

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

German Idealism and the Move to Immanence

The impression one gets from a name such as Idealism is that one is already in a transcendent (or transcendental) sphere with reality either being denied or subjected to the ideal. But it may come as a surprise that idealism of the German variety is more realistic and has a strand of immanence in its metaphysics.

It all started with Kant who tried to rectify the situation in which philosophy found itself. Science was making great advances but metaphysics was stagnant and open to all sort of views that were unverifiable or at least didn't count as knowledge. It was also the time when Enlightenment, the rationalism and materialism of the French and the empiricism of the British, supported by science, posed a great challenge. But there was also the idealism of Berkeley that put all material reality into question. Kant came up with his slogan: Things are empirically real but transcendently ideal. Kant, despite his transcendentalism, stayed anchored in reality through what he called 'the thing-in-itself'. But the other side of his transcendentalism is that he eliminated the transcendent.

The post-Kantians rejected Kant's things-in-themselves but accepted his rejection of transcendental metaphysics. This is very clear in Fichte and Schelling but also in Hegel. But the one who created most controversy was Fichte in what has become known as 'the atheism dispute'. His position was that God is not transcendent but present in the community, not as a person, but as the moral order. He was led to his position by his reaction to the theology of his time which he described as bad philosophy. He spoke like an insider because he was trained in theology. But unlike Kant, he was not compromising with the materialists, especially of the French school. He was critical of them and we might talk about this

on another occasion. He was also unlike Kant in that Kant kept the idea of God as a postulate or an idea of reason. For Fichte, God is a shorthand for a moral community or reason objectifying itself in reality. Perhaps Hegel subscribed to this idea as well.

One interesting difference between Kant and Fichte was in the relationship of philosophy to faith. Kant was clear on this matter. For Kant, we can't have knowledge of God through discursive reasoning and he rejected all the standard proofs for the existence of God. But he was a believer and in his famous statement he said that he denied knowledge to save faith. Kant restricted knowledge to the realm of possible experience but not to things-in-themselves or transcendental ideas, such as God, freedom and the immortality of the soul, though we can feel these as real on moral grounds. Aesthetics and reflective judgments are also a help in this indirect knowledge. So, faith has been preserved and philosophy has an important role in being critical.

Fichte, on the other hand, talked in an ambiguous way. He said that traditional beliefs amounted to idolatry, and that he was giving the true meaning of faith. But when pressed on his view he retreated to a peculiar position by saying that the task of philosophy was not to change people's beliefs but to understand these beliefs and how people came to believe them. Philosophy had become quietist in the way Wittgenstein would suggest later on. Was Fichte submitting to the pressure of his peers and critics? Was it the pressure of the authorities that led him to lose his lecturing post at Jena University? Was it an apology? Whatever it was, it was a crucial move from transcendence to immanence.

The Editor



Hegel: The Development Of Consciousness

The German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has been considered as the foremost representative of German Idealism. He had a profound influence on Karl Marx. We will outline the fundamental themes which are central to his philosophy.

RANJINI GHOSH

Part 1

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A good place to start is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he traces the appearance and development of consciousness.

Phenomenology of Spirit

Hegel said that the history of the world is the progress of consciousness of freedom. It is the history of the development of the spirit. *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a study of how the mind appears to itself. He showed how limited forms of consciousness develop into more

adequate forms. His task was to examine the exposition of knowledge as a phenomenon. Therefore, the development of consciousness means that forms of consciousness develop that are capable of understanding reality more completely. This process culminates in 'absolute knowledge'. He stated that the aim of philosophy is the knowledge of the absolute.

Hegel says that knowledge is like an instrument through which we understand reality. Hence our instrument should not be faulty.

Knowledge as an instrument is like a medium through which we understand reality but it is not reality itself. It is possible that this medium may be faulty and so our understanding of reality will be distorted. It is like a stick which appears bent in a glass of water. If I know the laws of physics then I will know what the stick is actually like. Is it similarly possible that we can understand reality without any distortions produced by our medium of knowledge? Hegel replies that it is not possible because the concept of knowledge is not the same as that of a stick. We may recall that it was Kant who had said that we cannot comprehend reality completely since our knowledge of reality is limited to our sense experience and which we try to understand through our categories of understanding like space, time and causality. Space, time and causation are not part of reality but they are modes through which we understand reality. Hegel believed that to understand reality or knowledge one would have to examine consciousness from inside or the way the mind appears to us. This is what he calls *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

The simple form of consciousness at first appears to be genuine knowledge but on a closer examination it appears to be not so and then it develops into a higher form of consciousness and so on till it is capable of grasping the nature of complete reality or absolute knowledge. In the words of Hegel, it is a process of training and educating consciousness itself. It is the development of ideas that occurs through various epochs of history. Since each form of consciousness is inadequate, it leads to a 'determinate negation' which in turn leads to a higher form of consciousness. The discovery that one form of consciousness is inadequate to understand reality, is itself a new kind of consciousness. So, there is a continuous process of movement of this consciousness from a lower level of knowledge to a higher level of knowledge. It is in this sense that one can say that history is the progress of consciousness.

The quest of consciousness is to know what actual knowledge truly is. How will one know that consciousness has reached the level of absolute knowledge? Hegel says that the process will stop where knowledge is no longer compelled to go beyond itself. This way then knowledge will be of the true reality and not the appearance of reality.

Sense Certainty

Sense certainty is a primitive form of consciousness which understands reality by relying only on the senses, of what is immediately before us. It only lets us know at a bare minimum level what we can see or feel but there is no attempt to categorize or classify this information into a higher form of knowledge. For example, it will not be able to describe a ripe mango since that would involve some classification of the sensory experience. This form of consciousness gives us only awareness of the object in front of us and nothing else. This form of consciousness also cannot be translated into language since that would also involve some form of classification. Sense certainty is knowledge of particulars and not universals. The knowledge of universals enables us to understand different range of objects within a particular term. For example, 'mango' is a universal term for different types of mangoes. Knowledge cannot be had without universal concepts.

The question then arises that if we are to understand knowledge more fully do we need to translate our sensory experience into the language of universals which others can also understand? Hegel believes that it is essential that true knowledge should be translated into language. Because if it is not it remains only a personal opinion and opinion cannot be knowledge unless it is made public. Everyone should understand what is being said. Therefore, this primitive form of consciousness is not able to grasp anything other than what is in front of it. It is incapable of understanding

knowledge or reality. It is essential that these particular sense experiences need to be organized in a conceptual scheme so that we can understand reality through the concept of universals and express them in the form of language so others can understand. Therefore, the mind has to play a more active role in classifying and ordering our sense experience into conceptual categories of universals that will enable us to understand reality adequately. This is also what Kant had said in his concept of 'transcendental analytic'. It is imperative that one should move to a higher stage of consciousness which is able to do this job of categorizing our sense experience into a coherent whole.

Self Consciousness

Hegel explains the development of consciousness through 'perception' and 'understanding'. Consciousness first classifies the sensory data according to their universal properties and this is the first stage of perception and it further employs laws to understand reality at the stage of 'understanding'. The laws are the scientific laws of motion etc. and are seen by Hegel as a part of the classification process of the data of sense perception. So, the concepts of physics like motion and gravity are categories or constructs made by this consciousness to understand reality. And when consciousness makes an attempt to categorize sense data into the universal it is a process of making it a part of our language of communication.

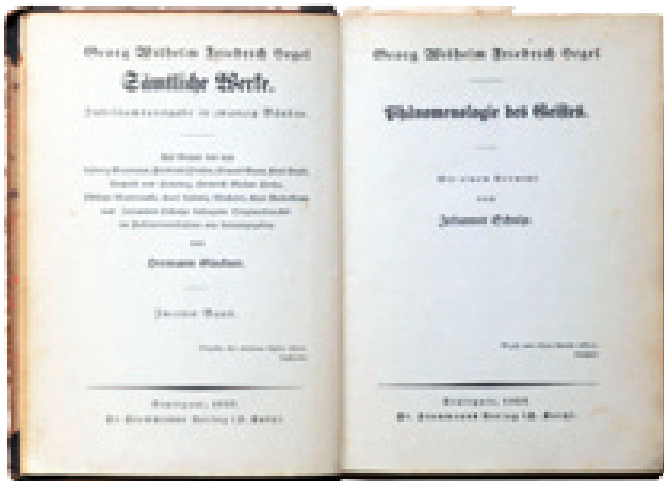
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In trying to understand reality this way, consciousness is actually trying to understand its own creation, as Peter Singer explains. Hence consciousness reaches a point at which it tries to understand itself, it is a kind of latent self-consciousness. If consciousness has to understand itself then it requires some other object which stands in contrast to itself and from which it can differentiate itself. It needs

to understand itself in the context of something else. It needs an external object to understand itself. It is a kind of desire where one tries to possess something while not destroying it. Desire is an unsatisfactory state for self-consciousness. If the object of desire goes away then so does self-consciousness. The object of self-consciousness becomes another self-consciousness. Peter Singer gives an example of the mirror. To be aware of ourselves we need to look into the mirror, in effect we are also seeing another self-conscious being in addition to ourselves. Self-consciousness can only develop in social interactions. A child brought up in complete isolation will only develop a minimum level of consciousness but not self-consciousness since that can only come through social interactions.

Master And Slave

One self-conscious being requires recognition from another self-conscious being. If the other person does not recognize me then my self-consciousness is hurt. Psychologists have documented that lack of recognition severely undermines a person's sense of identity and worth. We may appreciate that in the arena of international politics every newly created state desires recognition from others. He says that the desire for self-recognition often leads to violent struggles where one person wants recognition by violently suppressing the other person. In this unequal combat the victor is the master and the loser is the slave. It is a division between the ruler and the ruled. In the struggle between the master and the slave the slave also develops self-recognition through his own labor. When he makes a chair out of wood it gives him a sense of creation and he becomes more aware of his consciousness. The product of his labor then becomes his creation and the foundation for a sense of worth and consciousness.



Old copy of Phenomenology of Spirit



Roger Scruton

The slave in the eyes of the master is only a means to achieve his end. But from the perspective of the slave his will is not destroyed though it is chained. Since he has given his labor to the objects he makes for his master he realizes his own identity through this. His self-consciousness grows. The dialectic of this relation between the master and the slave is resolved, according to Roger Scruton, only when each treats the other not as a means but as an end. The struggle between them ends and each accepts the autonomy of the other or a categorical imperative not to treat the other person as a means. So, both of them become bound to a community and a common moral law which in the words of Kant is the law of freedom. It is then that the self-consciousness of both the master and the servant becomes a universal self-consciousness.

Religion

The philosophy of Stoicism became important in the Roman Empire. Stoicism was a philosophy which came as a sense of escape to the slave. It taught withdrawal from the external world as a way of achieving freedom from oppression. This withdrawal was a kind of retreat into one's own consciousness where

one could feel free. The mind detaches itself in a manner of speaking from the body and finds freedom from external constraints. Stoicism gave way to another school of philosophy called skepticism. From here Hegel moved to his concept of 'unhappy consciousness'.

The concept of 'unhappy consciousness' derives from Christianity in that the alienated soul goes into retreat in itself much like the slave who mentally retreats from his master. The unhappy consciousness tries to seek independence from the material world while at the same time being fully aware that it can never reach God and escape from worldly pains is impossible. Hegel is basically against any religion which puts God on a different and a higher plain than man. Hegel believes that God is nothing but the projection of human nature. The spiritual qualities of God are only a reflection of man's own self. The unhappy consciousness is unhappy or alienated because its own nature is projected onto something which is out of its reach and not attainable and thereby making its present life miserable. Therefore, our belief in God, according to Hegel, is only a projection of our essential attributes.

The Consolation of Philosophy

There are times when we might desperately need consolation. This existential state is not going to discriminate between religious belief, philosophy or science or art, yet reason alone can supply consolation as Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* reveals.

WILLIAM BISHOP

There is a need to discriminate between two types of reason: that directly arising from the Logos, and logic that departs from it. Logic may appear cold and calculating, lacking in heart, but its point is objectivity, while reason in the spirit of the Logos combines head with heart. Today the emancipated intellect is virtually independent of emotion and will to the extent that 'artificial intelligence' might substitute for it, but this would emphasize the significance of the role of human emotion, thinking from the heart and intuition and volition.

Today we are familiar with our usual conscious state of mind, but what if the mood of our soul was radically different prior to the Renaissance in the fifteenth century? Let's say that the intellect was active in the medieval period but connected more with feeling and volition than it is today with its tendency towards abstraction. Indeed while medieval texts might seem dry it is likely that intense feeling and will went into them. Some evidence of this can be discerned in the fierce controversies that arose. Though out of tune with today's mode of intellectual philosophy, Boethius' consolation philosophy has been widely celebrated and arguably remains relevant today beyond any sentimental moss that it might have gathered in its journey through time.

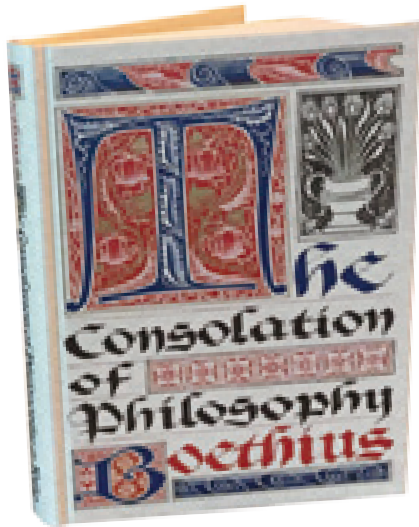
unprincipled men to the ruin and destruction of the good'. Ironically it was through his good moral deeds that he became the victim of 'unprincipled men' bearing false witness.

The comprehensive power of the work comes from the fact that Boethius was a consummate master of Greek philosophy, having read widely and translated among other things books of logic by Aristotle and Plotinus. He also formulated the idea of the quadrivium, believing that perfection in philosophy required a fourfold approach.

While his book comes within the consolation tradition it does have unique features. Boethius frames the composition in the form of an evolving knowledge drama with dialogue and reflection. It opens with a self-indulgent, self-pitying poem by Boethius which includes the lines: 'My hair untimely white upon my head / And I a worn-out bone-bag hung with flesh.' (Boethius was in his mid-forties at the time.) Straight away Lady Philosophy makes her appearance, indignantly dismissing the interfering poetic Muses preying on Boethius like Sirens. From that time on Philosophy takes Boethius in hand mentally and guides him through a course of reasoning to a final point of resolution, reminding him of his dignity as a God-created human being and that divine reason governed the world and this was the essential reality to attend to, which transcended the life of the world with its subjection to the wheel of fortune.

Poetry, dialogue and reflection punctuate the discourse so that deep feeling is interspersed with reason: there is reason in the poetry and passion in the prose. What for us today is a personification of philosophy could have been for Boethius a

The Consolation of Philosophy was written by Boethius around the year 524 during a period of imprisonment or house arrest pending execution, so its purpose was to address an immediate need. Boethius was in this predicament as a result of participating in the political arena due to his concern that 'it was necessary for philosophers to take part in government to prevent the reins of government falling into the hands of wicked and



Boethius

concrete imaginative relationship personalizing philosophy and thereby creating a condition of personal reality. Boethius' relationship is then with a personality, which brings life to the ideas, giving them the living quality of conversation. The 'Muse' had been taken very seriously by the Greeks as a source of inspiration from a spiritual presence or power.

Lady Philosophy (as the goddess or essential being of philosophy) calls for the need to know oneself and she persuades Boethius through reason that he can acceptably lose all possessions through the wheel of fortune but his own self cannot be taken from him and his true happiness lies in the Good, which is the domain of the divine, his true homeland. God, referred to in the dialogue, is to be regarded as real and responsible for the world of divine justice that transcends the values of the world in which Boethius is condemned.

Indeed in old age (with white hair and protruding bones) there is often the desire to come to a resolution with life in order to avoid the need to rage against the dying of the light. Lady Philosophy's dialogue illuminates the understanding, reminding Boethius to see life with its circumstances and values in the broader, universal perspective of divine eternity – the Platonic and divine reality rather than in the light of the earthly, time-bound world. In most medieval philosophy God was not only part of the picture, but the foundation of

reality; as Lady Philosophy sings:

'From one beginning rises all mankind;
For one Lord rules and Fathers all things born ...
He closed in bodies minds brought down from high,
A noble origin for mortal men.'

Philosophy today (in the West) is not beholden to 'God' in the same way that it has been. In recent years God has received a bad press, and in some minds has even expired, or has been banished to a separate reality, the field of theology. Arguably though, if God is real, arguments to remove the divine presence, however convincing, would not affect reality. Philosophy is free to speculate and analyse, but, in the final analysis, theology occupies the same human world where reason, knowledge and faith interact against a background of passion and will.

But returning to consolation, this can be considered a matter of *feeling* and feeling can be affected by viewing a situation in perspective. Boethius was able to distinguish between *intellect* as insight and *reason*, which needed deduction from one point to another to arrive at intellect's insight. Lady Philosophy led him in the way of reason. Today we may not have the facility of direct sight provided by *intellect* but philosophy does grace the human condition with its logic and reasoned reflection. As the love of wisdom, philosophy can console, while wisdom itself offers the laurel crown.

Schopenhauer: Late Thoughts (a Triple Sestina)



CHRIS NORRIS

The method of viewing things which proceeds in accordance with the principle of sufficient reason is the rational method, and it alone is valid and of use in practical life and in science. The method which looks away from the content of this principle is the method of genius, which is only valid and of use in art.

In music we do not recognize the copy, the repetition, of any Idea of the inner nature of the world. Yet it is completely and profoundly understood in our innermost being as an entirely universal language, whose distinctness surpasses even that of the world of perception itself.

In aesthetic consciousness we enter that painless state, prized by Epicurus as the state of the gods; for a moment we are delivered from the miserable pressure of the will. We celebrate the Sabbath from the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still.

Arthur Schopenhauer

I

Your man Charles Darwin has the right idea.
He knows that life's just dog-eat-dog at root.
A friend informed me, saw the book in proof.
Its gist: the species-race goes to the fit.
He grubs around, as English writers will,
Thinks metaphysics rot, and frets in case

The godly take offence. Familiar case:
Can't get his head around his own idea
And what it means, so bids us think that Will
Entails no more than having nature root
For its prime specimens. A doctrine fit,
I'd say, for those so metaphysics-proof

That all they want's the English style of 'proof'
Served up by endless hefty tomes of case-
By-case-type burrowing for facts to fit
Some given theme. No doubt a good idea,
Though far out-argued by my *Fourfold Root*
Of Reason, let alone my *World as Will*

And Representation. Proving – if you will –
Through metaphysics that all talk of ‘proof’
In Darwin’s sense is subject to the root
Delusion that defines the common case
Of rationalists and empiricists. ‘Idea’
Is just the word both parties use to fit

Their lifeless concepts to a nature fit
For nothing but the motions of a will
Devoid of living force. I’ve no idea
As to what Will might be beyond the proof
That love or hate supply when it’s a case
Of forces deep beneath that fourfold root

Where reason ends. Let my opponents root
Around for some life-episode that’s fit
For psychiatric treatment. It’s a case,
They say, of my attributing to ‘Will’
Such elemental powers as lack all proof
Since purely figments of a crazed idea.

I say: at root all suffering’s down to Will.
The symptoms fit: what need for further proof?
It’s just the case, in no way my idea.

II

They speak of my misogyny, my lack
Of ‘heart’, my endless seeking-out of grounds
For discontent, and how I’ve raised a whole
Great creaky metaphysics on my need
For dismal thoughts. As if to say: your job,
As thinker, is to see the glass still full

Though emptied to the dregs, and not half-full,
Or (crush the thought!) half-empty. Yet it’s lack
Or indigence that keeps us in a job,
Us thinkers, since it takes away all grounds
To postulate an end-point to the need
For fantasies of broken lives made whole.



Poetry

I tolerate misfortune, on the whole
(No choice, you'll say), and much prefer a full-
On *Weltschmerz* to admitting some crass need
For comfort that would blind us to our lack
Of reasons to be cheerful. All that grounds
Such hopeful thoughts is the old Kantian job-

Lot of ideas – his best-of-a-bad-job
Attempt to keep Will quiet – on which the whole
'Enlightened' crew once banked as offering grounds
For reason, faith, and hope. Conceive it full,
That glass, though clearer sight would show the lack
That goads and sharpens every human need.

It's all in Shakespeare: 'reason not the need',
Cries Lear in torment, taking on the job
Of chief instructor in how far we lack
What's basic to us, we for whom 'the whole'
Can only signify a life-time full
Of defects, gaps, lacunae, missing grounds.

It's some such thought of nothingness that grounds
The Vedic texts I turned to in my need
For wiser mentors than those Kantians full
Of lofty sentiments (goes with the job,
Like 'Dr. Prof.') since seeing through the whole
Charade of thought's vain quest to heal the lack.

Clearing the ground's a necessary job
For thinkers when the need to 'see things whole'
Reveals in full the truth of all we lack.

III

I contradict myself, you say. I count
Music the highest of the arts since Will
Finds voice directly through the inner world
Of *Tonkunst*, while the rest – the visual arts
And poetry – partake in various ways
Of ideation and the veil of thought.



So, music reigns supreme; yet who'd have thought
I'd yield to that idea, rather than count
It more like hell on Earth, given all the ways
I'd gone around to demonstrate how Will
And its rough strife might cease awhile through art's
Too briefly conjuring a Will-less world.

Plato

They say: what place for music in that world
If music plunges us, beyond all thought,
Straight into Will's inchoate flux where arts
Like poetry or painting scarcely count
Since thought and image shelter us from Will
And so placate its pandaemonic ways?

Tempting to turn it round: 'among those ways',
I might reply, 'is how the ordered world
Of logic meets its nemesis in Will
And all the so-called 'laws' or rules of thought
Receive its body-blow: 'out for the count!'
Like old conventions in the sister-arts'.

But not for me, the logic-twisting arts
Of rhetoric and their beguiling ways!
Peruse my work, see just how low the count
Of faults or fallacies, then tell the world
It's clarity of mind and strength of thought,
Not weakness, that here meets the test of Will.

Let logic-choppers tax me as they will,
Along with self-styled spokesmen for 'the arts'
Who tend to bridle at the very thought
That music might disrupt their usual ways
Of thinking or of being-in-the-world
Till they've its curse and blessing both to count.

They'll frame my talk of Will in many ways,
The arts and science of a future world
Where id tells thought: no chickens left to count!



Circumpunct

We will not wake up.
Words dissolve before they are pronounced.
Nobody will rename things.
Hypothesis, theory, science and logic,
everything will fly to pieces
like this love we once thought
would last forever.

Oh the joy of
falling deeply into metaphysical purity,
into the light of a higher nothingness,
into a cube of finality as a cycle of immobility,
immutable from every perspective,
and counterpart to the sphere,
which holds the universal force in every soul.

circumpunct

*is a symbol of gold in alchemy,
a symbol of the sun in astrology
and a symbol of god in Gnosticism.*

*A circumference represents an outer world
full of chaos and uncertainty.*

*A point inside represents
the beginning of creation or the self (C.G. Jung).*

*Our goal as humans is to gather knowledge about ourselves
which means approaching the central point - the perfection.*



It is the blazing fire that burns
nothingness. No wind in its centre,
no faith, no extension of the mind.
Reduce a circle to one dot,
the ancient symbol,
as it is the dot, the line and the circle,
where all knowledge are contained,
where the germ is raised
upon the surface of infinite duration.

Poems and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Profound McTaggart

Time is unreal, McTaggart claimed, and what was once is now,
Queen Anne is taking tea at Hampton, Gladstone wipes his brow,
Duke Williams's archers draw their bows as Caesar lays waste Gaul,
While Alexander stares, recruits obey Napoleon's call.
So, in a timeless realm, for him, events stood side by side,
But, as he paced the tilting deck above the moving tide,
Or changed below for dinnertime and waited for the gong,
Didn't he feel expectancy proved dialectics wrong?
What was, is, and about to be pulsating in his veins,
How could he not see change in life and all that life contains?
But no, Time is unreal, and the dialectic sound,
And, using that fine instrument, acute McTaggart found
That everything deep down is one plurality of minds
Who love each other with a love so powerful it binds
Seemingly separate selves into one universal whole,
A harmony containing both the starting point and goal,
Until we find the path of metaphysics we have trod
Has led us to the Absolute theology calls God.
Such was philosophy in the days idealism ruled,
Then in Australia rose a group refusing to be fooled
Who in their Sydney seminars irreverently concluded
A mind which thinks such thoughts as these is certainly deluded.



McTaggart

Edward Greenwood

The Wednesday

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:

rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

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Barbara Vellacott

Paul Cockburn

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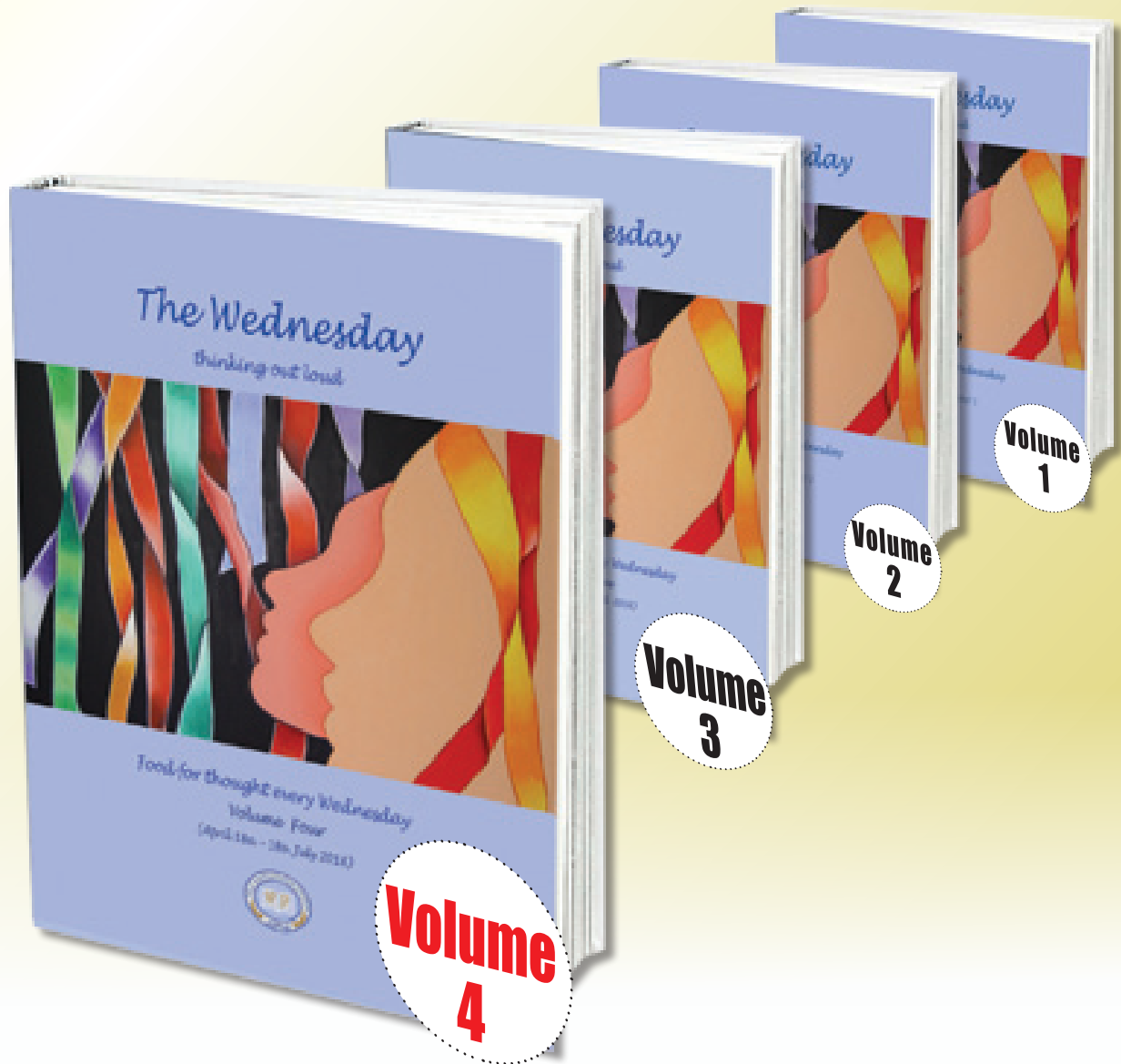
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