

# The *Wednesday*

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Weekly Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

## Editorial

### *Philosophy: Art or Craft?*

Plato worked hard to mark out a special territory for philosophy with his long struggle against poetry. In the process, he seems to indicate what defines philosophy and that it is a craft rather than art. Craft has a logical ground and can be taught, while art is mysterious and gives no rational account of how it gets to the truth that it claims to have. Also, each craft has a subject matter, while poetry seems to deal with a wide range of topics the details of which the poets know little about. They make more claims to truths than they are qualified to do.

Logical rationality then is what distinguishes philosophy from the enchantment of poetry. One can see how the sciences came out of philosophy and not from poetry. Philosophy in its long history seems to have delivered results, not as philosophy but through the different branches of science it gave birth to.

Plato wasn't vain or narrow-minded. He turned to mythology when rationality showed its limitations and he used artistic creations for his philosophical writings, but these were discarded by his successors as time went on, up to the present time. Nowadays, philosophy is associated with logic, rationality and strict proofs. It is a sophisticated craft that is taught at university departments. Philosophy, one might say, if one lacks a comprehensive definition, is what philosophers do or students study at a philosophy department in a university. But what do they study? Is it the results (or truths) produced over the centuries? Are they empirical truths or speculative thoughts? Are they verifiable by reference to an independent reality or are they self-standing through coherence and logical deduction? Furthermore, if philosophy is a craft that produced all the other sciences, has it now, or will it in the near future, run out of material so that philosophy

exhausts itself? Will the pendulum swing in the opposite direction?

In modern philosophy, there are two views about philosophy. Hegel, in his early writings, thought philosophy couldn't be a craft, with the craftsman being busy improving on the skills he inherited. Perhaps this view stayed with him for the rest of his life. On the other hand, Schelling in his early but important work, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, thought that philosophy should rely on aesthetics and the aesthetic intuition. It is the property of the genius. Hegel did not accept such a view. For the rest of his career he fought against the idea of the genius. For him, everything should be brought into the light and clarity of conceptual thinking.

In our time, Heidegger seems to have moved between these two conceptions, especially after his lectures on Nietzsche and Holderlin. Poetry started to reoccupy him and did so for the rest of his life. The questions above are not just personal concerns but they surface every now and then in philosophical circles, especially when the idea of philosophy and the concept of truth itself become questionable. What are the truths that philosophy teaches as a craft and what is there to teach if there aren't any? Should philosophy turn to the arts after all? Some philosophers already write on films, theatre, dance and aesthetics generally. Will this be a proof that Plato was wrong in his exclusion of the arts and that his craft is actually an art? Will the imagination come to the centre of debate? We are planning to have a debate on the issue of philosophy and poetry in the next month or two, with the participation of philosophers and poets who are already within *The Wednesday* group. We hope to report on that in the near future.

*The Editor*

# Friedrich Nietzsche On Fate And History

Nietzsche's emancipation from his upbringing came in his eighteenth year when at Easter 1862, the time of his first communion, he suddenly realized that he no longer held to the faith in which he had been brought up. He broke free from 'the stifling atmosphere of "Naumburg piety"'. This emancipation gave rise to a remarkable document in which much of his mature philosophy is startlingly adumbrated. As this document is not so well known as it should be, I give here a translation of it in full. It is called 'Fate and History' and is to be found on pages 431 - 437 of vol 1 part 2, of the *Kritische Ausgabe* of Colli and Montinari *Nachgelassene Aufzeichnungen Herbst 1858 - Herbst 1862*.

EDWARD GREENWOOD

### FATE AND HISTORY

#### Thoughts

Easter holidays 1862 F. W. Nietzsche

If with a disinterested gaze we could survey the Christian teaching and the history of the church, we would read insights contrary to the widely accepted view. However from our earliest days we are confined through habit and prejudice, through the impressions of childhood, so hemmed in against the uninstructed development of our spirit and the education of our temperament, that we believe we must see it disappear as soon as we choose a freer standpoint, from, from out of which we may be able to come across a judgment of religion free from our times and from party view.

Such an attempt is not the work of a few weeks, but of a lifetime.

For how can we destroy through the result of youthful discontent the authority of two millenia, the rule of the most intelligent men of all times? How can we set aside the deeply extended devotion and commitment of world history with the fantasies and immature ideas of youth?

It is certainly a presumption to will to solve

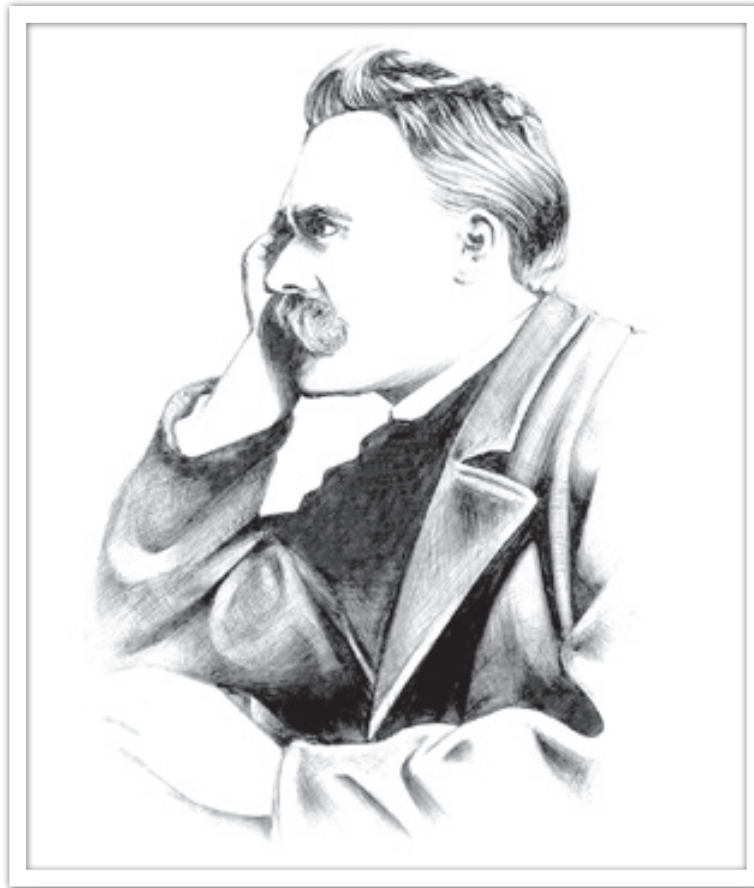
philosophical problems over which there has been a struggle of opinions for several thousand years, through which mankind became human following the belief of spiritually gifted men; to unite natural science with philosophy, without knowing the highest achievements of either; finally to set out a system concerned with realities based on a united science and history, when the unity of world history and the principal foundation have not been revealed to the human spirit.

To throw oneself into the sea of doubt without compass and captain is folly and destruction for undeveloped heads, most will be destroyed in the storm, only very few will discover new lands.

Out of the middle of a measureless ocean of ideas we often look back to firm land: how often have I been overwhelmed in fruitless speculation by the longing for history and science?

History and natural science, the wonderful powers from our past, the announcers of our future, are alone the secure foundation on which we can build the tower of our speculation.

How often philosophy hitherto has appeared a huge tower of Babel. To reach heaven is the



Nietzsche

aim of all great striving. the kingdom of heaven is called earth itself.

An endless confusion of thought in the people is the comfortless result. We stand before great upheavals when the mass first grasps that all Christianity is founded on mere assumptions - the existence of God, immortality, the authority of the Bible, inspiration and other things which will always remain problems. I strive to deny all; oh it is easy to tear down, but to build up! And to tear oneself apart seems easier than it is; we are so determined in our innermost being by the deeply rooted impressions of our childhood, the influence of our parents and upbringing, so that each deeply rooted prejudice cannot be torn away through reason or the power of the will. The power of habit, the need of the higher, the break with everything solid, the dissolving of every form of community, the doubt that humankind would not have been led by a mirage, the feeling of one's presumption and folly: all that contends in an undetermined contention, till in the end painful experiences, sad occurrences in our heart lead us back to the beliefs of childhood. To observe the impressions which such doubts

bring about in our mood must be a result of cultural history. Otherwise it is not conceivable that still something remains grasped, an outcome of that speculation which is never knowledge, but also can be a faith, something which stimulates or represses a moral feeling.

As customs are the outcome of a bias, a people or a direction of the spirit, so is morality the result of a universal human development. It is the sum of all truths for our world: it is possible that in all the endless world it means no more than the outcome of our spiritual direction, that out of the truth of several worlds a universal truth develops.

We hardly know if humanity itself is only a step, a period in the universal, if it isn't a willful appearance of God. Is humanity not perhaps a through the stages of evolution ... a plant, an animal? Is there an aim reached and isn't history also present in this? Has the eternal moved? Where are the motivating forces of the huge clock? They are hidden, but they themselves are in the universal clock which we call history. The clock face is the events. From hour to hour the pointer comes back, to begin

at midnight, a new period of the world breaks out.

And can we not view humanity immanent in each motivating force? So both insights would be combined. Or is there something higher and a plan in the whole? Is humankind a means or an end?

For us purpose, for us change, for us epochs and becoming are there. How can we build ideas out of the sources themselves? We can only see out of the sources themselves, humanity is constructed out of the impression of extensive ideas, how these achieve life and form, universal good, knowledge, a feeling of duty come into being. The drive to production works to renew itself in matter, how we shape life, rule history, how in eternal struggle with one another, how in this mixture new forms arise. A struggle and movements of diverse currents with ebb and flow, all to the eternal ocean.

All things move together in huge ever widening circles; humankind is one of the inner circles. If it will measure the external movements then it must abstract wider circles out of the encompassing. Next there are people, society and the history of humankind. The common centre of all movements, the investigation of the endless small circle is the task of natural science; now we know that humankind in and for itself seeks the centre which meaningful history and natural science must possess for us.

In so far as humankind is linked into the circles of world history, there arises the struggle of the single will with the universal will; here lies an endlessly important problem, the question of the relation of the individual to the people, the people to humanity, humanity to the world; here is the ground of the constitution of Fate and History.

The highest interpretation of human history is ungraspable by mankind; the great historian

is a prophet just as the great philosopher is; since both abstract from inner circles to outer. Fate is not assured in its direction; let us again cast a glance at human life in order to discover its justification in the individual and the collectivity.

What determines our happiness in life? Have we to thank the events from the whirlpool we were thrown out of for them? Or is it more that our temperament gives the colour to all events. Does not everything come to meet us in the mirror of our personality? And don't events give the grand tone to our future, in that the strength and weakness with which they meet us simply depends on our temperament? Emerson says that intelligent men question what our temperament does and does not decide.

Our temperament is nothing other than our mood on which the impressions of events have left their stamp. What is it that powerfully drives some souls down to mediocrity, to the customary, and makes it so hard to rise to higher ideas? A fatal inclination to regression, the rank and nature of our parents, the banal nature of their behavior, the commonplace nature of their environment, the monotony of their homeland itself? We are influenced without the power to act differently, without ourselves knowing we are influenced. It is a painful feeling to give up one's independence in being overwhelmed by outer impressions, the capacity of our soul being repressed by the power of custom, and the burying of all possibility of dissent within us.

On a higher level we find all this repeated in the folk history of a people. In the grip of the same events many people are influenced in the most diverse ways.

There is a common narrowness which wants to mould all humankind into stereotypes.

All social and communistic ideas suffer from





Naumburg

this error. For humankind is not uniform; in so far as it would be possible though a strong will to overturn the whole of past world history so far would we join the rank of independent Gods and world history would be a dream taken out of a self. The curtain falls and humankind finds itself like a child playing with the world that awakes with the morning glow and tears the fearful dream from its head.

Free will seems chainless, willful: it is the unbound and free, the sweeping, the spirit. Fate however is necessity because we cannot believe that world history is an errant dream, the inexpressible woes of human imagination, we ourselves the playthings of our fantasies. Fate is the unending strength of resistance against free will; free will without fate is likewise barely thinkable, a spirit without ground, without evil. For opposites alone create a quality. Fate preaches the basic idea 'Events are what determine events.' If this were the only basic

idea then humanity would be the plaything of darkly working forces, not responsible for its failings, in general free from moral autonomy, a necessary link in a chain. Happy when it never realises its situation, when it is never convulsed in the fetters which bind it, when it never with mad joy holds the world mechanism at fault.

Perhaps it is in a similar manner that spirit is only the tiniest substance, that good is only the subtlest development of evil, that free will nothing but the highest potency of fate. World history is then the history of matter if we take the meaning of that word in the widest sense. For there must be a higher principle from which all separate things come together in a grand unity, from which all development, all several stages arise, all is a huge ocean, where all the levers of development find themselves, unite, mingle, all one.

# A Comment on Nietzsche's *Fate and History*

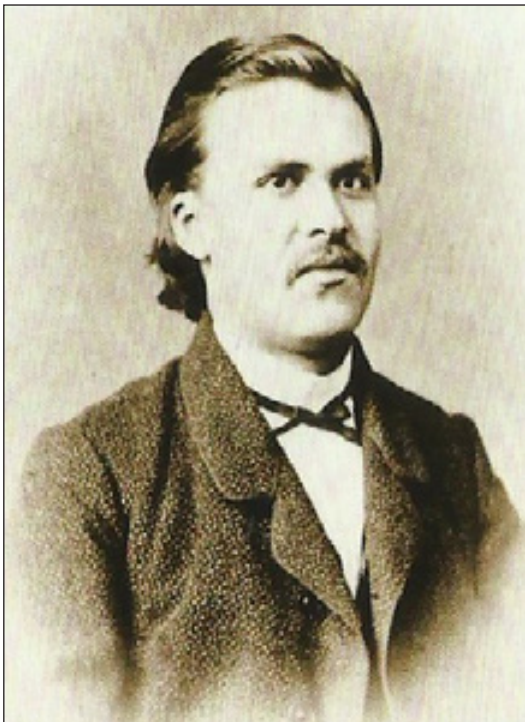
EDWARD GREENWOOD

This is surely a most remarkable document for an eighteen-year old. Not least because the foundations of his creative work over the next thirty-eight years of outstanding productivity are laid in it. Here are the central motifs of that work which I shall be exploring in more detail later:

- 1 The emphasis on truth and on the fact that self-deception and dishonesty have governed, do govern and will govern most of human life. Nietzsche recognized the psychological attractions of preferring falsehood, but never, unlike William James, or even Kant with his postulates for ethics of pure practical reason, sanctioned a will to believe on the grounds of boosting morale. The philosopher is concerned with the nature of truth and the furthering of those disciplines such as natural science and critical history which will help us acquire it. The primacy put on truth is essentially an Enlightenment virtue.

Children love make-believe. The essence of Enlightenment is, as Kant proclaimed so forcefully in his 'What Is Enlightenment?' the emancipation from childhood into thinking for oneself as a mature adult. It is 'to dare to know.' It began with Hobbes and Spinoza critically questioning the received authorship of the *Pentateuch* and continued with the critical examination of the provenance and authorship of the *Gospels* by Reimarus, Lessing and David Strauss.

Nietzsche rightly saw many aspects of Romanticism as arising from a reaction against the Enlightenment. Examples would be the Nazaries in Germany and the Pre-Raphaelites in England, or Wagner's *Parsifal* in Germany and the obscurantist Newman and the Oxford Movement in England. These are all bound up with Romantic nostalgia as is Proust's childish and regressive obsession with the pre-revolutionary aristocracy.



Nietzsche



Kant





**Cardinal Newman**

Though Nietzsche admired the energy of the Romantics, particularly that of Byron and Shelley and even tried to emulate it, he always tried to combine it with Enlightenment rationalism and truth telling. He remains an Enlightenment figure. It was hubris of him to suggest in *Ecce Homo* that human history should be divided into pre-Nietzsche and post-Nietzsche rather than into B.C. and A.D., but it would be no bad thing to divide history into pre-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment history, Thucydides could be regarded as a product of the Fifth century BC Athenian Enlightenment as Matthew Arnold suggested in his too little known essay 'On The Modern Element in Literature.'

- 2 Nietzsche was always to see the primary weapons of Enlightenment in natural science and a psychologically acute critical history, just as he does in 'History and Fate.'
- 3 Nietzsche sees any notion of an optimistic direction of the movement of history as a whole as envisaged by Hegel and Mill and what Herbert Butterfield called 'The Whig Theory of History' is false. He gives striking expression to this in his fine second of the *Untimely Meditations* 'On The Use and Abuse of History'. In this he is in curious agreement with Tolstoy in his story 'Lucerne' written a decade earlier, but there is no evidence that he read that early story.



**David Strauss**

- 4 'History and Fate' strikingly anticipates the Midnight Song in part three of *Als Sprach Zarathustra*:

'Oh mensch ,Gieb Acht,  
Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht?'

(O Man, take heed!,  
What does the deep night say?)

In its use of the clock metaphor for history, a metaphor in which each midnight is seen as the start of a new cyclical movement.

To round off my account of Nietzsche's awakening from what Joyce was to call 'the nightmare of history' (James Joyce always remained a renegade Roman Catholic in his sensibility just as his epigone Samuel Beckett always remained a renegade Protestant), I will quote a striking letter in praise of 'intellectual honesty', the 'intellectual conscience' he later praised in section 344 of book five of *The Gay Science*, the intellectual virtue Nietzsche always admired the most. The letter was written to his sister on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1865, three years later after the splendid 'History and Fate'. Elizabeth, whom Nietzsche nicknamed the Llama, was both the person closest to him and the one who least understood him. She misinterpreted him to further her own ambitions and under her influence many who worked in the Nietzsche archives which she controlled, and later others even after her death, were also misled into propagating a false image of him, which had a great influence in the dreadful



Wagner's Parsifal



Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche

Hitler period, when, quite unjustly, his reputation reached its lowest ebb. I translate it from pages 60 to 61 of the second volume of the *Staatliche Briefe*, the *Collected Letters* edited by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari and published by De Gruyter in October 1986.

'Dear Elizabeth,

After so sympathetic a letter overflowing with girlish poetry as I received from you, it would be unjust and ungrateful to let you wait for an answer, especially as I have available for use a rich quantity of material and I can only chew over with some embarrassment the spiritual joys that are my companions.

First of all, I must take issue with a part of your letter that is written with the somewhat pastoral colouring as from the Llama's heart. Don't be sad, dear Elizabeth. If the will is so good and decided, as you write, then the good uncles would not be so troubled. As to what touches your basic position, that truth is always on the side of the most difficult, I allow this to some degree. In this case is it not hard to grasp that 2+2 is not 4; is it for that reason true?

On the other side is it so hard, that all we are educated in, what all the time has become deeply rooted, what in the circle of good men is seen as the

truth, what moreover has comforted and elevated mankind, to simply swallow that, is that harder than in a struggle with custom, in the uncertainty of independent conduct, under the heavy faltering of mood, often comfortless, but always with the aim of the true, the beautiful the good, to tread new paths?

If it emerges that we want to achieve the intuition of God, world and reconciliation, by which we find ourselves most comfortable, is that not much more for the true researcher a matter simply of indifference? Do we seek in our researches peace, joy and happiness? No, only the truth even if it is shocking and hateful.

Still a last question. If from youth onwards we believed that all health of the soul flows from someone other than Jesus, is it not certain that we would have joined in following that someone? It is certain that faith points to nothing objective which lies behind faith. I only write this to you, dear Elizabeth, to take issue with the usual methods of proof of believers who call on their inner experiences and thus reveal the unwarranted nature of their faith. Each true faith is also unwarranted, it achieves what the believer hopes to find in it, he does not ask for the smallest link in the grounding of an objective truth.'



## On Authority

*Notes on the Wednesday Meeting Held on 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2020*

**CHRIS SEDDON**

**On Wednesday ten philosophers met in the basement of the Opera Cafe, Oxford, to discuss Authority. David Burridge had provided a short paper, building partly on Fromm's definition in *Fear of Freedom* that 'Authority refers to an interpersonal relation in which one person looks upon another as somebody superior to him.'**

Fromm distinguished between *rational* and *irrational* authority, based on whether the motivation to give authority is based on a realistic recognition of the competence of the other person, or simply through fear of them. In his paper David explored the natural inclination to seek submission to authority, particularly in humans as a social species balancing the wishes and competence of the individual and the group, which he called the 'I' and the 'We'. He criticised Rousseau's apparent assumption that the general will can be easily discovered, and argued for moderate liberal laws to limit self-serving elites and empower disadvantaged minorities, building on our responsibility to serve others to the best of our abilities.

Rather than read and argue for his own paper, David opened the floor at the outset to allow each of those present to share their perspectives on the topic. One contributor suggested that *authority* did not have a single meaning, illustrating this perspective with a contrast between ideas of authority derived from a parental model, in which the maternal aspect may have a more physical, nurturing feel, whereas the paternal aspect may have a more intellectual, didactic feel. David reflected that as a baby individuates themselves, they may experience the fear that freedom brings.

Another contributor noted the importance of rules in social authority - for example, we would not be comfortable at a speeding driver simply revoking the policeman's authority to levy a speeding fine. It was also suggested however that the policeman's authority had been granted by a wider social group, not by any individual driver, which is why only the wider social group can revoke it.

A different perspective was introduced with the



**David Burridge**

concept of *Aesthetic Politics* - the title of a book by F R Ankersmit critiquing traditional Western political philosophy based on ethics, as typified by Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, and instead considering it in terms of the 'aesthetic gap'. Just as representational art has a degree of autonomy to deviate from that which it represents, so a political representative has a degree of autonomy to deviate from the individual wishes of the electorate. This deviation is not determined by written law, but may be more influenced by historical cultural forces.

As well as traditional cultural forces, other contributors noted the impact of information technology. The authority of Art was also discussed. The power of political cartoons and the use of humble models for religious figures to influence political perspectives was contrasted with the political and religious structures that permitted great artists to work and prohibited certain artistic representations.

## Greek Music Fires The Heart

A dance with shadows  
twists and turns, rises and falls  
and is always acting in unison.  
It moves in ancient rhythms  
firing the heart and opens  
and closes like flowers.

.

All parts are rehearsed in a double act,  
but hush, do not try to separate flesh and spirit,  
they are one.

There is nothing to it, shadow dancing,  
just sunlight and skill on a whitewashed wall  
and love and passion written there  
in invisible ink by the Greek music  
with the lavouto, the tambouras, tzouras  
and baglamas, of course.



*Poem and Artwork by Scharlie Meeuws*



## End-Time



CHRIS NORRIS

The great majority of interpretations of Apocalypse assume that the End is pretty near. Consequently, the historical allegory is always having to be revised; time discredits it. And this is important. Apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited. This is part of its extraordinary resilience.

**Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending***

So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountain.

**Matthew 24:15-16**

They'd all troop up and then troop down again.

'Trust scripture, check the maths, end-times are nigh!'

Wrong call each time but now the truth stands plain.

Earthbound catastrophists alone stay sane

Since they're first off to raise the climate-cry,

Not just troop up and then troop down again.

**Frank Kermode**

Those old doom-sayers back up memory-lane  
Devised new end-dates that would soon pass by:  
Wrong call each time but now the truth stands plain.

‘Another climb-down’, the elect complain;  
‘Re-do the maths, give the I Ching a try.’  
They all troop up and then troop down again.

Their loss of face brings joy to the profane  
As dawn reveals no horsemen in the sky:  
Wrong call each time but now the truth stands plain.

Through deft recalculations they maintain  
The faith though unmet deadlines multiply:  
They all troop up and then troop down again.

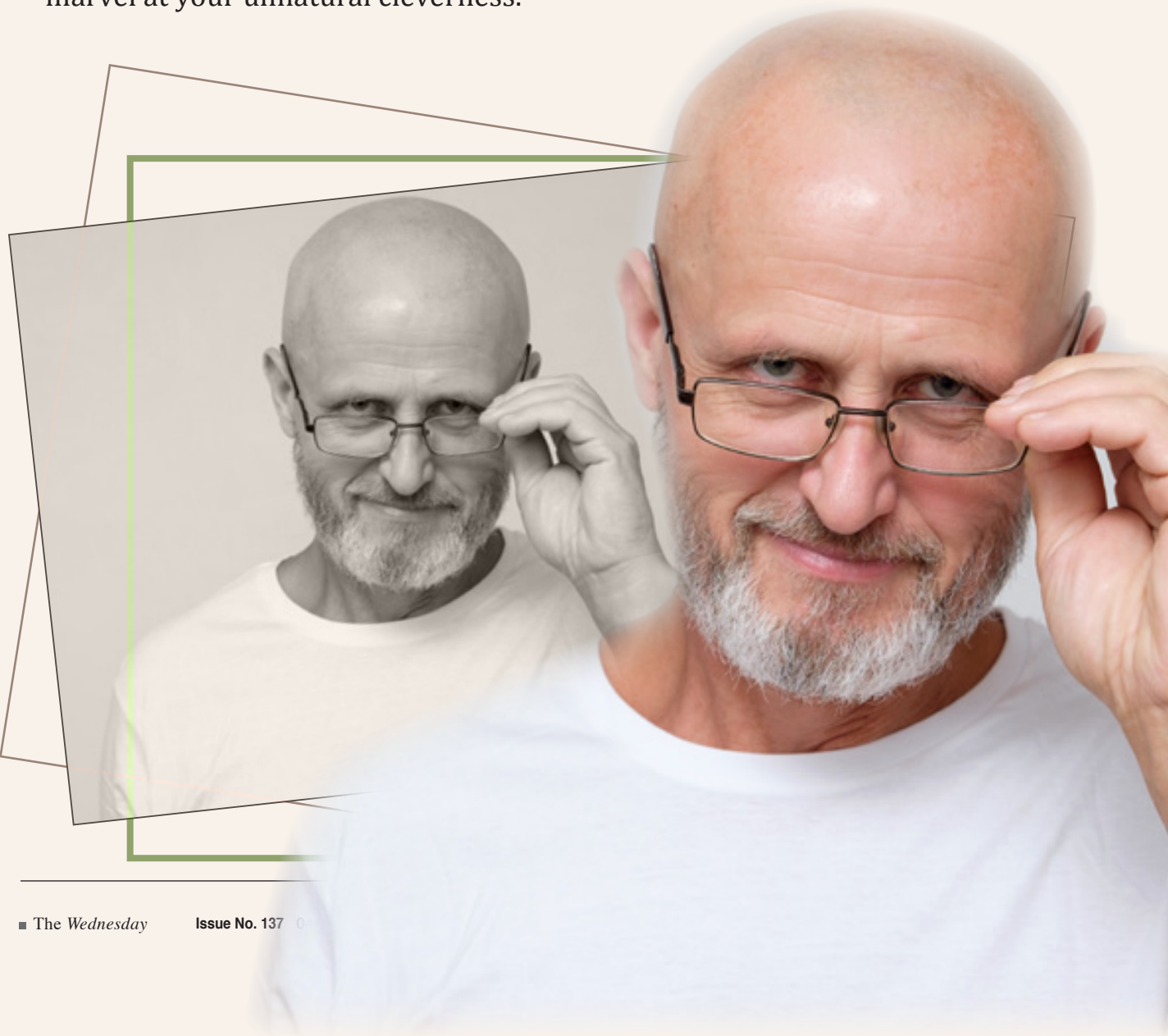
When drought, flood, forest-fire and hurricane  
Spell doom for real, what need to prophesy?  
Wrong call each time but now the truth stands plain.

They call down heavenly wrath yet call in vain:  
It’s we who’ve fixed the outcome, freeze or fry.  
They’d all troop up and then troop down again,  
Wrong call each time, but now the truth stands plain.

*As Handsome Did*

You always talked such tosh about  
your hair, trying to pass its slight  
performance off as an event,  
buffing up your baldness with a pair  
of monogrammed bristle brushes  
and defying me to find any grey.

Sometimes you even clamoured  
it was growing back, rejuvenated,  
so you said, and I'd have to  
marvel at your unnatural cleverness.





Sometimes the way you corkscrewed  
as you slept would set a wispy  
bit of down the wrong way round,  
and then you would lament you'd been  
too prodigal and grown too much.

And everytime the barber finished off  
your timid back and sides, you spouted  
endless desperate tosh just to get you  
through your pink-lobed afternoon.

But what about the private trim!  
In the full eye of your shaving light  
You'd slowly tilt your chin about -  
moustache, nose, eyebrows, ears, all  
synchronized with classical precision.

"What a dashing fellow!" you'd exclaim  
when you were done; and Mum,  
of course, would say you were  
as handsome as the Prince of Wales.

For years I've kept your brushes  
pressed together, hedge-hogged darkly  
in my dressing-table drawer. But still  
your stardom keeps on dodging past  
the breathing bristles, and your silver  
monogram keeps on showing off.

**Erica Warburton**

## *The Wednesday*

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