

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group at Albion Beatnik - Oxford

Editorial

Post-Truth and the Will

In a previous issue, we have presented an interpretation of the newly created concept of Post-Truth – not that we believe that there is such a thing as post-truth, as was objected by a keen reader of **The Wednesday**, but we hope to clarify some confusions. In that issue, we interpreted post-truth as a concept related to the Faustian spirit - the attempt to get mastery of reality at any cost. The late Algerian thinker Malik ben Nabi called it 'efficacy' or being active in the world, as opposed to being idealistic and insisting on the highest epistemic standard for truth. We also said that it is related to the primacy of the will.

It was Kant who brought out the concept of the primacy of the will when he considered reason as primarily practical. Fichte took that to mean we have a task of creating a moral order. Both philosophers thought that there is a unity to reason and we are invited to harmonise our goals so that we create this moral order (the 'kingdom of ends' in Kant), or to dissolve our individuality in the process of creating this moral order that becomes reason in the absolute sense (or God in Fichte's thought). Hegel thought that the trajectory of thought in history is leading in this way: towards absolute knowledge, the concept (reason).

Marx objected to all these thoughts by declaring: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' For Marx, logic is in reality and not in thought. Thought alone leads to ideology. Truth can be reached only after the sorting out of contradiction by discovering the logic of reality, of power and human interest.

started with Descartes, his concern was epistemological. He insisted on the highest epistemic criteria and nominated God as the guarantor of our knowledge. When it came to the possibility of error, he blamed it on the will of our finite being. But Nietzsche saw truth as a product of the will. Truth for him is connected to the work of art. It is what we bring to the world. It is what we make of the world. Maybe he is making a similar point to his contemporary thinker, Marx, or he may be going back to the idea of the primacy of the will we find in Kant and Fichte. The problem is that Nietzsche, unlike Kant and Fichte, does not take the will as rational or good in itself. However, he agrees with the early Fichtean slogan: the type of philosophy you adopt (or create) depends on the type of person you are. Nietzsche also thought that there is a truth for the weak and a truth for the strong. The only mitigating thought in Nietzsche is the nobility of character that limits the excesses of a will let loose.

The question of truth (or now post-truth) is limited to abstract logical analysis in the analytical school of philosophy but in the continental tradition it gets a much wider context, as summed up by Habermas's book *Knowledge and Human Interest*. However, the increased emphasis on interest and efficacy may lead to the assumption that the truth that has been given high epistemic position in the philosophical tradition is no longer important and that we now live in a post-truth world. But truth gives us more effective way of acting on the best information we have. It also creates the trust required for the functioning of society and thought, even the thought of 'post-truth'.

It is interesting that when modern philosophy

The Editor

German Idealist Philosophy and F W J Schelling

Following on from Kant's work, German Idealists aimed in their different ways to systematise his ideas and to describe an Absolute that would unite his two worlds - the Phenomenal and the Noumenal. J. G. Fichte and F W J Schelling attempted to do this in different ways. The article below is the first in a series of articles on German Idealist philosophy.

DAVID SOLOMON

2

The work of the German Idealists starting from the 1790s followed on from the revolution in philosophy initiated by Kant. Since, as he alleged, we cannot know things in themselves, he attempted to explain how it was possible for us to construct objects in the world based on the appearances of things. This would only be possible by virtue of our apprehension of the forms of intuition (space and time) which we could not experience empirically but must derive from an understanding that we have prior to these experiences. Based on these intuitions we can construct an objective world using categories of understanding that are also part

of our consciousness a priori. As he famously said: 'Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind'. This was his 'transcendental turn' – his description of the way in which the world was constructed from the activities of the mind, not because, as with traditional idealism there *is* nothing outside it, but because of the limitations and nature of this process of understanding itself. The objective world is how we experience it, what it is to us, and what things are *in themselves* is inaccessible to us. We can envisage this inaccessibility as a 'gulf' or we can use the metaphor of a horizon of understanding within which our reason operates.

But in addition to the phenomenal world and ourselves as phenomenal beings, we also experience ourselves as free, capable of unconditional ethical acts. The phenomenal world is observable by us and we can order the things within it by laws of cause and effect. The world of freedom, which we also inhabit as free beings, he calls the 'noumenal world' – the world, the world of things in themselves. We cannot by definition know this, through observation or through other senses, but every time we act according to the moral law, we rise above our nature (which is phenomenal and determined) we are acting freely and in accordance with the noumenon. Kant's philosophy developed the idea of two worlds, phenomenal and noumenal, but he did not systematise the relationship between them. The missing piece in Kant's philosophy became an obsession of the German Idealists to find an absolute origin that would encompass both the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds and then explain the divergence. From the point of view of the human subject, they asked how it is that we experience some aspects of our being as free and self-motivated (i.e. our actions, especially the actions by which we ourselves determine ourselves ethically), while we also experience the world of objects around us as not entirely under our control, as necessary, determined and resistant to our own will.

Different Idealist philosophers approached this systematising task in different ways. J. G. Fichte radicalised Kant's transcendentalism (his derivation of the objective world through the formulating activity of the subject), by making the action of the 'I' absolute in itself. For him, the absolute I was unconditioned, that is there was nothing on which it depended. There could be nothing outside the activity of the I, in its drive to comprehend and order the world, nothing in the universe that could be independent of its work of formulation, and no law independent of it. The objective world, and the limited particular I of personal identity is a reflection of this activity, rather like a beam of light hitting a mirror (but in this case a mirror of its own making) and then reflecting back on itself.

In the remainder of this article, I would like to consider the contrasting approach of his younger contemporary F. W. J. Schelling. Schelling was as

obsessed with finding an unconditioned absolute as Fichte. In his earliest works he followed Fichte's idea of an unconditioned I as Absolute. His focus however took him in an increasingly different direction. He was interested in the scientific experiments of the time, especially in electricity, magnetism, and chemistry. Alongside Fichte's and Kant's transcendentalism and increasingly divergent from it, he developed a philosophy of nature. His turn towards nature as absolute influenced not only the future direction of philosophy itself but appealed greatly to the German Romantics of his own time. In 1801, the tension between his system and Fichte's proved too great and led to a rupture between them. What I want to concentrate on here is a work prior to their break, dating from 1798. This was the *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* which was part of a lecture course at the University of Jena, together with his introduction to this work written, at more leisure, the following year.

In the *First Outline*, we can see that Schelling's nature philosophy sits in an uneasy relationship with Fichte's transcendentalism. In this work, the Absolute, the unconditioned in itself, is Nature, not just a collection of objects in the universe, but an active dynamic creative force:

Originally, no individual being at all (as an accomplished fact) is present for us in Nature, for otherwise our project is not philosophy, but empirical investigation. We must observe what an object is in its first origin. First of all, everything that is in Nature, and Nature considered as sum total of existence, is not even present for us. To philosophise about nature means to create Nature. Every activity perishes in its product, because it reaches only to this product. Thus, we do not know nature as product. We know Nature only as active—for it is impossible to philosophise about any subject which cannot be engaged in activity. To philosophize about nature means to heave it out of the dead mechanism to which it seems predisposed, to quicken it with freedom and to set it into its own free development—to philosophise about nature means, in other words, to tear yourself away from the common view which discerns in nature only what 'happens'—and which, at most, views the act

as a factum, not the action itself in its acting. (First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature First p. 14)

The Philosophy of Nature must not confine itself to what happens, and therefore not confine itself to empirical investigation (although Schelling was interested in current scientific empirical investigation). It must concentrate on the creative free spirit of nature, nature as creator not just as product. This applies to the human subject, whose activity in formulating and understanding is part of the productivity of nature. (Here Schelling is combining transcendentalism – the activity of the I – with his nature philosophy, making one part of the other):

Now what is this being itself for transcendental philosophy, of which every individual being is only a particular form? If, according to these very principles, everything that exists is a construction of the spirit, then being itself is nothing other than the constructing itself, or since construction is thinkable at all only as activity, being itself is nothing other than the highest constructing activity, which, although never itself an object, is the principle of everything objective.

Accordingly, transcendental philosophy knows of no originary being. For if being itself is only activity, then the individual being can only be viewed as a determinate form or limitation of the originary activity. —Now being ought to be something just as little primary in the philosophy of nature; ‘the concept of being as an originary substratum should be absolutely eliminated from the philosophy of nature, just as it has been from transcendental philosophy.’ The above proposition says this and nothing else: ‘Nature should be viewed as unconditioned.’ (First Outline, First Division I. The Unconditioned in Nature)

Any system that is founded on an unconditioned Absolute has to be able to explain what is different from it. Fichte’s Absolute I has to incorporate what is not-I (the ‘objective’ world) for which it is somehow responsible. Similarly, in Schelling’s system, if the whole of the universe is dynamic

energy, how is it possible for there to be individual objects, which he sees as their temporary limitation of this creative process and the temporary congealing into particular things? He himself is very much aware of the problem: the paradox of endlessly dynamic activity that is periodically caught up in products that are apparently stable, at least stable for a while:

The chief problem of the philosophy of nature is not to explain the active in Nature (for, because it is its first supposition, this is quite conceivable to it), but the resting, permanent. Nature philosophy arrives at this explanation simply by virtue of the presupposition that for Nature the permanent is a limitation of its own activity. So, if this is the case, then impetuous Nature will struggle against every limitation; thereby the points of inhibition of its activity in nature as object will attain permanence. For the philosopher, the points of inhibition will be signified by products; every product of this kind will represent a determinate sphere which Nature always fills anew, and into which the stream of its force incessantly gushes. (Ibid.)

Schelling famously describes a solution to this paradox by his famous metaphor of a stream, running flowing in a straight line. Along its course a whirlpool might form. A whirlpool is a particular configuration of the water. The water embodying the stream continues to flow through it, but the whirlpool keeps its pattern. The stream maintains its onward motion and can form new whirlpools:

A stream flows in a straight line forward as long as it encounters no resistance. Where there is resistance—a whirlpool forms. Every original product of nature is such a whirlpool, every organism. The whirlpool is not something immobilized, it is rather something constantly transforming—but reproduced anew at each moment. Thus, no product in nature is fixed, but it is reproduced at each instant through the force of nature entire. (We do not really see the subsistence of Nature’s products, just their continual being-reproduced.) Nature as a whole co-operates in every product. Certain points



Could all the universe be a series of whirlpools?

of inhibition in Nature are originally set up—consequently, perhaps there is only one point of inhibition from which the whole of Nature develops itself—first of all, however, we can think infinitely many points of inhibition—at each such point, the stream of Nature’s activity will be broken, as it were, its productivity annihilated. But at each moment comes a new impulse, as it were, a new wave, which fills this sphere afresh. In short, Nature is originally pure identity—nothing to be distinguished in it. Now, points of inhibition appear, against which, as limitations to its productivity, Nature constantly struggles. While it struggles against them, however it fills this sphere again with its productivity. (Ibid.)

The whirlpools represent different products either organic or inorganic. The stream is the creative force in the universe. There is a problem here in the metaphor in that the whirlpool would have to form as a result of some resistance. Where does the resistance come from? If the creative

energy of nature is the Absolute Unconditioned, how do we explain the resistance to it? It cannot be from outside the absolute, as it would be a contradiction to say that there was something outside the Absolute having an effect on it. Here, as with Fichte, there is an implicit threat of dualism lurking within a system incorporated in a single principle. However, this attempt to combine the one and the many (an old obsession in philosophy) has in Schelling another consequence. As he says, the productivity of nature exists at all levels. What are themselves products are also creative within their own sphere. This is obviously true of organic living products, but also of inorganic products. The whole universal system contains little universes within it, each one productive within itself and echoing the creativity of the whole.

In the next article I will describe how this applies to the spheres of chemistry, magnetism, and electricity, and also how Schelling’s nature philosophy affects his view of science.

A Brief Collect of Idealism: ten limericks



CHRIS NORRIS

Kant it was who kicked off by declaring
‘Nothing real but in thought’: very daring!
Yet he left it opaque
How us humans could make
A joint thought-world of things beyond sharing.

That’s why they all had their *Kantkrisen*
When they read his *Critique of Pure Reason*
And discovered, to their
Intellectual despair,
That for sceptics it spelled open season.

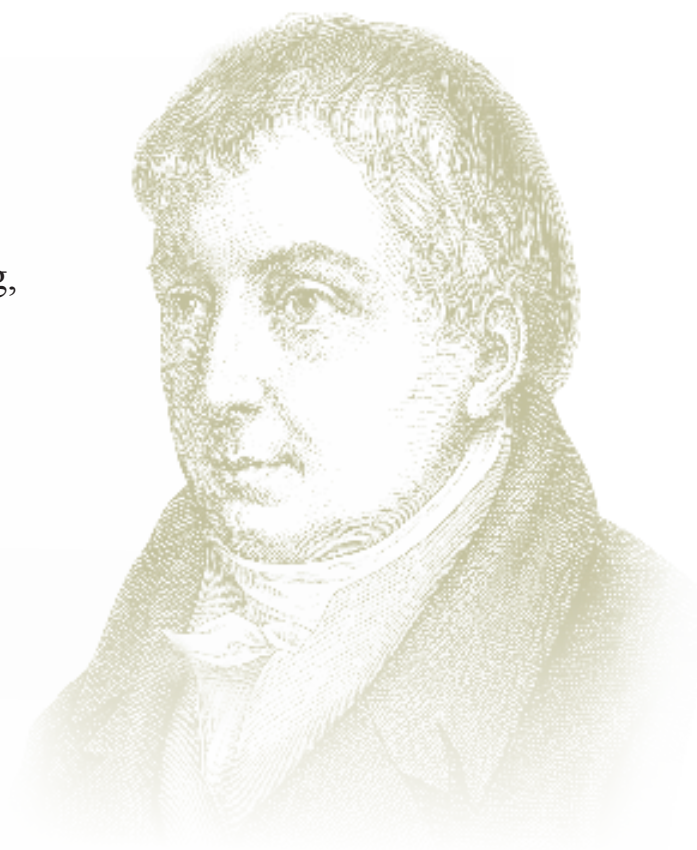
The subjective idealist Fichte
Earned a place in *Ideengeschichte*
When he went transcendental,
Said all things were mental,
And so proved less *Denker* than *Dichter*.

The objective idealist Schelling
Found these arguments less than compelling,
Which was why he inclined
To give nature, not mind,
Pride of place in the tale he was telling.

Other versions kept coming: first Hegel,
Then Friedrich and A.W. Schlegel,
All testing their wits
On Kant's difficult bits,
Or the bits they saw fit to finagle.

Never fear: soon enough Bertrand Russell
Told the world 'all this Germanic fuss'll
Blow over once we
Get idealists to see
How it's logic that packs all the muscle'.

But no: Russell's heirs just updated
Those Kantian dilemmas, now stated
In terms analytic
But still parasitic
On all the old tosh he'd berated.



Friedrich Schlegel

So, with language and logic now filling
Top place in each conference billing,
We're still up the same creek
That made Kant (First *Critique*)
The one father we'll never cease killing.



Hegel

He marked up the score long before us,
We performers with parts in the chorus
Who must sing by the rules,
As in all the best schools,
Or have the rule-sticklers deplore us.

Thus it was that Immanuel Kant
Gave philosophy such a new slant
That, idealist or not,
Any tweak finds a slot
That his system's pre-programmed to grant.

Notes

Kantkrisen = 'Kant-crises'. A remarkable number of mainly German philosophers, poets and novelists had experiences close to a nervous breakdown by encountering what they took to be the sceptical implications of Kantian epistemology.

Ideengeschichte: 'history of ideas', 'intellectual history'

Denker = thinker; *Dichter* = poet

‘Composition’

by the Iraqi Artist Mohamed Mustafa Kamal



A Sybil

Not young but timeless as she was known,
when she was seen in town wandering
always in deep thought and pondering
fate and beliefs, always walking alone.

She looked worn as century-knotted wood,
her forehead furrowed like ploughed earth
and her words fell slowly, each one worth
more than gold, then silently she stood

ever circled by the streaming light
that around her rose, all watched and willed,
while her prophecies, still unfulfilled,

would spread widely into threatening clouds.
Far below the scattered guessing crowds
felt a chill and left, unsatisfied.

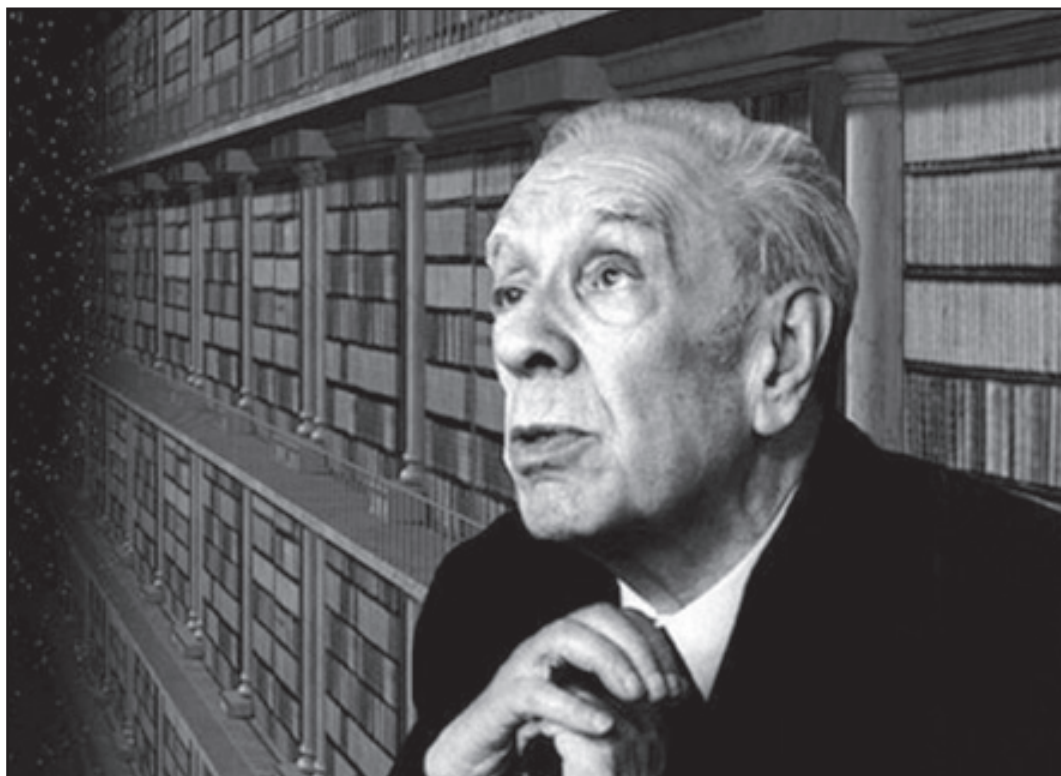
Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws



Notes of the Wednesday Meeting Held on 20th June

Peter Wood kicked off the meeting with these provocations:

1. Evaluations of literature pre-twentieth century are generally accurate (Shakespeare, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Moliere, Racine, Dickens, etc...), but in the last century, in the UK at least, social class interferes (hence over-evaluations of e.g. Forster, Waugh, Greene, and of any writer who is 'of the right class', along with the under-evaluations of e.g. HG Wells and DH Lawrence, because they are 'of the wrong class').
2. Literary analysis is generally much better, with more accurate evaluations, than analysis in the field of 'art', i.e. painting and sculpture. In part this is due to the fact that literature, like analysis, uses language and concepts, while images are in another medium and more problematic to conceptualize. But it is also due to literature being for the masses (you want your book to sell as many as possible) while art produces a single object which, if valued, is likely to be in the possession of the rich and powerful. The masses like something that appeals to the archetyp-



Borges

ally human (e.g. Shakespeare) while the rich and powerful want something that reinforces their own false view of themselves as superior to ordinary humanity (which is in fact the very *raison d'être* of ballet).

3. In addition, one might note the emptiness of most Anglo-Saxon art criticism, which tends to emphasize formal features, while the German tradition – as well as some of the French – pays more attention to content and what the work means.

But then we moved to discuss the self and its boundaries. Still seeking to retain some inwardness from Augustine, I felt the influence of Merleau-Ponty and others displacing inner conflicts into the flesh of the lived body. Identity is increasingly being assessed on how we looked and what was written on our bodies rather than how we spoke or in how we interact (ethics).

Some in the meeting queried the shape of the self and the implied linearity of self-narrative. MacIntyre had introduced narrative as a method of virtue ethics.

Ricoeur used this idea in relation to ethical accountability as a kind of executive summary that comes to mind when we are asked to give witness, testimony etc. It was not a complete map of actual life decisions but might be a web, similar to Quine's web of belief or maybe Borges' forking paths. But the bifurcation or forking path model was simply too contingent. We did not really resolve this.

The question of literature did not get much discussion but the conversation was slanted towards Lacan and Derrida's talked about Merleau-Ponty having a dream of exploring the sea and waking up with a piece of seaweed. It reminded me of Neruda's poem about the diver emerging from the sea.

Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis



Husserl

A major conference on phenomenology and psychoanalysis was held at Oxford two weeks ago. Here are some reflections on the theme of the conference.

DAVID CLOUGH

The Phenomenology conference at St Catherine College – Oxford discussed the overplayed embodiment theme and how the Hubert Dreyfus type approach to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (styled Being in the World) is being challenged by Zahavi and Dermot Moran. They challenge the notion that Husserl either needed Heidegger (or Merleau-Ponty) for the ‘Being in the World’ concept and how Zahavi had earlier challenged the idea that Husserl, like Heidegger and Sartre, had deficiencies in relation to the Other. This has thrown into question much of my earlier historical account. Do we need Levinas or Ricoeur to make Heidegger or Sartre more ethical?

essays, there is discussion of Heinz Kohut’s *Self Psychology and the Humanities* which proved useful at this conference.

One point emerged in the conference, that of the four French interpreters of Husserl, Ricoeur is the one who stays closest to the transcendentalism of Husserl. Though he has to modify the core object of his inquiry somewhat after his reading of Freud, it still stays closer than the other French readings. Merleau-Ponty for example sees the later Husserl in the *Crisis* book as a break with his earlier work. Levinas is more radical still and so is Derrida.

Did this mean French philosophy was still in Plato’s cave more than we are used to if our ideas are mainly neo liberal in character? Where is Hegel and communitarianism in all this? Is it the case that people who are not ‘in analysis’ are still in a trap unable to renounce repressed wishes? Existential Psychotherapy still maintains a human reaction, as in TS Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, not to fully embrace the world and retreat within. But the thrust of modern thinkers, such as Thomas Fuchs, now

At the Wednesday’s meeting of our group I was trying to explain how differently Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty, Levinas and Derrida were reading Husserl. The problem in Ricoeur’s *Freud and Philosophy* is that it is so concerned with the place of Freud as a statuesque monumental idol that there is no real discussion of Lacan, Jung and other post Freudians, or any real analysis and no Heidegger and no Binswanger. But in later

58 and at Heidelberg, is to project as much as possible through the lived body concept essentially out there in the world. But the imperial right of the analyst to solve problems or provide solutions like cognitive work may claim more directly still falls back more in the narrative sense of dealing better with past suffering.

Summing up: how do these points about Lacan and Plato's cave get improved? If Merleau-Ponty played Jung the integrationist, Lacan plays Hillman here. There was the sense in the Derrida-Lacan version of the unconscious as a site of resistance to unjust persecution and politics. But then came the Derridean impossible to contrast with the carnal ambitions of Kearney and Treanor's *A Passion for the Possible*. Most action options have a legacy of past body actions, but memory seems a bit freer than this. I was left wondering whether the Zizekian real was on the side of possibility or impossibility. Someone else felt this was too pessimistic.

But there was nothing on Friday about the debate Merleau Ponty and Ricoeur about Husserl and Hegel. While the interpersonal came up Hegelian self and other recognition did not. There was nothing about Ricoeur's distinction between philosophical and psychoanalytic hermeneutics through the opposition of teleological spirit in Hegel and the archaeological unconscious in Freud as two contrary movements. It seemed that in the post-Heidegger period most of this moved towards pragmatism perhaps. Archeology was the wrong model now but we might still be able to say that Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledges that in Freud too one borrows oneself from others much as I would say GH Mead says too in his pale echo of Hegel.

Am I really convinced about the idea that the unconscious itself is a site of resistance to oppression? What about bad power which was one aspect in Lacan and Derrida politically speaking? It wasn't mentioned but Foucault was there too despite his dalliance with neoliberalism. Kirsteen Anderson in her: *Paul Valery and the Voice of Desire* says that Foucault welcomes evidence of resistance to prevailing or authoritarian powers. He conceives of poetic or creative activity as a means of redefining or restructuring the self, where form is a key stimulant.

The Wednesday

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:

rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Copyright © Rahim Hassan

Website: Currently unavailable

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

Editorial Board

Barbara Vellacott

Paul Cockburn

Correspondences & buying

The Wednesday books:

c/o The Secretary,
12, Yarnells Hill,
Oxford, OX2 9BD

*Please make your
cheque out to:*

The Wednesday magazine.

Donations

Please make your donation
directly on-line to:

The Wednesday Magazine

Account Number:

24042417

Sorting Code:

09-01-29

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

Weeds



(Definition: a plant in the wrong place)

After the rain its *viridis* sparks through busted pavement;
a screech of green piercing broken construction.

Dark tar should have held it at bay.

But the earth bends and buckles, like human stumble.

Softer swathes form pretty edges in skimpy soil.

Yellow perfection swarms across brown field sites:
still it's deemed as something for clearance.

A puff of dandelion seeds gauges wished for time.

A natural piece but a scourge of wind and showers
soon muddles it all away.

David Burridge