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The Wednesday

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### <u>Editorial</u>

## On Hermeneutic Injustice

ast week we dealt with the topic of epistemic injustice; the injustice done to a speaker in cases of knowledge and testament. But there is another aspect to injustice that is related to the individual or a group of people and how they understand their experiences and whether they are cases of injustices. Miranda Fricker, in her book Epistemic Injustice, pointed out this type of injustice. She called it 'hermeneutical injustice'. It concerns the availability of proper concepts for classifying an experience and making it intelligible to the speaker or a hearer. For example, sexual harassment, racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are now well-established concepts so that a person subjected to an experience of these sorts can understand what is happening and can report it in the right terms. The very naming of the experience gives it an objective sense and clarity in the social sphere and the possibility of making it the subject of a legal case.

The less stable and effective any of these concepts, the more the individual and the group find themselves to be in what Fricker calls a 'hermeneutically marginalised' situation. 'They participate unequally in the practices through which social meanings are generated.' It also 'can mean that our collective forms of understanding are rendered structurally prejudicial.' But the major harm of this injustice is the effect on the individual and the group in the way they see themselves: 'not in terms of the subject being unfairly disadvantaged by some collective hermeneutical lacuna, but also in terms of the very construction of selfhood.' They may become ashamed of who they are or feel a deep guilt for some unspecified wrongdoing they have not committed.

how these concepts are created and function. The public sphere is an arena of power. The powerful tend to dominate the hermeneutical social sphere. Knowledge is a source of power. The less an individual or a group have knowledge or contribute to public knowledge the less likely it is that they will be able to participate in the collective hermeneutical resources of society. They will be more open to prejudices and less able to fight hermeneutical injustices committed against them. They may become passive and start to internalise the prejudices directed onto them.

However, these concepts don't function in a vacuum but in an atmosphere full of pre-conceptions, daily images and association through the media. The association could be positive or negative which leads towards the strengthening of the concept or the weakening of it. For example, when negative news about Muslims and Islam are daily reported through different channels and different stories, films and images, it becomes difficult to seek justice for Muslims. It is not only the availability of the concept that is important but its effectiveness, which requires reinforcement from the intellectual and social atmosphere. The daily news and images that may look individually, in isolation, neutral and harmless could have a devastating influence when they feed into, or create, a well entrenched view of hostility and hatred.

It is important to create a mass of critical thought that can unmask the practices of the media and other sources which generate prejudice and injustice. When intolerance and prejudice show themselves, philosophy should turn critical and help with the task of creating the right concepts for our time and for the future.

There is also a political dimension in terms of

# God And The Philosophers

The question of whether God exists and whether there is sufficient evidence to believe in the existence of God has been a central question in the philosophy of religion. We shall focus on the main debates regarding belief in God and the question of evil and morality in relation to the concept of God.

**RANJINI GHOSH** 

## Part 1

One of the most influential philosophical views that rejected metaphysics and considered it a non-sensical issue is Logical Positivism. We will start with this school of thought:

#### **Verification And Falsification**

Logical Positivists have given us a theory of meaning called the verification principle by which they examine various statements and the implications of such statements. They hold that meaningful statements fall into two groups. The first group includes mathematical statements like 2+2=4 or tautologies like all cats are cats and logically necessary statements which are of the form P and not-P cannot both be true. The second group are factual statements which can be confirmed by means of the senses. They equated factual meaningfulness with sense experience. Hence a statement is factual and meaningful to them only if we can confirm it through some kind of sense experience. A statement like 'God exists' is neither empirically verifiable nor empirically falsifiable. Therefore, such statements do not have any meaning.

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A. J. Ayer in his classic book *Language*, *Truth and Logic* notes that the term 'God' is a metaphysical term. Such a metaphysical utterance cannot be either true or false. Ayer's position therefore is that if we cannot empirically verify God's existence then it is meaningless to say there is a God. The other criterion employed is falsification. This

principle states that a statement like 'There is a God' is meaningless because we cannot verify it. Antony Flew gives an example of a parable. Two explorers come to a clear space in a jungle. The first explorer maintains that there is an invisible gardener who looks after it. The second disagrees. Various tests like electric fences, dogs and keeping watch are employed to actually check whether there is a gardener. All the tests fail to show any gardener. But the first explorer keeps on maintaining that there is an invisible gardener. Flew says that religious believers make similar claims and are not ready for any counter arguments. Their claims in the existence of God are unfalsifiable. Such people do not allow any sense experience to go against their belief.

### **Religious Belief And Evidence**

According to some philosophers, religious beliefs should be rejected unless they can be defended on the basis of evidence and argument. Antony Flew defends a position called 'the presumption of atheism'. In criminal law a person is presumed innocent until the prosecution establishes his guilt by bringing evidence. Flew believes that those who believe in God should be similarly asked to produce evidence. Just as the prosecution in a crime is proposing a conclusion, and it is up to the prosecution to show that its conclusion is true, it is up to the believers who are proposing a conclusion that God exists to prove the same.



A.J.Ayer



**Antony Flew** 

#### **Meaning Of Religious Belief**

A school of thinkers argue that the job of philosophy is not to comment on the truth or falsity of religious beliefs but to try to understand them. Some philosophers have argued that it is a mistaken view of the nature of philosophy to seek to rationally justify religious belief. One has to instead seek to understand the true nature of religious belief. A belief in God has to be understood and appreciated on its own terms without any need for rationalization or evidence.

Wittgenstein made a famous distinction between 'surface grammar' and 'depth grammar'. It is a distinction between what sentences really mean and what they appear to mean. We can consider a sentence like 'I have a pain in my foot'. He says that on the surface of it grammatically it is similar to saying that I have a key in my pocket. It is as if the pain is like an object in my pocket. But this is not what the sentence really means. Philosophy has to examine what is the real meaning of belief in God . According to this view it is not the task of the philosopher to decide whether there is a God or not, but to ask what it means to affirm or deny the existence of God. Belief in God does not require a rational justification. Belief in God is not a hypothesis which is open to falsification. God is not an empirical object which might or might not exist. There is a difference between believing in God and believing in a hypothesis. A hypothesis is tentative and subject to evidence. Those who believe in God do not do so tentatively.

#### **Belief Without Evidence**

The fourth view says that it is possible to hold a religious belief without any evidence. This line of argument is most famously propounded by Alvin Plantinga. Plantinga argues that people are rationally entitled to believe that God exists. He says that all those philosophers who argue that a belief has to be based on some evidence derived from the senses or something which is self-evident are 'classical foundationalists'. He says that all of our dayto-day beliefs are not based on what classical foundationalism says. He believes that those

### Philosophy

who believe in God do not need any rational arguments or evidence. Children are not often able to produce evidence, but they know who their parents are. Their belief on this count is not unreasonable. Elizabeth Anscombe also said that the greater part of our knowledge of reality rests upon the beliefs which we have been taught and told.

#### **Cosmological Arguments**

This line of argument says that the world cannot come from nothing. There has to be a cause or reason for the explanation of the universe. One main school of thought is known as the Islamic Kalam argument. The fundamental idea of this school of thought is that God exists because the universe must have had a beginning and only God was responsible for this beginning. The beginning of the universe was a free and intelligent choice and there must be someone able to do this. This cause cannot be an unfree, non-intelligent physical process. The cause is therefore a personal being.

Thomas Reid said that no mode of existence can begin without an efficient cause. There has been some opposition to the idea of a personal being who is responsible for the emergence of the universe. This argument says that personal beings are all material objects and material objects are a part of the universe and therefore they could not have been the cause of the universe happening. So, the universe could not have been affected by a personal being. There is another argument which is a part of the cosmological argument. This is the 'argument from sufficient reason'. When we say the world exists then it may be either contingently true or true of necessity. A statement like 'a triangle has three sides' is necessarily true since it does not depend on any external reasons for its truth. But for contingent truths or facts some outside reason for support has to be taken. The principle of sufficient reason says that it is a necessary truth that the world exists. The necessary

thing is God. If there is no God, then there is no world. Leibniz said that God is the ultimate reason for things. He argued that the ultimate reason of things is God.

Some philosophers like Bertrand Russell argued that it is a futile question to ask why is there a world or a universe. He said that the universe is just there and that's all. The world is there as a basic fact and that is all. The principle of sufficient reason given by Leibniz cannot be settled on empirical grounds.

Another view of the cosmological scheme is called the First Cause Argument. There is a first cause of everything. Thomas Aquinas held that everything that is real is from God. God is the all-embracing cause of being. And God is the first cause. But what accounts for the being of God? Aquinas says that it is God's nature to exist.

Wittgenstein said that the important question is not *how* the world is but *that* it is. How the world is, is a scientific matter but it is the *thatness* of the world that is more important. Simon Blackburn has argued that when we talk of the ultimate cause or the first cause we should cut off any regress. The Indian Philosopher said that the world rested on an elephant and when asked what the elephant rested upon, he said a tortoise, and then further tortoises.

David Hume presented the traditional theological argument for the existence of God. The argument begins by stating that whatever exists must have a cause or reason for its existence and ends with the argument that there is necessarily a Being who carries the reason of his existence in himself.

Bertrand Russell thought that the first cause was an awfully bad argument because the conclusion did not follow from the premises: the argument starts off with a premise that



**Alvin Plantinga** 

everything has a previous cause but ends with the conclusion that there must be something that has no previous cause. The conclusion denies what the premise asserts.

#### **Design Arguments**

This school of thought does not seek to prove God's existence from the cause of the universe but from certain visible features of the world. This argument takes mainly two forms. In the first, design is seen as a purpose, in the second it is seen as a sense of regularity.

William Paley gave the most famous argument from design as a purpose when he said that the parts of a watch are put together for a certain purpose. The universe is also like a watch that has a purpose. It is not by chance that acorns grow into oak trees. The regularity argument sees the evidence of regularity in nature as proof of the existence of God.

Richard Swinburne says that all laws of nature whether in physics, chemistry or biology all reflect an order and not chaos. There has to be an explanation for this. There can be two explanations of this: a scientific explanation or



Simon Blackburn

a personal one in terms of the conscious choices of people. Scientific laws cannot explain the universe because every scientific phenomenon is explained in terms of some prior phenomena, and science fails to explain the highest level which explains all other phenomena. There has to be a personal explanation like God who is behind this order. God has reason to produce an orderly world because order is a necessary condition of beauty.

David Hume criticized such arguments by saying that when we explain something in terms of cause and effect then we have to be careful that there is a proportion between the amount of cause and amount of effect. If a certain design has to be explained, then there has to be a similar design producing being. But when we say that this being is God then we are going beyond the evidence. Hume also refutes the argument that since the universe is unique we cannot have a basis for inferring that there is a human designer behind it. Positing a designer behind the universe leads to infinite regression. He says that there may be a gang of Gods who may have designed the universe.

# Concepts and Reality

This third in a series of three articles explores the idea of concepts through a view of language as the use of recognisable signs to express information by combining concepts.

### **CHRIS SEDDON**

## Part 3

In the first article of this series I quoted three related notions from the history of Philosophy and illustrated some working definitions which ground language on the notion of referential concepts, without limiting language or concepts to that function.

In the second article I illustrated how these ideas relate to generalisations and the idea of vocabulary approximately shared between language users, vagueness, explicit definitions, and contextsensitive language.

In this final article I illustrate the importance of linguistic self-reference in everyday contingent language and how the notion of the definition of variables avoids some contradictions inherent in formal accounts, and defend the distinction between analytic and synthetic language.

#### Linguistic self-reference

The previous article on this topic described how changing vocabulary enables people to associate signs such as "he", "that" or "now" with appropriate concepts depending on the sign's context. In this sense most everyday language, which expresses references to contingent situations, is self-referential. For example, I am meant to associate "Now" (or verbs in the present tense) with the time that *this sentence* is uttered, and it can be convenient to define implicit references to the here and now in terms of this sentence. **Riechenbach's** concept in *The Philosophy of Space and Time* of co-ordinative definitions such as a standard metre or an atomic clock are further examples of vocabulary which relies directly or indirectly on a reference to the sentence in which it is used.

The paradox of the liar derived from Epimenides' poem Cretica is an example of implicitly selfreferential language and a peculiar kind of context-sensitivity. Epimenides wrote "Cretans, ever liars...", which seems merely racist at first, until one realises that Epimenides was himself a Cretan. If a Cretan said that Cretans always lie, then what they said cannot be true, because then it would be a lie. I am sure that Cretans sometimes tell the truth, in which case what Epimenides said would seem to be false, but what if I am wrong, and Cretans do always lie? In that context, Epimenides' statement, taken literally, could neither be true nor false. In that context it would be meaningless. If it really were the case that Cretans never told the truth and we were to associate the component signs of Epimenide's compound sign with the intended component concepts (and the grammar of combining the signs with the intended way of combining the concepts), the combination of concepts would not form a concept. This is a peculiar kind of context-sensitivity, in which the grammar is not significantly dependent on context, but the associated combination of concepts is.

Although it is unusual and even perverse to take a statement such as Epimenides' literally, historically the paradox has revealed the weakness of accounts of language which, focusing primarily on mathematical language, have ignored context-sensitivity and the role of inter-personal vocabulary that follows naturally from the above account of operational language and operational concepts. Gödel's incompleteness theorem in his article On Formally Undecidable Propositions of Principia Mathematica and Related Systems, applies to formal systems which attempt to assign meaning and truth to signs solely in terms of their form, illustrating the problem with such accounts of language but not really explaining why it arises or how to avoid it. A carefully constructed operational semantics can avoid this result by taking account of the fact that definition and proof cannot be reliably based on mere symbolic forms, because signs may be associated by people with concepts dependent on context and language may be - and typically is - self-referential.

#### Analytic language

**Quine** cast doubt about the existence of concepts even just as parts of meaningful descriptions, since he could see no difference between analytic and synthetic truths:

> "Modern empiricism has been conditioned in large part by two dogmas. One is a belief in some fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic, or grounded in meanings independently of matters of fact and truths which are synthetic, or grounded in fact"

Quine Two Dogmas of Empiricism

Quine starts by pointing out that:

"meaning is not to be identified with naming or reference"

Indeed the definition of an operational concept in the first article clarifies the distinction between meaning and reference, that is, between concepts in general and referential concepts in particular, and the examples illustrate how to use abstract



**Chris Seddon** 

concepts when referential concepts are not appropriate.

Quine then questions whether the idea of meanings makes any sense:

"what sort of things are meanings?... mental ideas for some semanticists, Platonic ideas for others... It is not even clear, granted meanings, when we have two and when we have one"

Again the definition of an operational concept provides the basis for the answer: meanings are concepts. Successful references are the same when they refer to the same thing. Other concepts are the same when in combination with the same other concepts they form the same new concepts.

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Since the logical denial of a failed reference is a successful reference, the recursive definition of an operational concept explains what concepts are and when they are the same or different.

Quine claims that definitions cannot explain synonymy, because:

" a language whose extent is specified in relevant respects. Suppose we now consider a language containing just the following materials... Now a language of this type is *extensional*, in this sense: any two predicates which *agree extensionally* are interchangeable *salve veritate*..."

The section in the second article on preexisting vocabulary associated by language users with clusters of precise concepts explains the characteristic vague synonymy that holds between different signs.

The example in the second article of an explicit definition illustrates how the precise synonymy of concepts can be expressed by generalising operators within an extensional equivalence:

```
0r
[self-loving: loved: # defined terms
And
 [And # definitions
  [context: person: # parameters
   Equivalent # first definition
   [context # definiendum
    [self-loving[person]]
     context # definiens
     [Loves[person][person]]]
   Equivalent # second definition
   [context # definiendum
    [loved[person]]
     context # definiens
     [Or[lover:Loves[person][lover]]]]]
 And # use of the defined terms
  [loved[Chris]
   loved[Dolly]
   Not[self-loving[Dolly]]]]
```

In his chosen examples Quine imposes on his

language the restriction of only generalising first order predicates, that is, generalising operands but never generalising operators. Such language can generalise about what a given concept describes, but not about what describes the concept. The former describes the extension of the concept, and the latter describes its intension.

For example, if everything that has a heart also has a kidney, then the concept of having a heart is extensionally equivalent to the concept of having a kidney. If everything that describes a heart also describes an organ that pumps blood, then the concept of having a heart is intensionally equivalent to the concept of having an organ that pumps blood.

Intensional equivalence is synonymy, but Quine chooses language that cannot express intensional equivalence and then concludes that there is no such thing as intensional equivalence. My examples, like those in Gödel's work, express intensional equivalence as an extensional equivalence within a conjunction generalised with respect to an operator on the equivalents.

Finally Quine claims that there are no criteria for identifying postulates such as definitions:

The example above of an explicit definition and the description in the second article of pre-existing vocabulary indicate that certain statements represent definitions (or other axioms or postulates) with respect to other statements which represent their use, by virtue of their respective positions within a specific explicit or implicit structure of generalisation.

Since unlike Quine I do have a coherent account of concepts, synonymy, and definition, I can define analytic language as that part of our vocabulary which is deliberately restricted to analysis, that is, vocabulary which in isolation can form only trivial analytic statements (the truth of which depends only on the definitions of component terms), but which in combination with other terms can form significant synthetic statements (the truth of which depends also on external evidence).

## Universe under a Microscope 2.

## By Mike England



(Courtesy of The Dragon Gallery, Petworth, West Sussex)

## **Art and Poetry**

## Janus Mind

I am not who you think, grey-haired for safe-keeping, single-minded with my hidden heart.

Something I did not tell, a broken thread, a casual remark - say, a tiny spark

has set my mind alight, fanning the flames while you were asleep.

No dream here. Double I see and I am, a Janus head as found in ancient Roman temples

reaching in two directions. Am I the reflection of myself, or a distorted image in its flow

that proofs its undertow, each advance complemented by a retreat, every rise

10



transformed into a fall? Am I in search of more ways for multiple answers?

I am nothing and all, a body and a mind and eyes that judge distances

11

from you to me, from my hands to your face, from yin to yang.

Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws

### Poetry

## An Armored Train



CHRIS NORRIS

TTAPANE

Trotsky spent three years living on a converted armored train, travelling through Russia at speed. The train included a telegraph station, a library, a radio station, an electric power station, a squad of sharpshooters and machine-gunners, and an automobile garage. The on-board printing house published its own newspaper, *En Route*.

### Astrid Alben, The Times Literary Supplement, March 29, 2019

An armored train, with soldiers to defend Their Comrade Leon Trotsky, though if they, Or one of them, should try to commandeer The heavy guns it's my coach they'd bombard.

Sometimes the train stops just before a bend And my sharp-shooters mount their whole array Of armaments in case they're somewhere near, Those renegades, and have the railroad barred.

Not, maybe, quite the place you'd choose to spend A largish part of every waking day And sleepless night, but there's no choice if we're To catch the Whites and Mensheviks off-guard.

Three years it's been, this journey without end, Three years since my long trek got underway, Since we first piled aboard with all the gear, The stuff that soon became our calling-card.

We've telegraphs set up so we can send Deceptive messages that let us play A cat-and-mouse game with the channels clear To bag the turkeys in their own backyard.

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Once daily we slow down, stop, and descend To Mother Earth, a joy I can't convey Unless, like me, you've known the secret fear That seized us every time the couplings jarred.

Amazing all the articles I've penned In transit, when the carriage ceased to sway And I gave shape to theses that will sear My signature on brains that take it hard.

Already I hear mutterings that portend No good conclusion to the plans I lay, Those plans the Georgian butcher hopes will veer Off course for me, the wild-eyed communard.

We've got a radio, printing press to lend The thing a bit of cultural cachet, And daily newspaper that may appear Or not, as days prove lucky or ill-starred.

No shortage of new things to fix or mend, The buckled rails, the lengthening dossier Of loco faults, the push-rod oil to smear, The sleepers weather-proofed with fingers tarred.

No wonder if those honest toilers tend To mock my onboard library, the way I churn out endless screeds that try to steer A path twixt *Proletkult* and avant-garde.

I say 'It needs unmasking, this new trend, If we're to keep the Mensheviks at bay', But know there'll always be a few who'll jeer At that old bourgeois 'brain-worker' facade.



### **Follow Up**

# Religious experience and Philosophy Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 1st May 2019

### PAUL COCKBURN

**R** ahim Hassan introduced the subject of religious experience and its relationship to philosophy. He thought there was often distrust between philosophy and mystical (religious) contemplative experience and he wondered why.

Religion was critiqued in terms of its role as giving too much power to people in religious institutions who then abuse others, and in terms of the many bad things that religious zealots do in the name of religion. One view was that religion can be dogmatic and 'closed', but it can also be open to new ideas, and other people, in a loving way. It is a spectrum that contains the fanatical at one extreme but also open-mindedness, tolerance and understanding, especially in matters of inter-faith dialogue or a study of faiths beyond the individual's religion. We should explore, learn and challenge ourselves on our journey through life. There is good and bad in all religions and it was felt that 'good' religion should improve the behavior of its adherents: 'By their fruits you shall know them'. The beneficial effect of meditation in lifting people out of depression was also discussed.

We were pleased to welcome back our visitor Sung Han Song from S. Korea. He said he is a Christian, but he also values Buddhism, and he found good and bad in both Buddhism and Christianity.

In terms of a historical perspective, Rahim mentioned Charles Taylor's view that Nietzsche could only write about the death of God in the late nineteenth century because of the tremendous success of the scientific method in so many fields up to that point which gave the impression that one doesn't need a God any more (on the assumption that belief in God is motivated by fear of the unknown). This links to our discussion last week of the 'split brain' with logic and piecemeal analysis being emphasized in modernity as opposed to the organic whole, the bigger picture which may be missed. But the point is that we are now witnessing a religious revivalism of extreme forms in a time when science is more advanced than the nineteenth century and this calls for an explanation.

Can religious experience be described by means of natural language or does it require some kind of special language? We discussed the concept



**Charles Taylor** 

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of infinity, in terms of its awe-inspiring impact making human affairs look rather small. We also discussed infinity in mathematical terms, where it can be a limit (for example the series 1+ 1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8... sums to 2) or it can be expanding for ever (for example the series 1+2+3+4...) We cannot really grasp such concepts as the Absolute or infinity, but we can construct logical mathematical proofs which give them some meaning.

Logic and rationality require that you believe either 'p' or 'not-p'. The human mind is full of dichotomies. But there might be a sphere beyond the limit of rationality where these dichotomies and contradictions could be reconciled. That is what has been named as the Absolute which figures in religious, artistic and poetic experience. The word for reason in Arabic is derived from the practice of tying a camel's knees to restrict it. In German *Begriffen* (concept) also means to capture or grasp. Religious experience (and the Absolute) may be free of these limitations.

#### **Defining Belief**

David Burridge talked about the concept of belief:

A belief has an axiomatic function, shaping all other thoughts, whether they are determined through sensed experience or by the outcomes of reasoning. Minds may carry more than one set of beliefs so there will be a varying degree of fixity, ranging from extreme adherence to a transient notion.

Beliefs are important to human thinking because they provide both a direction for our mental energy (what Hume called passion), and a stimulant for that energy. This can function in the interest of the progress of knowledge, but in extreme cases can have the opposite effect and shut down objective thinking or limit perceptions. There is probably a hierarchy of beliefs in in human thinking, with the deepest being borne from pure intuition.'

David concluded that there are three categories of belief. The first he called *Omission*. When we need to act but don't have the full facts to hand, we go with our beliefs. It is a method used all the time in the business world. The second is *Commission*. We believe that there is a right course of action and proceed sometimes in the face of other people telling us we are wrong. The third is *Foundational*. This is a structure of belief sometimes called a faith. It is a social structure which binds us as individuals into groups and predetermines our judgements as individuals, for better or worse.

# The Wednesday

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## **Poetic** Reflections

Apeiron

AN ETERNAL SUBSTANCE POSITED BY ANAXIMANDER, BOUNDLESSY LARGE AND WITHOUT ANY DEFINITE CHARACTER: NEITHER HOT NOR COLD, NEITHER WET NOR DRY...

My existence is entrenched between hot and cold, wet and dry. Today I poke the brolly up, tomorrow I will sweat inside my coat. I've been structured to manage whatever makes me stumble So I stride in measured fashion, knowing one day soon, it will all be suffused.

### **SUFFUSION**

A perfect blend of everything with nothing The 'I' will become 'We', then the 'We' will become 'Other' and other just a pate in an endless smear on boundless bread Hot or cold, good or bad, existence will just end in an infinite melt. So I am just muddle of cognitions cohering into concepts, just for now.

David Burridge

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