

The *Wednesday*



Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

Freedom, Creativity and Enchantment

A loyal reader of *The Wednesday* commented on our last editorial on the possibility of re-enchantment, by asking how could we square enchantment with the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence?

My dear reader, and friend, is right. We have been going through a digital revolution for about half a century and the world now looks very different from the world that worried previous generations. The dis-enchantment then was connected to the industrial revolution and its aftermath. But the digital age is moving to almost all parts of the world with the speed of light. There are huge potentials and opportunities in this revolution for all nations but there is also a great fear of the unknown and the breakdown of the old norms, national boundaries, solid identities and shifting of loyalties. There is also the sense of impotence in the face of the autonomous, unlimited progress of technologies. This points to a strong sense of dis-enchantment. It points to a world leaving human individuals behind and the creating of a faceless power over them.

So, it is correct to make the connection between Artificial Intelligence and re-enchantment. Technology seems to me irreversible. But we could admit all this and then argue for an enchanted world in which human beings can be at home in the world, with a full dignity for themselves and nature, by concentrating on the values of freedom and creativity.

It is one thing to have machines, it is another thing to think and feel like machines, as in some reductionist theories of the mind, or in an education system that caters for the needs of the technological market and is short on producing all-round humans with a variety of potentials. The re-enchantment is to humanize the

machine and to build up the character of a creative human who will value freedom and self-overcoming – a human being who is not just a bit of data, a part that is absorbed in some system, but a free human being capable of dreaming of a better future.

But the obstacle to a better future is not the machine itself, although technology has its own logic, but the larger interests of the system itself (you may call it for now the capitalist system). It turns people into slaves and it deprives them of feeling and the spontaneous enjoyment of life. The fight against the latter is what makes some countries better, with better rules and laws than other countries. It is an ethical and political question besides being a scientific one.

The contradiction is that we live in an age that opens up for the first time unlimited opportunities globally, yet there is also the feeling that people have to enslave themselves to a grinding system that tears up the old ties, norms and ways of life. As Marx once wrote: ‘All fixed fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned.’

We could have argued the case for re-enchantment from the point of view of rationality. We could have said that reason drives us towards self-sufficiency and freedom. But then, we have to reply to the critique of reason and the disputed link between rationality and freedom. But starting from freedom and creativity is the correct way to argue for the philosophical basis of re-enchantment. Freedom is the highest human value and the source of creativity, not only on the individual, intellectual level, but also as a political and social program, locally and globally.

The Editor


$$\frac{1}{2} \text{ truth} + \frac{1}{2} \text{ truth} \neq \text{Truth}$$

Challenges To The Concept Of Truth

There are number of challenges to the concept of truth. Hume was skeptical about causality. Kant tried to reply to Hume's challenge. Post-Modern thinkers challenged absolute truth and they argued for relativism. The article below deals with these challenges to truth. It also discusses some of the famous theories of truth.

RANJINI GHOSH

Part 2

Truth is linked to our experience of the world. There are many concepts involved in making sense of our experience of the world, such as causality. This concept was taken for granted for a long time before the Scottish philosopher David Hume questioned its validity.

DAVID HUME AND SKEPTICISM

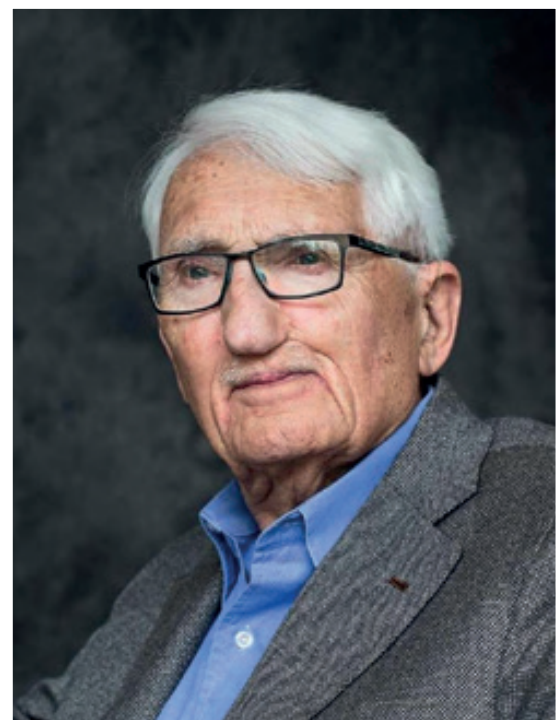
David Hume pointed out that there are only two kinds of truth, matters of fact and the truth of reason. A matter of fact has to be defended by an appeal to experience or experiment. A truth of reason has to be defended on grounds of mathematics or logic. If something cannot be defended or justified in either of these ways, then there is no ground for our continued belief in such a statement.

Hume says that all our knowledge begins with experience on the basis of which we form impressions and ideas. Hume in particular mentioned the principle of causality which says that everything that happens has a cause. Hume says when one billiard ball hits another one, the other one moves. We learn this only through experience and not reason. The first human being on the earth could not have known that fire burns and water drowns but only deduce it through experience. Knowledge of cause and effect is merely a matter of experience and not reason.

Hume says that in causation we merely see one event followed by another. We cannot actually see that the one caused the other. We only infer causation and this inference comes



Kant



Habermas

from experience and not reasoning.

RESOLUTION OF SKEPTICISM

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant was woken from his dogmatic slumber on reading Hume. Kant said that we set up the world according to certain *a priori* rules. The human mind imposes certain categories on our experience. The categories are time, space and causality which are presuppositions of knowledge. These presuppositions are neither empirical truths nor relations of ideas. These are a new kind of truth called *synthetic a priori*. They are true of the world we experience and like all necessary truths we know them prior to experience.

The categories of time, space and causality help us to make sense of the world around us. We understand time as a linear concept of succession, and we understand objects

as existing in three-dimensional space. All scientific laws like the laws of gravitation and of motion are all categories of understanding and we constitute them in order to understand our universe. If we do not impose the concept of time in our understanding, then we will not be able to understand the world around us. No experience is possible without these presuppositions of knowledge. These rules are constituted by us and so there cannot be any skepticism around this.

THEORIES OF TRUTH

Our initial conception of truth has been the idea that a statement is true only if it corresponds to facts which exist in the real world. This is known as the **correspondence theory of truth**. It is often important that we shift our focus from a statement being true to our reasons and justifications for accepting it as true. It becomes sometimes difficult to separate

the objective truth from a mere subjective opinion. The problem with philosophical truths is even more complex. The problem of whether God exists is a problem of insufficient evidence. One can say that one knows God exists in that it may be a belief which may appear to be justified and true. But as Gettier has shown there are serious doubts about what can count as justifications. Some philosophers have argued that one has to accept the truth of God's existence prior to any evidence or arguments. Belief in God requires a leap of faith as Kierkegaard says.

The **coherence theory of truth** says that the notion of correspondence to facts cannot account for truths of mathematics or logic, and also fails in the case of ordinary factual truth. Most of the times we may only have evidence, arguments which fit in the overall framework of our belief. If we make a claim that the cat is on the mat then various claims which will fit in with this will be like I do have a cat, the cat is not on the porch, there is something on the mat etc. All these cohere with my belief that the cat is on the mat. All these statements add up to a coherent picture.

William James is the most famous proponent of the **pragmatic theory of truth**. This theory says that what matters is whether accepting a statement as true allows us to function better. What is the truth's cash value in experiential terms? For example, one scientific hypothesis may have the same amount of evidence in its favor as some other hypothesis, but it may encourage experimentation better. Therefore, it will be more pragmatic to accept such a hypothesis.

SUBJECTIVE TRUTH AND RELATIVISM

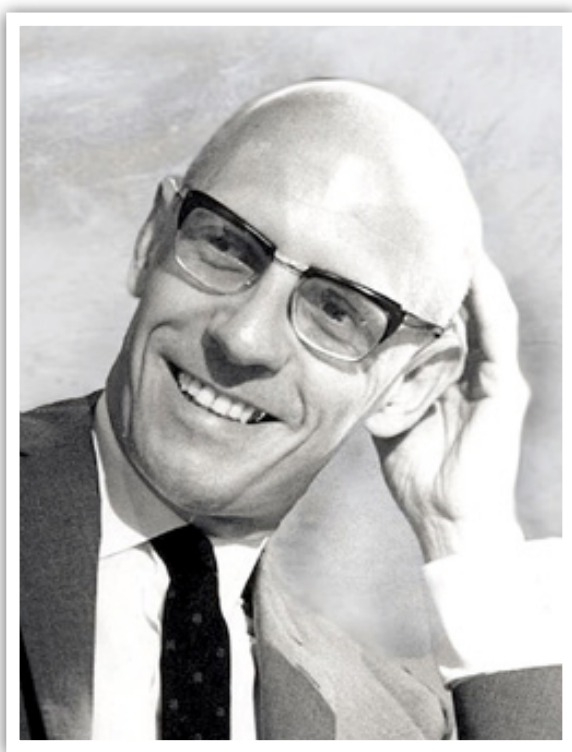
Some philosophers have said that the quest for objective truth is a futile quest. What is important is subjective truth or our own truth. The notion of subjective truth allows

for different truths for different people. The notion of relativism says that what is true for one person may not be true for another person.

Some thinkers have emphasized that we can move away from our obsession with objective and scientific truth to a different kind of truth. Nietzsche argued that art and beauty gave us a more profound kind of truth. The Danish philosopher Kierkegaard argued that there are more important truths which are personal truths. Because all of us are faced with objective uncertainty, we need to be concerned more with subjective truths rather than impersonal objective truths of the world. Nietzsche argued in an extreme fashion that there is no truth. There are no facts but only interpretations. What gives us the truth is our own perspective.

The French philosopher Michel Foucault has argued that truth is dependent on a particular time and place in the history of any society. Truth depends on a particular type of knowledge and discourse that is dominant or central to any society at any particular time in history. The dominant discourse of a society decides to present and formulate problems in terms of what is true and what is not. He believes that truth is not something outside power. Each society has its regime of truth or its general politics of truth. There are certain types of discourse which it accepts as true. He gives an example that it is the rise of capitalism that gave birth to a particular form of knowledge or truth about the benefits of a market economy which came to be known as the famous school of classical economics.

Foucault says that there is a battle for truth according to which there are rules which decide what is true and what is false. For him truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution and operation of statements. Truth is linked to systems of power which produce



Foucault

and sustain it. In other words, there is a regime of truth. Knowledge is essentially a matter of power and it works to the advantage of those who are in power.

In Plato's *Republic* Thrasymachus said that justice is nothing but what serves the interests of the strong. Foucault says likewise that truth is what the powerful declare it to be. He says that to know the truth or knowledge we must see where it is manufactured and for this we should look not to philosophers but to politicians because we need to understand the relations of power and struggle.

The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas argued that truth and knowledge are relative to discourse but unlike Foucault he does not believe that such discourse is imposed upon us but it is something we do. This discourse is about concrete conversations and debates that we engage in. His idea of conversation and discourse is similar to the Greek idea of dialectics. It is through discourse and conversation that better argument prevails and one can arrive at truth and knowledge.



Quine

The American philosopher W. V. O. Quine argued against a conception of truth relating to facts. He emphasizes truth as it emerges from the use of language. He said that one cannot determine on the basis of empirical evidence what a speaker is referring to. He says that if someone points in the direction of a rabbit, he may be meaning the availability of meat from the rabbit or something else about the rabbit. It can have any number of meanings in terms of what he is referring to. Therefore, what is important is how we put the facts together and this is a matter which cannot be settled by the facts themselves.

Different theories can be given for any given set of facts. We can defend any particular theory depending on how we can use our language intelligently. But this does not mean that we should give up our quest for truth and knowledge. In his famous article 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', Quine argued that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body. This is known as holism.

Bachelard and the Imagination

Notes of Wednesday Meeting Held on 24th July 2019

PAUL COCKBURN and RAHIM HASSAN

The discussion in our latest meeting was led by David Clough. We discussed the work of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1884-1962). A fairly new book on him entitled *Gaston Bachelard: A Philosophy of the Surreal* by Zbigniew Kotowicz (2016), and this formed the basis for much of our discussion.

Bachelard initially specialized in the history and philosophy of science and wrote a number of books on this subject in the 1930s. His views were picked up later on by philosophers of science, such as Thomas Kuhn, who wrote on the structure of scientific revolutions in the 1960s. But his direct influence was on the French philosophers of the sixties and seventies, such as Foucault. Bachelard talks of 'epistemological obstacles.' However, Bachelard did not believe there was 'simple' progress in science. Although new scientific theories incorporate old theories in new paradigms, there are often large discontinuities. Bachelard thinks that Einstein's theory of relativity illustrates this well.

One of his main theses in *The New Scientific Mind* was that modern sciences had replaced the classical ontology of the substance with an 'ontology of relations'. This idea is closely linked to process philosophy and perhaps, the ontology of events.

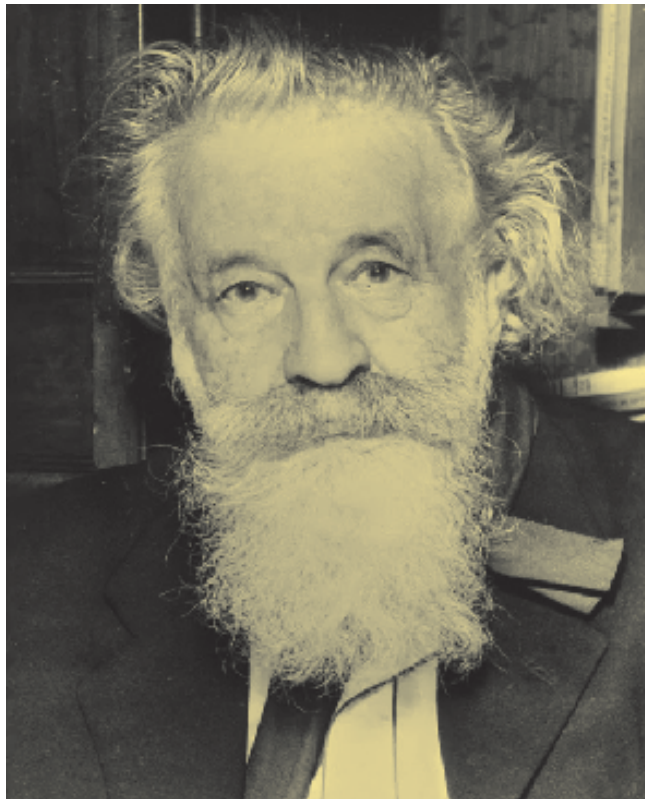
6

Our discussion skirted Bachelard's philosophy of science to concentrate on his fairly late works on the imagination and the poetic. Imagination is for him the key to scientific endeavour, it is the start of the scientific process. It would be a fallacy to say that science is just experimentation. Rather, it is through reverie, focused dreaming on a particular object or problem, which gives us scientific theories which can then be tested. Perhaps, that is why he was interested in the notion of Nothingness in

Buddhist thought, the abyss and the unfilled spaces, atomism and voids in Greek philosophy. It is these concepts that refer to a pre-conceptual activity that gives birth to science, philosophy and poetry. More recently Latour, Serres and Stenger have criticised the large gap between concept and image and the rejection of everyday knowledge implied by his 'surrealistic' approach. What they want is a new deal with nature which is less radically ruptured.

In 1938 he suddenly produced a book entitled *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* and subsequently he wrote mostly about the imagination, particularly the poetic imagination, and also the philosophy of art and aesthetics. A radical change! Bachelard writes, 'one can study only what one has first dreamed about. Science is formed rather on a reverie than on an experiment, and it takes good many experiments to dispel the mists of a dream,' (Bachelard, *Psychoanalysis of Fire*, P.22). Bachelard, David said, is not fighting against science *per se*, but how science comes about. It would be a fallacy to say that science is just experimentation. Rather, it is through reverie, focused dreaming on a particular object, that allows one to imagine a possibility and move from that to a theory that is experimented upon.

We discussed his most widely read book, *The Poetics of Space* published in 1958. This book deals with spaces, forms and images in phenomenological, psychological and psychoanalytic terms. A section of the book deals with the house as a home, dealing with basements, attics, stairs etc. 'Our soul is an abode' Bachelard writes. 'The house is a nest for dreaming, a shelter for imagining'. As children we find basements dark and scary, they represent our fearful primitive past. Bachelard links this to our unconscious, which is not civilized. He goes on to consider nests and



Bachelard

shells as homes, such images reveal a psychic state.

The 'new' is somehow surreal to the old. We choose our paradigms and frameworks to live by and understand the world, and it is difficult to move out of them. Francis Bacon's idea that science is radically opposed to common sense gets treated as surrealism in Kotowicz's account of Bachelard. But then, surrealism emphasises the imagination and the pre-conceptual. It also deals with space and time in a new sense, as we find them in Dale's work. Philosophy tends to deal with space and time in a formal way, as in Kant's philosophy but the philosophy of Bergson tried to bring them closer to human experience. Possibly, phenomenology did as well.

For Bachelard, poetry can communicate in a direct, almost magical, way. The rhythms of poetry can lead to an intensification which the recitation of facts cannot match. Poems are often associated with dreams or reverie, and Bachelard values these states of mind as 'open' and creative rather than treating them in a conflicted Freudian sense. He is a believer in the soul.

In a note circulated to the group by David Clough, he sums up the work of Bachelard: 'Born 1884 Bachelard died in 1962, just as key texts by Deleuze and Derrida are published in France. His best-known works are among his latest or last. *The Poetics of Space* is 1957 and *The Poetics of Reverie* 1960. Look at each room in the house its corners and tiny spaces. (George Perec's (1936-82) more literary work is probably slightly after this). The turn begins with *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, and the study of Lautreamont from 1940. *The Earth and Reveries of the Will* (1948). Also followed its companion *Earth and Reveries of Repose*. His books on the elements (air, fire and water) follow. *The Flame of the Candle* might remind one of Michelski on Nietzsche. But surely if Taylor likes him so much, there's some Hegel or Heidegger in the mix, and Kierkegaard and the eternal is the obvious clue in its title... *The Flame of Eternity*.'

Bachelard is an unusual philosopher in terms of leading us to consider artistic and scientific endeavours in a new way. His ideas appeal to a new generation of scientist and philosophers who are rebelling against all reductionist accounts and the exclusion of the imagination.

Soldier

1941: Naini Tal, India

Staff-quarters need no gardens,
they are pitched against lush hills
where tilted valleys strung with lakes
give sudden singing views
of the mauve and blue Himalayas.

Come to the window. Look -
a top floor is like an opera box.
Polished distance, loose with sun,
hurls glossy arias headlong
down blue lofty rhyming halls.

Afloat upon Imperial Pink,
we keep a cook, a gardener, bearer,
ayah, chokra, sweeper, and we wait
for letters, gummed with security,
to find him there between the lines.

1951: London, NW2

The MBE, King's Medal, Burma Star,
lie boxed. Their red-white-blue like new.
*"For God and Empire...our trusty
well-beloved...in recognition of...to have
hold and enjoy...the privileges thereunto..."*

Last night he rolled his cigarettes,
stoked the boiler, wound the clock,
polished up his shoes; and now
he is leaving for the tube, before the sky,
a dark lament, turns icy-blue.

Come to the window. Look -
between these shabby terraced lines.
Yes, there he goes, head down,
bent to the wind, never looking back,
attending the rhythm of his tread.

Erica Warburton

ayah: a native nurse or maidservant
chokra: a native boy employed as a domestic servant

Origin

And he lay, reassured,
but inside grew a desire
to find his origin in transit
as in a fast-flowing river
drifting without expectation
always into the new, right into the action
and all its entanglements and riddles,
forever growing and advancing
throughout the chaotic shadows.

He loved the wildness, this soundless tumble
and blurred gliding in and out the murky flicker
wherever his heart throbbed.

Did his own roots reach deeper into darkness,
or was his arrival already outlived?

Down to a mother's smile?

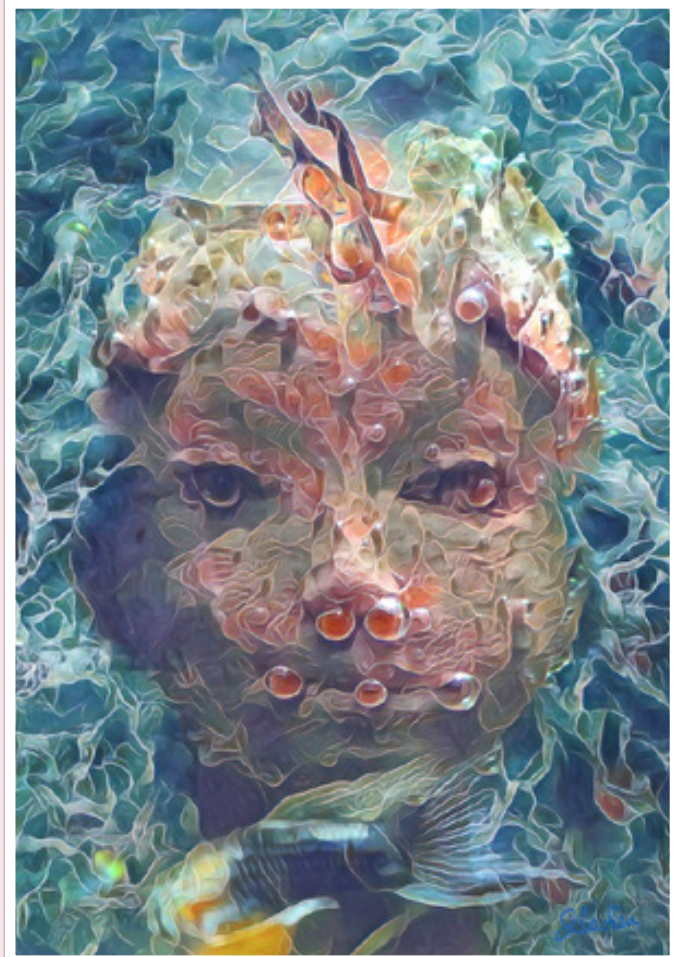
That was the first time.

Ursprung

Und er selbst lag, erleichtert,
doch im Innern war immer der Wunsch
seinen Ursprung zu finden, ohne Vorsicht,
wie in den Fluten eines schnell fließenden Flusses
sich furchtlos treiben zu lassen,
immer ins Neue, ins Schäumende,
von Verstrickungen umschlungen,
wachsend, immer weiter vorstoßend
in die sich jagenden Schatten.

Er liebte die Wildheit, dieses lautlose Stürzen
verschwommen im trüben Geflimmer
wo immer sein Herz schlug.

Wuchsen die eigenen Wurzeln weiter hinab
in das Dunkle,
wo sein Werden schon überlebt war?
Hinab bis zum Lächeln der Mutter?
Das war das erste.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

The Turing Test



CHRIS NORRIS

A computer would deserve to be called intelligent if it could deceive a human into believing that it was human.

I believe that at the end of the century the use of words and general educated opinion will have altered so much that one will be able to speak of machines thinking without expecting to be contradicted.

Alan Turing

Two ways this thing might go, this Turing Test.
Who's tested, who's the tester – how decide?
No algorithm shows the lead-role clear;
No help from *nous* if *techné* steals the show.

Not ours to know which party comes off best
When both take techno-savvy in their stride,
Both have (or are) the latest IT gear,
And both have hopped-up software on the go.

Seemed simple once: you questioned it and guessed,
Or figured out, if it was bona fide,
A living soul you were in touch with here,
Man or machine – human yourself, you'd know!

Six decades on and rate of change has messed
Things up: the computations multiplied
A zillion-fold, until it seems that we're
(Who 'we'?) just nodules in the data-flow.

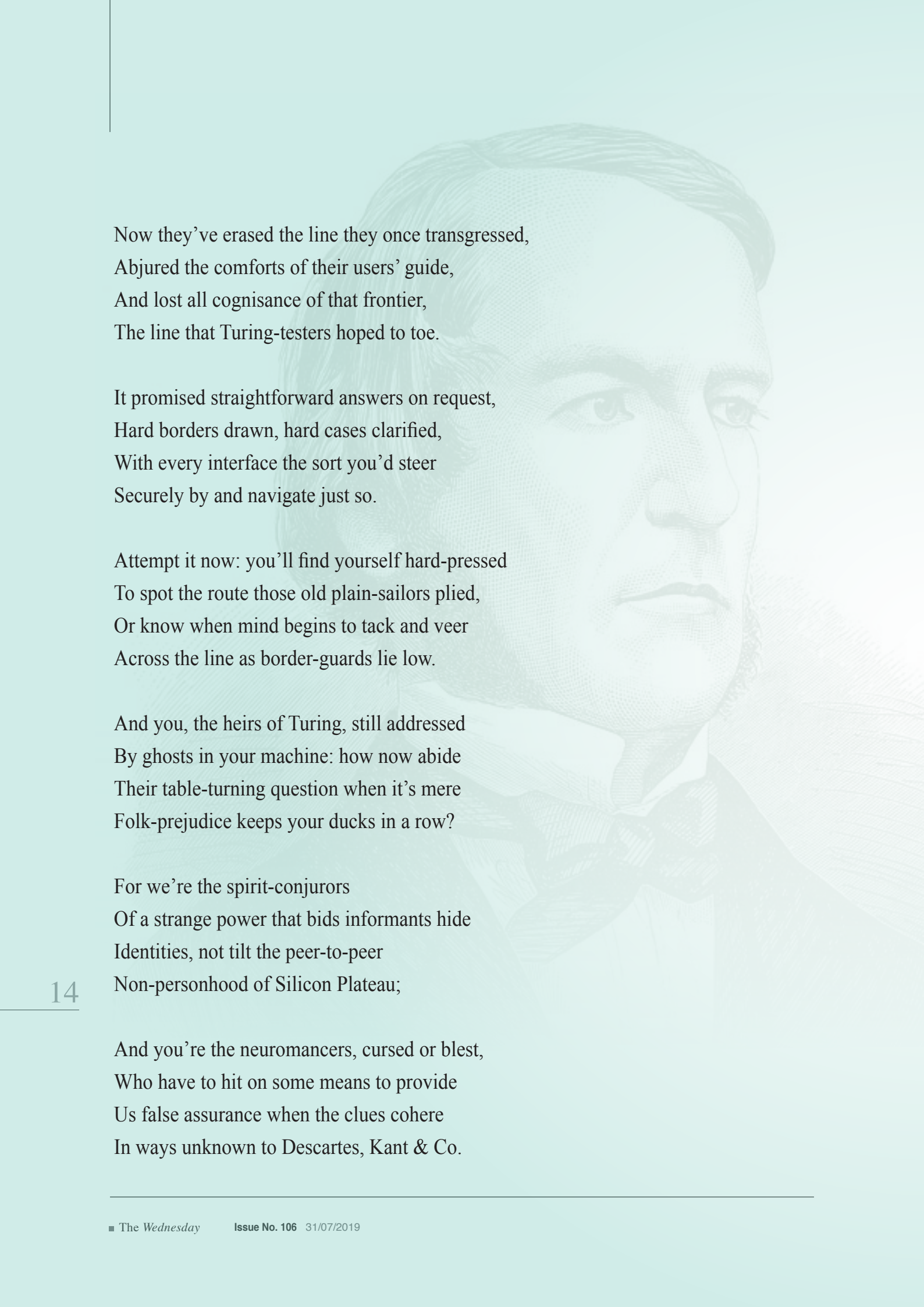
The humans, feeling threatened, may invest
More heavily in fixing the divide,
Yet see how rapidly the techno-sphere
Expands to level up the quid pro quo.

They pile on bit-rates just to keep abreast,
Make expert protocols a source of pride,
Heap laurels on the software engineer,
And stand amazed as his dominions grow.

No wonder if the upshot of their quest
For brains of silicon that override
Our carbon networks is to conjure fear
Of what might buck the IQ ratio.

For it's the *Übermensch* here manifest,
The future-shock they courted open-eyed,
The point where all their Faustian dreams appear
The promptings of some Boolean Mephisto.

Turing



Now they've erased the line they once transgressed,
Abjured the comforts of their users' guide,
And lost all cognisance of that frontier,
The line that Turing-testers hoped to toe.

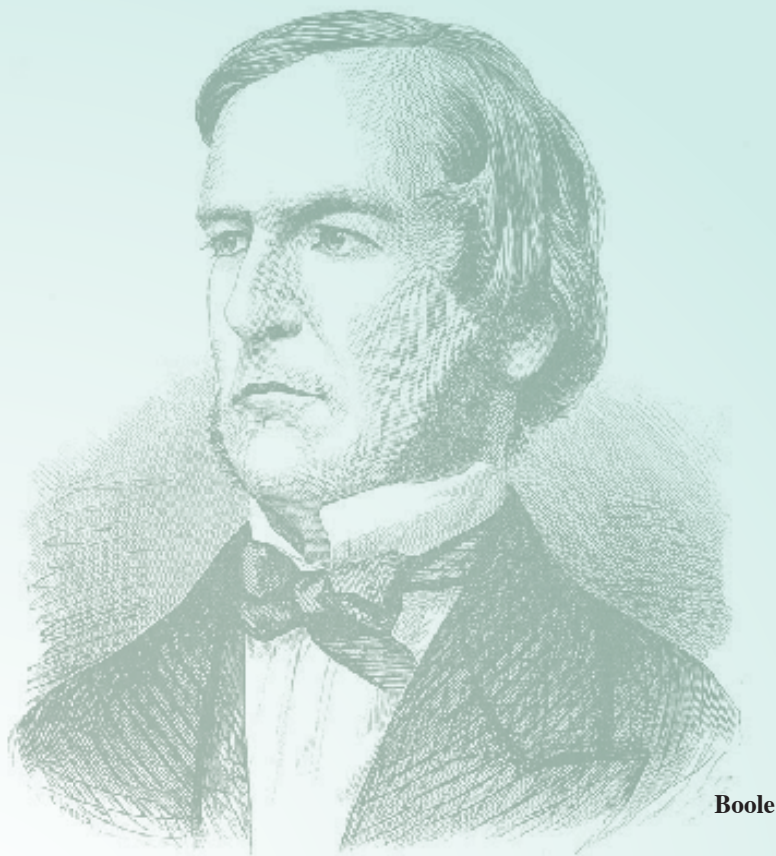
It promised straightforward answers on request,
Hard borders drawn, hard cases clarified,
With every interface the sort you'd steer
Securely by and navigate just so.

Attempt it now: you'll find yourself hard-pressed
To spot the route those old plain-sailors plied,
Or know when mind begins to tack and veer
Across the line as border-guards lie low.

And you, the heirs of Turing, still addressed
By ghosts in your machine: how now abide
Their table-turning question when it's mere
Folk-prejudice keeps your ducks in a row?

For we're the spirit-conjurors
Of a strange power that bids informants hide
Identities, not tilt the peer-to-peer
Non-personhood of Silicon Plateau;

And you're the neuromancers, cursed or blest,
Who have to hit on some means to provide
Us false assurance when the clues cohere
In ways unknown to Descartes, Kant & Co.



Boole

Too tough for hardline dualists to digest,
But true: it's now a question open wide
As to where 'human' ends and we draw near
The cyber-realm where physics may bestow

More sense of what the mystics once expressed,
That constant chafing at the cut-and-dried
Cartesian scheme of things that had mind jeer
At any debt to body it might owe.

It's this too quick, too soul-encumbered jest
That's now turned back by those who'd sooner side
With science even if it turns out queer,
Like giving old pan-psychism a throw.

That's why, as all our certitudes go west,
We're left with Turing's problem: how he tried,
And failed, to keep the two-way channels clear
Of cyborg cross-talk bouncing to and fro.

The Wednesday

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:

rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Copyright © Rahim Hassan

Website:

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:

The Wednesday Press, Oxford

Editorial Board

Barbara Vellacott

Paul Cockburn

**Correspondences & buying
The *Wednesday* books:**

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

*To obtain your copy of the
cumulative volumes: one, two,
three or four, please send a
signed cheque with your name
and address on the back
£15 for each volume
inside the UK*

*or £18 for readers
outside the UK:*

*Please make your cheque out to
'The Wednesday Magazine'*

or pay Online

Account Number:
24042417

Sorting Code:
09-01-29

The *Wednesday*

we are online now..visit us on:

www.thewednesdayoxford.com



weekly philosophy at your finger tips