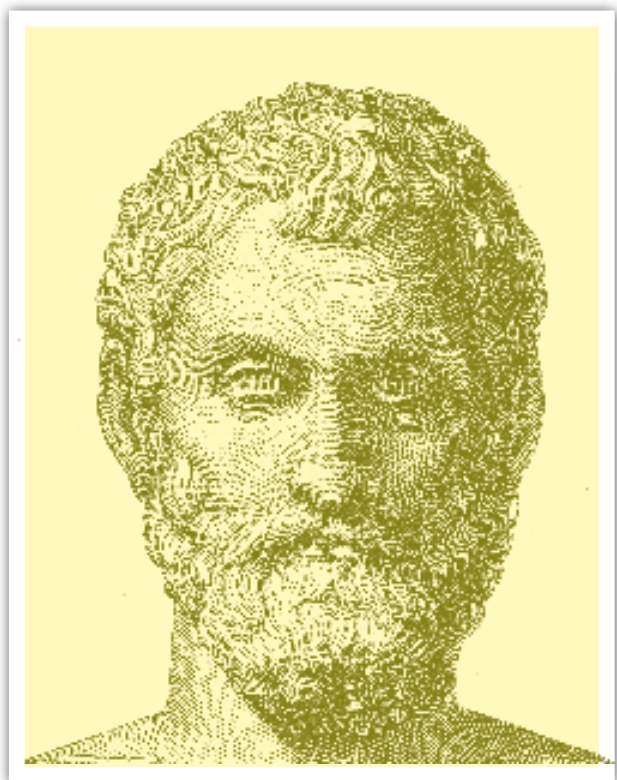
Thales was born in 624 BC in Miletus, a Greek Roman city on the western coast

of Asia Minor in today's Turkey. He was the first known person to use natural explanations for simple phenomena rather than turning to the supernatural. He is also the first to define general principles and develop hypotheses. He is therefore someone often referred to as 'the father of science'. Although we remember him as the first Western philosopher, he was also an astronomer and mathematician. He is the first we know of to correctly predict a solar eclipse. He is said to have visited and studied in Egypt. However, many scholars doubt this. His parents were thought to have been of Phoenician origin and quite well off financially. Obviously, he was very well educated.

Although the word 'philosopher' was not in use in that time, and a knowledge or understanding of mental disorders was most vague, most doctors/psychologists were committed to the view that all medical disorders were of bodily origin and treatable by physical measures. Disorders with prominent mental symptoms (e.g. depression) were no exception to the rule. On rare occasions some behaviour was referred to as a 'disease of the soul', in contrast to 'diseases of the body'. 'Diseases of the soul' referred to non-medical mental problems and moral flaws. They were conceived of as having being analogous to bodily diseases in that they were unnatural and against the right order of things.

In the sixth century BC, writing nearly a millennium later than Thales, Simplicus of Cilia refers to him as one of 'The Seven Sages of Greece'.

'It is a tradition that Thales was the first to turn the Greeks to the study of nature' wrote Theophrastus. 'He so surpassed those who proceeded him that everyone has forgotten them.'



Thales

Aristotle, in discussing Thales, wrote 'from what is recorded of him, he seems to have held the soul to be motive force since he said that magnets have souls because they move iron.'

Certain thinkers said that the soul was intermingled with the whole universe, and it is perhaps for this reason that Thales came to the opinion that all things 'are full of gods'. He also thought the soul was immortal, and this can only be understood in connection with his general orientation, but it is an immortality that has nothing to do with personal immortality.

It is said that, having returned from his studies in Egypt, he was the first to inscribe in a circle a right-angled triangle, whereupon he sacrificed an ox.

We have nothing in writing from Thales himself.

## ‘Unfrozen Leaves’ – Poems by Edward Greenwood – a Review

BARBARA VELLACOTT

If in this life ‘Joy & Woe are woven fine’, in William Blake’s memorable line, in the balance of Edward Greenwood’s poems it seems that woe weighs more heavily. He addresses two great mysteries of human existence: death (including suffering) and the nature of human consciousness.

The experience of death as profound loss is the immediate theme of some sixteen in a total collection of 72 poems. The death of a son – the reader surmises the painful cause – is visited many times, sometimes in despair – ‘Not till those grieving die / Will grief be dead’ – and occasionally in consolation – ‘And yet Time has a silent healing way.’ Far from being individual

in their reference, many other poems hold a constant awareness of human suffering in the world: ‘A sense of never-ending wrong...’

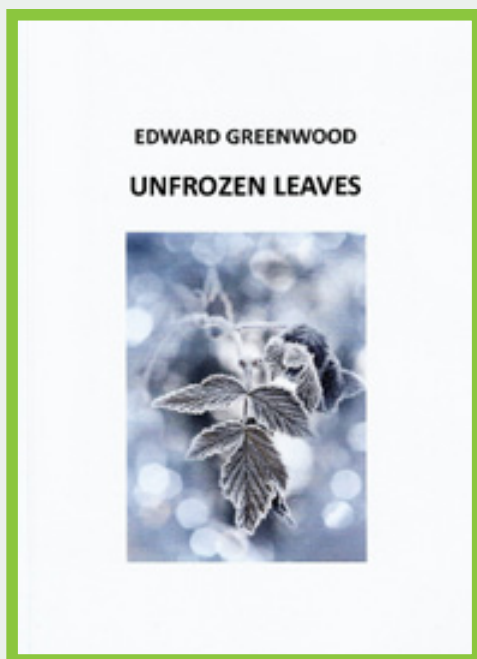
Closely linked with the above, is this poet’s other recurring or implied theme: the mystery of human consciousness. A poem entitled ‘The Riddle’ muses:

*Could it be true that Kant was right?  
Are Space and Time in you and me?  
Or will the sun go down at night  
When there is no one left to see?*

There are many other references to philosophers – Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche... The poet knows, however, that reason is useless in the face of grief.

The ‘joy’ side of the balance is present in flashes of beauty and moments of uplifting experience. The little poem ‘To Music’ is simple and moving testimony to the power of music to ‘ease the troubled mind’. ‘Such harmonies of sound / Such heaven on earth.’ But more important, I think is that the writing of these poems and expression of what in ordinary speech is unmanageable and inexpressible, is itself a joy and consolation to the poet and to the sympathetic reader.

These poems have a simplicity of speech and familiar poetic forms, which may strengthen their sense of deep feeling and sincerity, and their willingness to stay with unanswerable questions.







# The *Wednesday* Books

## Volume 1 & 2 in Print Now

### Limited Edition

We are pleased to announce the publication of the first two volumes of **The *Wednesday*** in a book form. The two volumes cover the first six months. Volume one included twelve issues (1-12) plus the experimental issue; issue no. zero. Volume two includes another twelve issues (13 – 24). The issues represent the journey so far and we are pleased with this achievement. The volumes are printed by The Wednesday Press, Oxford.

We are grateful to all the writers, poets and artists who contributed throughout. Special thanks to Dennis Harrison who supported the magazine since the experimental issue and hosted the Wednesday group until the closure of his Albion Beatnik Bookstore. But Dennis is still a great supporter of the magazine and the group and we will stand by him in his future endeavours in the cultural sphere.

*The Editor*

*To obtain your copy of volume one or volume two, please send a signed cheque with your name and address on the back for £15 (or £30 for both) inside the UK or £18 (or £36 for both) for readers outside the UK to:*

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Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

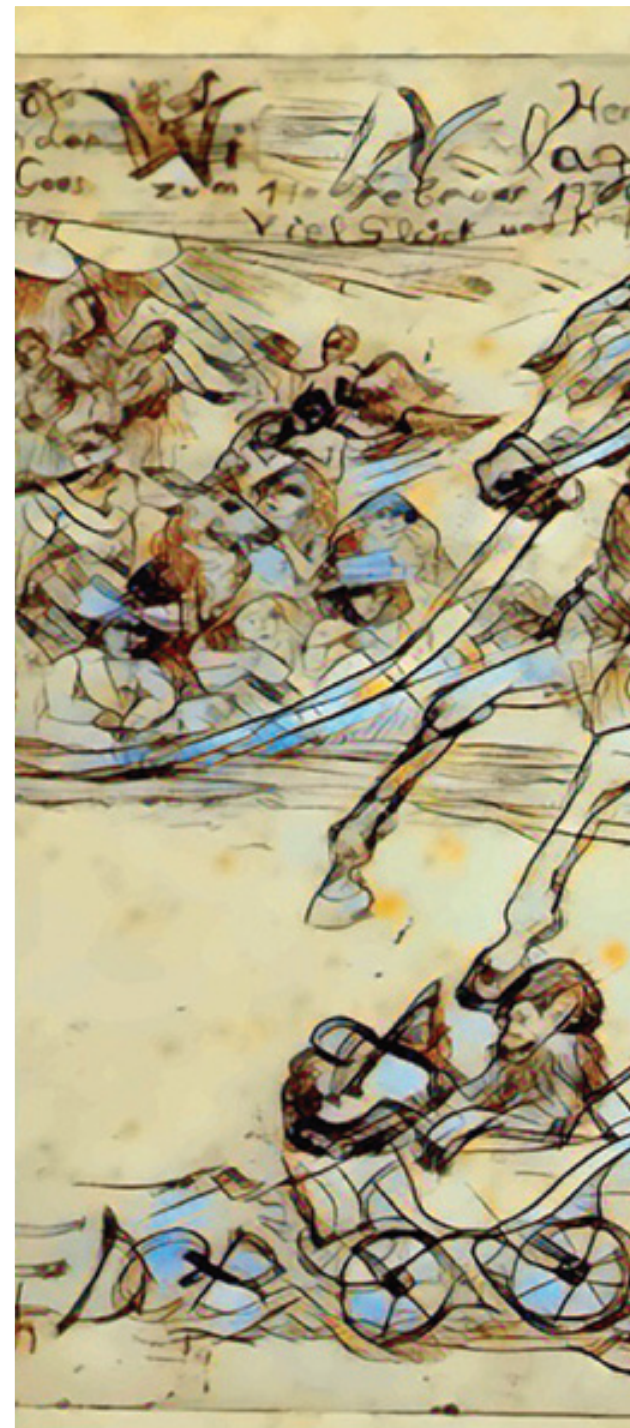
## This Circus

Disguising clouds prevent  
people researching  
the blue of skies, the heat  
of the sun. Fake rainbow cities  
are growing in space  
above the punky and ratcheted circus,

where, in freak shows, clowns  
jump through the fire hoops of power  
to find recognition. Acrobats  
on the production line  
compete on the high wire.

Audiences, growing gigantic,  
never stop watching, spellbound  
by the promise for change,  
never detecting the magic  
of tricks, or how quickly  
masks are exchanged  
in a vapour of value,

as the spectacle evolves,  
unstoppably,  
mocking and chopping society  
in heedless masquerades.









## Self-portrait

ERICA WARBURTON

**[Rembrandt's series of self-portraits span forty years]**

My mother would have called it  
a straight look. But the first impression  
that comes off the canvas is dark,  
as if the Low Countries had slipped back  
under the sea or been permanently eclipsed  
by smudged turbulence, one of those  
humid back-rooms where the soul  
can comment on itself  
in the language of its Rembrandts.

A discreet play of light hints  
at gold, at jewels, at lust  
for fabric. So we discover minds  
through small conceits. He wiped  
his brush on his smock; and when he had  
found the next stroke, he would not stop  
even for a monarch. He knew  
fame never made a man, and mirrors say  
only so much. So he looks at me.

I uncompose my face, check affectation,  
straighten curves that might be clichéd,  
to let him get my ugliness right.  
I trust the tender virtuosity  
of his light, and I am satisfied  
he will declare the picture finished  
when his purpose is achieved;  
and leave the hand in the glove  
as a mere sketch.



# The Royal Albert Hall

## ERICA WARBURTON

*Repulsed by Narcissus, Echo wasted away –  
and Pan, seeing  
his love was in vain, tore her to shreds.*

*They say, there was nothing left of her  
but her voice –  
those pale shivers treasured up by Earth.*

The dome is aloof now, baffled  
iron and glass,  
conscious only of history.

Great scaffolds shaped it once,  
laced it, braced it,  
and prepared to put out the sky.

The military was called. A soldier  
knelt to pray  
before taking away the last support.

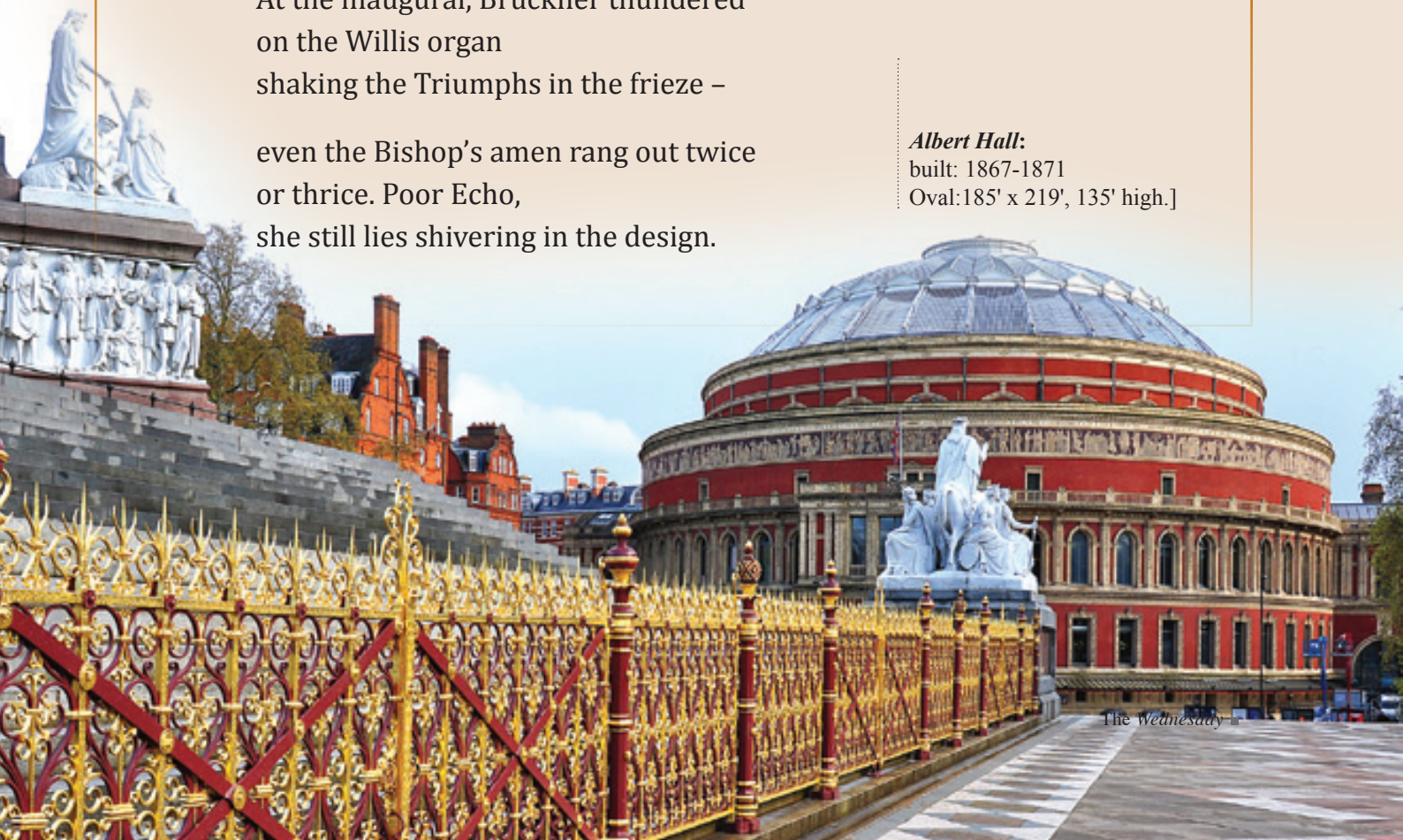
At the inaugural, Bruckner thundered  
on the Willis organ  
shaking the Triumphs in the frieze –

even the Bishop's amen rang out twice  
or thrice. Poor Echo,  
she still lies shivering in the design.

### **Albert Hall:**

built: 1867-1871

Oval: 185' x 219', 135' high.]



# Sources of hope

*Notes of the Wednesday Meeting 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018*

PAUL COCKBURN

We discussed disenchantment and re-enchantment, the lack of ‘magic’ in the modern world. The university of Antwerp organised a study day in April on ‘Re-enchantment in a Scientific Worldview’. In modern society scientific understanding is more highly valued than belief, rational goals are pursued in contrast to life in traditional societies. As Max Weber described it, ‘the world remains a great enchanted garden’ in these societies. The world of myths, symbols and fairy stories which Jung studied gave psychological meaning to the world. Rituals united communities and still do. According to Jung our unconscious could contact the collective unconscious of humanity. However, one of the Wednesday members who has been trained in psycho-analytic therapy thought that Jung was doing pseudo-science, he preferred the thought of Carl Rogers which was more ‘grounded’. One thought was that perhaps the world of myths has been transformed in the modern world into films like Superman and Terminator!

We then discussed the Hegelian ‘Geist’ - how is history developing. Thinkers such as Bloch and Habermas have a positive attitude to the future. The former has the idea of the Not-Yet (or Utopia),

the latter puts his faith in rationality. In Marxism there is a materialistic redemption. This looks more and more like a Utopia. Other thinkers thought of a redemption in the Messianic tradition but they differed as to whether the redemption will come as an interruption of history, in a miraculous way, or will happen as the unfolding of history. A leader will come who will lead us to the ‘promised land’, as in the Islamic tradition of the Mahdi. Many have claimed to be the Mahdi. One led a revolt in Egypt against the British in the 1890s.

The question of the future is centred around hope. We either have the hope that a better future will come about ‘organically’ from within, or we look for a transcendent intervention which will alter our condition from ‘outside’. One view was that human nature is such that we will always ‘mess it up’, and that history unfortunately shows this to be true. We are always hoping for a better society but in the end, we seem to be doomed to disappointment. Perhaps we should look elsewhere, and it was noted that there seems to be a revival of religion in the former Communist states of Europe. Perhaps this is an example of a suppressed idea coming back to haunt those who suppressed it and to take its revenge on the injustices of the past.

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## *Notes of Meeting Held on Wednesday 25th April 2018*

We discussed which philosophers had a strong public persona in Britain in recent times. It was thought that the last philosopher to be known widely by the British public was Bertrand Russell in the 1950s.

One of the topics we discussed was how different philosophers use the concept of ‘world’. For instance, Wittgenstein’s early philosophy was solipsistic. In the *Tractatus logico-Philosophico* he writes ‘I am my world’, but he also wrote ‘The

world is everything that is the case’ which suggests that the world consists of a totality of facts. This seems to show a deep subjective/objective split in his early thinking.

What can we include in ‘our world’? Current thinking is ‘weak’ in the sense that the certainties of old metaphysics, religion and grand narratives are generally disallowed. These ‘strong’ thoughts have supposedly been ‘critiqued’ out of existence. However, a Christian philosopher such as Vattimo

does not lose faith: he sees the multiplicity of interpretations as liberating and thinks in a Nietzschean way that they imply an overthrow of powerful ideologies which seek to dominate us in an unhealthy way.

We then discussed the work of G H Mead, the American philosopher. He thought the unity of the self reflected



Vattimo

the social unity that humans are brought up in. Are we completely determined by social forces? For instance, we might worry what others think of us. Mead thought the self arises when individuals become objects to themselves. He argued that we are objects first to other people, and secondarily we become objects to ourselves. This can all give rise to 'cognitive dissonance' where we feel strangers to ourselves.

We also discussed facts as opposed to action. Facts are dead, as matter is dead – they need to be animated! Is the organic realm of living things governed by cause and effect in the same way as matter is? Is there room for vitalism and/or teleology? If we are part of nature, we should be able to understand it, and more than that - the universe would flow through us! Primitive societies did and still do have a much more intimate connection with nature. But we now seem to be destroying nature!

Schelling, in his philosophy of nature, thought that nature cannot be completely explained by means of empiricism. He thought that nature is creative. It is a productive force and not merely product. He makes the distinction between world or the totality of natural products and nature which is creativity itself. Empiricism deals with nature as products, not the very creative living force in nature. He attributes to nature a form of agency and believes that nature, through some evolutionary process, ends up as conscious of itself because at a certain level it creates a conscious being. It becomes conscious of itself through us. Schelling based his philosophy of nature on the state of the early 19th century science of his time, in terms of magnetism, electricity, biology and medicine. But his idealistic and vitalistic views brought him lots of criticism.

## *The Wednesday*

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09-01-29

*(Or send your donation  
as a cheque to the Secretary  
at the address above.)*

## *Basking Snake*



Perfectly still in the morning heat,  
tempting me to see a hose pipe,  
but those markings defy cheap design.

I feel compelled to closer inspection  
but a heave inside is rooting me.  
The tip of my shadow was hardly near it  
*Inquiétude* it hissed and writhed swiftly away.

That shred of sound cut into my memory.  
Priding myself on garden design I will let this  
corner have a natural look.

*David Burridge*