

# The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

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## Editorial

### *Complementary Visions*

We introduced the idea of a 'Synthesis' in the last issue. Some more information - scientific, poetic and mystical - came up in our weekly discussion to support this idea.

McGilchrist, in his book *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, argued that there are two sides to the brain, the left-hemisphere is articulate and deals with logical calculations. The right-hemisphere is non-rational and deals with the holistic, imaginative and feeling aspects of life. There is also clinical evidence, mentioned by others, that patients who have had one side of their brain impaired (the side that deals with emotion) can keep their analytical capacities but can't reach decisions about anything. Deciding requires the feeling side. Without this you seem to lose your agency, the ability to act in the world.

Blake has an imaginative idea about human nature. He suggested four elements (Zoas), to which he gave mythical names and characters. The ones that concern us here are reason (Urizen) and the active, creative imagination (Los). The elements are in a continuous struggle, much like Nietzsche's drives, but reason here is not a completely repressive power but almost a strong drive that keeps an eye on what is going on, especially with the imagination. Blake favours the creative imagination but also recognised its chaotic tendencies and the possibility of getting detached from reality. It needs reason to give it boundaries.

Blake saw the limits of the Enlightenment's reason and the move towards abstraction and calculation. This was recognised in the twentieth century by Max Weber and the Frankfurt School as instrumental reason. The German Romantics were credited with this reaction to the Enlightenment and to classicism

in literary and artistic production. They thought that there was more to a human being than reason. It is the search for a balanced view of the human that led Blake to his idea of the four elements. But it was also the idea of the all rounded figure that Nietzsche talked about and he found it in Goethe. Perhaps Goethe is the only person that he doesn't criticise in all his writing.

Ibn Arabi, according to William Chittick, talks about seeing with two eyes, the eye of reason and the eye of the imagination. The eye of reason, for example, gives us the abstract idea of God, much like Aristotle's First Mover. It is the idea of a dissimilarity to the human in an absolute way. But the eye of the imagination gives us the idea of God who has all the attributes we know in our human existence but in a sublime way. St. Aquinas applied this idea to language. Language is a human means of connecting with reality. This is a sensible reality. Such a language is not adequate for the purpose of metaphysics or talking about God. Language has to resort to the concept of analogy. Analogy here plays the role of a synthesis and gives us a glimpse into the beyond based on what we already have. Both Ibn Arabi and St. Aquinas recognise the need for a complementary use of our capacities.

Thinking synthetically could be the way to solve many impasses and divisions. McGilchrist warns that the dominance of the left-hemisphere is detrimental to human development. He says: 'If I am right, the story of the Western world is one of increasing left-hemisphere domination, we would not expect insight to be the key note. Instead, we would expect a sort of insouciant optimism, the sleepwalker whistling a happy tune as he ambles towards the abyss.'

*The Editor*

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# Answers to The Fundamental Questions of Life

**For centuries, if not millennia, philosophers looked for certainty. But they never dug deep enough, so the results remained shaky. Eventually, it was even thought impossible to find absolute certainty, and the attempts to uncover it became scarce. They surrendered to relativism (i.e. nothing is certain) and realism (i.e., it is real because I perceive it). But what has that brought us? Ever more questions, but hardly any answers. Some even believe the purpose of philosophy is to ask questions, instead of finding answers. I think it is time to return to finding answers. Here I share what I found on my search.**

**RUUD SCHUURMAN**

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**M**any of the fundamental questions of life can readily be answered by making a fresh start and being fearlessly rational. Questions like what is real and what am I, what is true and what can I know, what is good and what should I do. If you would like answers to these questions, even if you currently believe that it is impossible, please bear with me. It only takes a moment. We just need to make a fresh start and be fearlessly rational. By making a fresh start, I mean discarding all that I cannot be (absolutely) certain of. By being fearlessly rational, I mean relying

only on what I can be (absolutely) certain of. Not accepting anything on hearsay, blind faith, or authority, but, instead, adopting the kind of doubt that Descartes provokes in the first and second of his Meditations on First Philosophy. So, let us see. What can I be certain of?

[1] Appearances appear.

That much is certain. It is an undeniable empirical fact. That appearances appear, means that:

[2] Appearances appear to me, here and now.

Or else I could not be certain at all that appearances appear. And from this it follows that:

[3] I am.

Of course, I could also arrive at [3] by noting that its denial results in contradiction. Now, the fact *that* I am, triggers the question *what* I am. In part, the answer follows from [2]. If appearances appear to me, here and now, then it follows that:

[4] I am (at the very least) that which the appearances appear to.

This is only a first step. As the phrase ‘at the very least’ implies, I could be more than just that which the appearances appear to. But can I? To begin with, we could ask ourselves, can I be any of the appearances that appear to me? I don't think we can. Why not? Because it would be viciously circular to suppose that I am something that could appear to me. It would imply that there are at least two I's: one I that appears to me, and another I that I appear to. Also, I am obviously not an appearance, at least not *just* an appearance. Finally, even if I believe that the appearances do not only appear *to* me but also *in* me, I cannot be just a part of what appears in me, a part of myself. The obvious objection is to say that, ‘If I see myself in a mirror, I appear to myself’ or ‘If I think of myself, I appear to myself’. But these counterexamples are invalid. If you see yourself in the mirror, reflections appear, but you are not a reflection, right? If you think about yourself, thoughts appear, but you are not a thought, right? Thus:

[5] I am not any of the appearances that appear to me.

I am like the eye that can see all except itself. From [2] and [4] and [5], it follows that:

[6] The appearances and that which they appear to (I, me, myself) are mutually exclusive.

If you are anything like me, this is uncontroversial. I never considered myself to be an appearance. Instead, I considered myself to be a real human being, a body-mind organism that is born into the world and that is somehow conscious of the world and of itself. But, apart from the fact that

that seems circular, we can ask ourselves: Can I be certain that I am a human being that is born into the world? Can it be inferred from [1]? No:

[7] That appearances appear to me, does not prove that anything else exists.

That appearances appear to me, does not prove that anything else other than the appearances and I exists (in some other way than as an appearance). Appearances need not be perceptions of something else. Thus, from [1], I cannot infer the existence of the world or the human being that I took to be myself. Okay, that was to be expected perhaps. From [1], I cannot infer the existence of things in themselves. But can I otherwise be certain of the existence of the world and the human being that I took myself to be? Again, I don't think so.

[8] I cannot *ever* be otherwise certain that there is anything else.

The reason is simple: I cannot *ever* be aware of anything except of what appears to me. Thus, I cannot *ever* be certain that anything else exists. And what are we to do with assumptions that we cannot *ever* be certain of?

[9] Assumptions that I cannot *ever* be certain of, are to be discarded.

Why? Because such assumptions cannot *ever* be verified or falsified, they are not declarative, and thus they are not propositions in the logical-philosophical sense. Even if they were, the conclusion of any argument that depends on such an assumption, will remain *forever* merely hypothetical, and thus be useless. Mind you, hypothetical conclusions need not be useless, but if they are known to remain hypothetical *forever*, then they are. Such assumptions cannot add anything to rational discourse but confusion. Therefore, they are to be discarded. It follows from [8] and [9] that:

[10] The assumption that there is anything else, is to be discarded.

Of course, this does not prove that there is nothing else, other than the appearances and that which



*'This is not a pipe'*  
by René Magritte

they appear to. After all, absence of proof, is not proof of absence. So, strictly speaking, it is not irrational to believe that there is something else. But it would be mere belief, unsupported by reason, i.e., superstition. Now, where does this bring us? From [2], [7], and [10], it follows that:

[11] The appearances and that which they appear to (I, me, myself) are jointly exhaustive.

Being fearlessly rational, there is no reason to assume that there is anything else, other than the appearances and that which they appear to (I, me myself). Now, if the appearances and that which they appear to are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, then:

[12] The appearances and that which they appear to (I, me, myself) are complementary.

This implies that:

[12a] I am (only) that which the appearances appear to.

and that:

[12b] All else are (only) the appearances.

This is where the argument ends. But did it deliver what was promised? Did it answer the fundamental questions of life? Let us have a look at the questions we started with, and see how the argument helps in answering them.

What is real? With 'real', I mean actual, factual, not possibly merely apparent. So, what is real?

That which the appearances appear to, i.e., I, me, myself, is real. Why? Because I am actual, always here and now, I am factual, I *am* while all else *appears and disappears*, and I am not possibly merely apparent because I do not appear at all. All else are (only) the appearances, which are possibly merely apparent, and thus not real.

What am I? I am that which the appearances appear to, in the thinnest, least weighty sense. I am that which is real.

What is true? Following Aristotle, I assume that to say that what *is is* and that what *is not is not*, is true. It follows that to say that I *am* (but do not *appear to be*) and that all else *is not* (but *appears to be*), is true.

What can I know? What is true.

What is good? To believe what is true.

What should I do? What is good.

This may be short-hand and deserve a more thorough treatment, but for now, it will have to do.

What? Do you think this remains merely theoretical, that is has no practical consequence? I dare you! It may have no worldly benefits, but it does set you free. In philosophical terms, it sets you free from ignorance and the suffering of doubt. It is wisdom, true knowledge. In Abrahamic terms, it sets you free from sin and the consequences of sin. It is salvation, divine union. More on this later, if you are interested.

# The *Wednesday* BOOKS

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# The Search for the Soul

**The concept of the soul is an old one and has a long history. It has evolved over time. The early Greek philosophers dealt with this concept and they built the basis of psychiatry and psychology. But the ‘soul’ – what, where, when, why? Our search for the soul will be a long one but here is a start.**

**NONA FERDON**

‘An infant crying in the night.  
An infant crying for the light  
and with no language but a cry.’

**I**t seems certain that the primitive individual was frightened of finding himself in an often terrifying world. One of his first reactions would be to turn to others for care and reassurance, whether it was the arms of the mother he found himself in or later stories of his tribe when he began to learn language. One of his first reactions would be to turn to others to help him relieve his pain – physical or emotional.

We have a great deal of evidence, of course. Early humans tried to alleviate the sufferings of their

companions, and with some success. But as the ages spun on and humans began to create ‘civilisation’ it was recognised that certain individuals had a ‘knack’ for helping their suffering comrades. Individuals could be cared for until their broken bones were amended. Skulls could be opened and pressure relieved.

But it became recognised that many elements of human pain were not strictly bodily. As time rolled on, the questions of life – and death – and the ‘afterlife’ loomed. For many, it became evident that simply caring for health of the body not the answer. As time passed, some philosophers began to be referred to as ‘doctors of the soul’. As they learned how to successfully care for individuals suffering from mental illnesses and existential angst in their Asclepiums they became more and more adept – more ‘philosophers of the soul’ and built the basis of psychiatry and psychology. But the ‘soul’ – what, where, when, why?

## The Soul

We know that we shall die. (It has been said that living philosophy is learning to die). And a few other animals are aware of death also. (Some species of monkeys carry their dead babies around for days after their death, and we all are aware of elephant’s behaviour (and now even some species of whales.).

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, we get a glimpse into the Greek underworld as it was perceived from Homeric times and dates from around the beginning of the archaic period. (Whether ‘Homer’ was one person or the work of many remains a question.) ‘Homer’s’ writings are the



**Homer**





Odysseus

first to be recorded on this topic in the Western world (and it seems that he denigrated writing as a threat to memory). But they represent a long history of oral stories that were prevalent in Greek society for many years. What did the word 'soul' mean to speakers of classical Greek and what did they think about an associate with the soul?

From humble Homeric beginnings, the word 'soul' underwent a striking semantic expansion. At the time of Socrates death, the soul is spoken of the distinguishing mark of living things, that is responsible for rational thinking, is the subject of emotional states, and is the bearer of such virtues as courage and justice. We must trace a development toward a very broad conception of soul. In ordinary fifth century Greek having soul is

simply being alive. Hence the adjective 'ensouled' – meaning 'I live'. This was applied to all living things. It may be that the word 'soul' was used in this way as early as the sixth century. Thales of Miletus is reported attributed soul to magnets, on the ground that magnets are capable of moving Iron.

By the end of the fifth century BC, people were said, for example, to satisfy their souls with rich food. Feelings like love and hate, joy and grief, anger and shame were attributed to the soul. 'Nothing bites the soul of a man more than dishonour' says Ajax just before he commits suicide.

### Homer and the Shades of the Dead

In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes more of the conditions of the afterlife than the scenery or processes of the underworld. His depiction of Odysseus' journey to the underworld is 'a spiritual adventure in a moment when life and death are brought into contact.' In order to interact with the dead, Odysseus must pour libations and perform a ritual sacrifice. Following this sacrifice, 'out of Erebus came swarming up shades of the dead' - the dead may move around in the afterlife and have a place to call their 'home'. We can assume that these shades of the dead resemble who they were during their lives, since Odysseus is able to recognise and describe them. They may look like the living, but they do not immediately act like them. They 'have no mental powers (*nous*) or strength (*menos*) and are no more than unsubstantial shadows. They may regain these mental powers and their memories, but are unable to speak the truth or remember their past lives until they drink sacrificial sheep's



Agamemnon

blood. Their strength, however, cannot be redeemed first. This is further evidenced by Odysseus, in his interaction with Agamemnon, whose 'sinews no longer hold the flesh and bone together,' and 'whose spirits cannot be grasp or held, but instead slip through one's embrace, like a shadow or a dream'

The shades are essentially non-existent, although some knowledge is regained by the drinking of blood. (It might be noted that animal sacrifice in Greece can be traced back to the prehistoric period.) They have little knowledge of the world of the living. Achilles is quoted as saying he would 'rather live working as a wage labourer for hire by some other man, one who had no land and not much in the way of livelihood, than ordered of all the wasted dead.' It may indeed be that Homer was showing that the afterlife was reserved only for beings of a special status. Most of the people that death meets and Homer describes are rather well-known characters.

We also encounter a Zeus passing judgement on the dead and there is some mention of 'the spacious gates of Hades (if they were pearly it is certainly not mentioned). Heraclitus, it seems, was received and already seen 'with immortal gods, enjoying the feast.' Furthermore, the punishment that sinners receive show that actions in life will affect one in death. But these conditions seem to be reserved for the semi-divine.

But there is no specific divide that separates those being punished from those simply living in the underworld.

Later philosophers, such as Pericles and Anaxagoras, held that the soul, which is what gives life and movement to the body, is constituted of atoms which are finer than others. These atoms are spread throughout the entire body and give life. Because of their fineness, these atoms also exit from the body, but they are taken up again with respiration. All these fiery atoms escape when respiration ceases. Thus, the soul is made of matter and upon death the matter of the fiery atoms become energy. As we can see, our search for the 'soul' will be a long one.

### Biography

He was born  
appeared  
was trained  
returned  
opened the door  
and closed it  
looked  
left  
thought it over  
returned  
switched the light on  
switched it off  
carefully picked an apple  
he did not eat  
chose a chair  
to sit on  
looked at it  
reconsidered  
walked away  
came back  
breathed  
and disappeared.





*Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws*

# Artistic Interpretation of The Unreality of Time

**‘The Unreality of Time’ painting is an expressionist rendering of reality, inspired by the best-known philosophical work of the Cambridge idealist J. M. E. McTaggart (1866–1925). In a famous article, first published in *Mind*, January 1908, McTaggart argued that time is unreal because our descriptions of time are either contradictory, circular, or insufficient.**

### The three parts of the argument

There are three parts to McTaggart’s argument:

#### Part 1

McTaggart offers a phenomenological exploration of the appearance of time, in terms of the now well-known A- and B-series.

McTaggart introduces a difference between A-series and B-series orderings of objects and events: on an A-series ordering, objects and events are ordered in terms of their being past, present and future; while on a B-series ordering, objects and events are ordered in terms of their relations of being earlier, later than, or simultaneous with other times and events.

So A theory states that there are intrinsic and monadic properties such as pastness, presentness, and futurity, and it is in virtue of having such a property (an “A-property”) that things in time are past, present, or future.

B-theory denies A-theory. B-theorists argue that the flow of time is an illusion, that the past, present and future are equally real, and that time is tenseless. B-theory is often drawn upon in theoretical physics, and in theories such as eternalism.

#### Part 2

McTaggart argues that a conception of time as only forming a B-series but not an A-series is an inadequate conception of time because the B-series does not contain any notion of change.

The A-series, on the other hand, appears to contain change and is thus more likely to be an adequate conception of time.

#### Part 3

Finally, McTaggart argues that the conception of time forming an A-series is contradictory and thus nothing can be like an A-series. Since the A- and the B- series exhaust possible conceptions of how reality can be temporal, and neither is adequate, the conclusion McTaggart reaches is that reality is not temporal at all.

### The artistic interpretation

This artistic interpretation of time (see the painting) focuses on the third part of McTaggart’s argument. The inadequacy and fragility of the A and B series by the darkest lowest edge that clashes with the lighter yellow ochre upper right hand with bursts of intense white at the contact points. Reality as we know it: Everything and anything was either originated from a singularity (The Big Bang), or else, everything and anything will be collapsed into a singularity (The Big Crunch). The eternal cycle of: yin/yang, in existence/ out of existence, good/evil, dark matter/ baryonic matter. This cycle of (re)birth and (re)death is represented by the cyclical brush strokes that are, at the same time: *towards* or *away from* the point of origin or point of disappearance, conveying the idea that time is just an unreal phenomenon keeping everything from happening all at once, for whatever that might mean.



**'The Unreality of Time'** (oil on canvas 120 cm x 120 cm)

With gratitude to the owner of the painting: Dr. Donna Gouba Sacco

*Article and Painting by Dr. Alan Xuereb*

### Going Viral: an A-Life parable



CHRIS NORRIS

On September 9, 1945, a Harvard technical team looked at Panel F and found something unusual between points in Relay 70. It was a moth, which they promptly removed and taped in the logbook. Rear Admiral Grace Hopper added the caption ‘First actual case of bug being found’, and that’s the first time anyone used the word bug to describe a computer glitch . . . .

For one thing, Harvard’s Mark II came online in summer of 1947, two years after the date attributed to this story. For another thing, you don’t use a line like ‘First actual case of bug being found’ if the term bug isn’t already in common usage.

‘Moth in the Machine’, *Computerworld*, Sept. 3<sup>rd</sup> 2011

The principal assumption made in Artificial Life is that the “logical form” of an organism can be separated from its material basis of construction, and that ‘aliveness’ will be found to be a property of the former, not of the latter.

Christopher Langton

How is it possible in the late twentieth century to believe, or at least claim to believe, that computer codes are alive? And not only alive, but natural?

N. Katherine Hayles

‘Just speaking metaphorically’, it goes,  
The standard line for sorting out the prose  
Of sober fact from fancy stuff that owes  
What sense it has to passion’s thrills or throes.

*‘First actual case of bug being found’ she said,  
Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, though the thread  
Of ‘bug’ for ‘glitch’ in techno-parlance led  
Way back to Thomas Edison instead.*

They’re right, of course: calling your love a rose  
Is fanciful at best, the sort of pose  
That poets strike when the mind-lulling flows  
Of love-talk leave their listeners comatose.

*A moth trapped in a relay: so it spread,  
That tale of how Grace Hopper patented  
The term, though her ‘first actual’ bids us shed  
The myth as more fake news that we’ve been fed.*



Still it was metaphors I always chose,  
And do still choose, to speak of you, so those  
Choice ways of somehow uttering who-knows-  
Quite-what no literalist should deem otiose.

*It's relays that give metaphor its head.  
They replicate like mad, computer-bred.  
As once to candles, now to relays fled  
The moths turn viruses, new bugs to dread.*

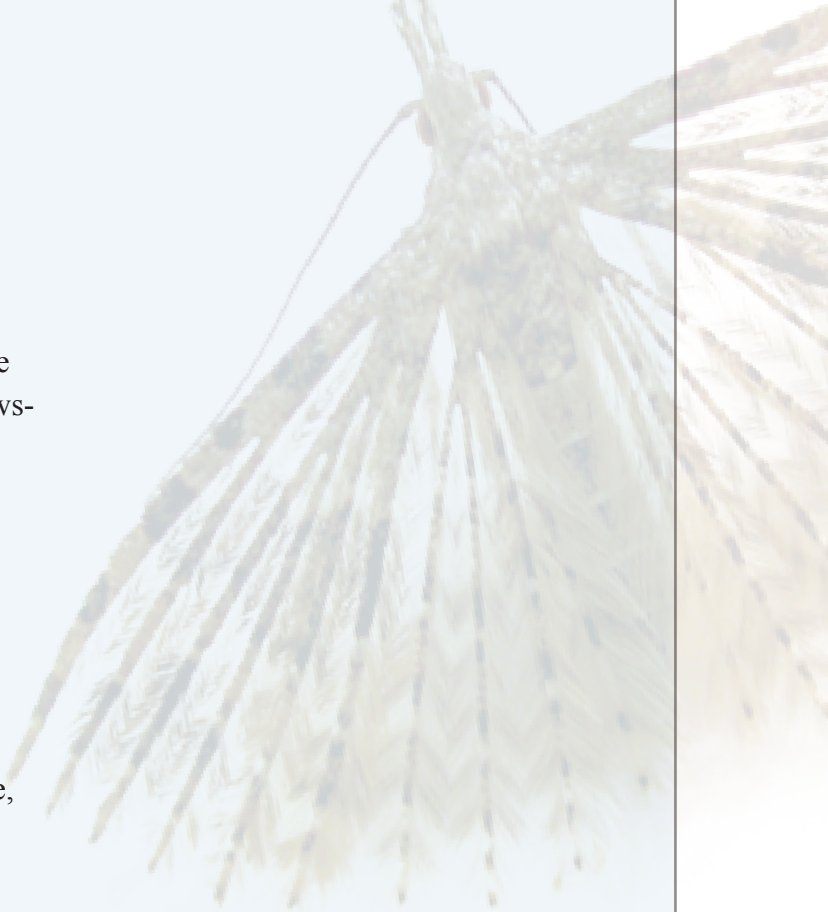
If mutants swarm, and the suspicion grows  
That there's a glitch we've failed to diagnose,  
Still it's the gift of metaphor bestows  
Fresh signs of life in viral embryos.

*Yet what if it's some sequence we've misread  
As live, some segment soul- and body-dead,  
Like the stretch of computer-code that sped  
The moth's swift exit from its biomed?*

Yet should its fate give rise to lachrymose  
Reflections, please consider what it shows  
Of the strange ways about that nature goes,  
Like language, to keep thinking on its toes.

*Why kid yourself such thoughts can bring a shred  
Of comfort when the one trope they embed  
Is that which leads where we should fear to tread  
Since viral haunts are best unvisited?*

Should this still bug you, think what light it throws  
On us-type cyborgs with our ratios  
Of creature-life to A-life that compose  
A living whole no virus can foreclose,  
No Turing-test annul if mind bestows  
Its imprimatur, and no hammer-blows  
Knock out like moths amongst the serried rows  
Of relays clicking shut like dominos.





# Stephen Clark Hands Over The Reins A Big Thank You to the Founder of PHILOS\_L

**Professor Stephen Clark, the founder and owner of the PHILOS\_L is handing over the control of the list to the philosophy department at Liverpool University where it all began. Professor Emeritus Stephen Clark founded 'The Liverpool List' a few years into his chair (around 1984). Stephen retired in 2009 but has continued to manage PHILOS-L. The List is now approaching its 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday.**

I am very grateful to Professor Clark for publishing the press releases of *The Wednesday* magazine since its early issues. This meant that the news about the issues has reached a world-wide audience. The List was initially a forum for discussion and trying out ideas but it is now the place for philosophers worldwide to share information and ask questions. It is now by far the largest philosophy email list in the world. The list currently boasts 10896 members in over 60

countries, with an additional 9000 Facebook subscribers and over 3000 twitter followers. Stephen Clark is a very friendly and accommodating person. There were times when I hesitated to publish press releases. But Stephen wrote to encourage me to use the list. I have recently published the news about the magazine reaching its first year in publishing and the will to carry on.

Stephen is very modest and doesn't want to take all the credit himself. In a review of the last thirty years of his supervising the list, he wrote, 'I have always emphasised the list's standing as "the Liverpool list"'. Talking about the list's history on his page at Liverpool University, he says:

'When I founded the list back in 1989, with the enthusiastic help of Computing Services (first Chris Woolf, and later Alan Thew), the chief Philosophy list was Philosop, run from Canada. A chattier list was NSP-L ('Noble Savage Philosophers' [sic]) run by a US postgrad.

As more people joined PHILOS-L (and the listserv system evolved) it was sometimes subject to flurries of mails about contentious matters. I took to remarking that the basic rule for the list was 'anar-



Stephen Clark

chy tempered by despotism' - that is, people could say what they wished until I told them to stop.

There were very occasional attempts to ignore my instructions - people with obsessions, people with apocalyptic programmes, and so on. There were also occasions when I became aware that someone was a con artist, advertising new journals or conferences or whatever with a claim to institutional or other respectable backing that did not in fact exist. I established Chora as a pure discussion list to divert people away from the main list, and eventually began to moderate posts - at first only the few posters who seemed most inclined to ignore the rules, and eventually the whole membership. Some old-timers took offence at this, but everyone seems now to accept the system.

Managing the list, especially in the early years, did need someone with the clout or perhaps the chutzpah to intervene and demand a halt (and to ignore the occasional hate mail). Nowadays that is less important, as most people have grown up with the rules and treat the list as a place to make announcements (Calls for Papers, Conference Announcements, Job advertisements etc) and to ask, occasionally, for help. I try to make sure that queries are answered off list, and the results - if relevant - posted to the list by the original enquirer.

There are other lists nowadays - especially Aphil-L for Australasia - but a lot of the conversations that used to happen on email lists now occur instead on social media like Facebook or Twitter (there are Philos-L links to both these outlets).'

On behalf of the team and readers of *The Wednesday*, I say a big thank you to Stephen for all his hard work in establishing and running PHILOS\_L for so long. Well done for providing such a useful service.

***Rahim Hassan***

## *The Wednesday*

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## *Doggerel Of Doubt*



Voices hard and clear,

Eyes with a glint of surety.

Mouths that twist and sneer.

Truth has a touch of impurity.

Are these the prophets I should follow?

Is it Utopia they are trying to create?

Or vicious masks empty and hollow,

Am I just snatching at their bait?

*David Burridge*

The *Wednesday* – Magazine of the Wednesday group.

To receive it regularly, please write to the editor: [rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk)