

The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

Nothing Lost

What happens when a school of thought, or a trend in art is no longer at the centre of attention, has it been lost? Such a question came up a few months ago when we debated literary and philosophical schools of Structuralism, post-Structuralism and Deconstruction. For decades, those trends dominated the academic scene and literary journals. But they no longer occupy such a position. This could also be said about other schools and topics, such as Marxist analysis, Modernism and post-Modernism. Similarly, we can give examples from art, from Classicism to Pop Art.

However, I wish to maintain that nothing is lost in the realm of ideas, philosophy, poetry and art. I suggest first an *a priori* proof. There is an obvious truth that all these ideas and art trends are expressions of the human soul and the endeavours of humanity over centuries. They represent a progressive movement that builds up to a future that takes in all that has ever been produced and creates new forms, moving towards a highest form. When thought reaches that absolute point, then nothing has been lost in the process. It is a movement building up to a perfection, even if that is still not realisable in the short term.

Each movement of thought and artistic trend carries within it the seeds of the movement that will supersede it. Dialectical thinkers call it '*Aufheben*', the preservation and sublation of the present state. This is precisely the meaning intended here. Movement of thought and art do not cancel each other out. They are preserved within the rising moment and they could be re-picked up by a later generation.

Secondly, there is an empirical argument that could be made. Human ideas and works of art are not lost. They - and endless interpretations of them over time - extend within the infinite space which is called

the human spirit. Not only the actual works but the endless interpretations of them over time. From some perspectives, the absolute is just this infinite space of interpretation. Furthermore, thoughts and ways of seeing find their way into human history and become a force within history. Academic philosophical debate is only a limited space compared to how much these ideas filter into the public sphere and energize it. Philosophical ideas move beyond professional circles and connect with wider society.

If there is a sense of loss, it is not the loss of a school of thought or art, but a mistaken view of their limits. Human thought and artistic styles are an incomplete apprehension of reality. Reality itself is infinite. Humans try to capture it through their intellectual power or artistic sensibility. But these attempts are incomplete. It is this incompleteness which allows room for taking a new or different point of view. But the human mind seems to take the partial as absolute. Take, for example, the attempts to explain history. Many ideas were suggested as movers of history, particularly economic factors. But this is obviously an incomplete view. However, it was taken to be absolute. In the process of working out what this view entails, there were many good works produced in philosophy, literature and art. These are not going to be forgotten or dismissed just because the general theory has been examined and found questionable.

In my view, nothing is lost as long as it has depth and originality. Most important are the insights and spirit that such ways of thinking and seeing bring, which are available for further development by later generations. History moves on and the human spirit does the same. What is created in the process, in the realm of ideas and art, will always be saved for future use and enjoyment.

The Editor

Personal Identity: A New Approach

I begin my account of personal identity by embracing Swinburne's thesis that many philosophers conflate, in a bad way, criteria of identity with the question of what it consists in. This is a key distinction but with regard to criteria one has to handle them carefully, for the temptation is always to look for counter-examples to a proposed criterion and to reject it if some are found. This, it seems to me, is primitive reasoning, for all that such counter-examples may indicate is that the criterion is complex of application.

LAURENCE PEDDLE

Let us start, for instance, with the bodily resemblance and behavioural similarity criterion. If an individual A is observed and later an individual B, we say that they are the same person if B resembles A, other things being equal. It is this latter clause that signifies complexity, for it may be, for instance, that A and B are identical twins, or that A has had a disfiguring accident but is nevertheless the same person as B, or that A is a baby with male sexual characteristics and B the adult woman that she becomes after gender reassignment surgery. Or, last but not least though very often overlooked, the effect of testimony may be felt, as with B resembling A, so that the identification is made, but followed by its being denied, perhaps by B or by some third party.

A particular virtue of this criterion is that it conforms to actual practice, though we shall presently have cause to re-assess it. A related criterion is more theoretical and was proposed by A.J. Ayer and others, who referred to it as the bodily continuity criterion. If, having met A, I keep him under constant surveillance for several hours, then basically there just is A in my field of view. An individual, B, will make an appearance only if I take my eyes off A, perhaps by blinking, so that one may now refer to B. Clearly, there is not much point, for A and B are the same individual.

That said, is there really such a thing as a bodily continuity criterion of personal identity? The problem, or one problem, stems from the use of the word "continuity", which is cognate with both 'continuous' and 'continual', these being in many cases difficult to distinguish if one's use of them is to be correct. That said, if I greet my partner in the morning, arranging to meet her at a certain time and place for lunch, and if it seems to me at the appointed time that there she is at the



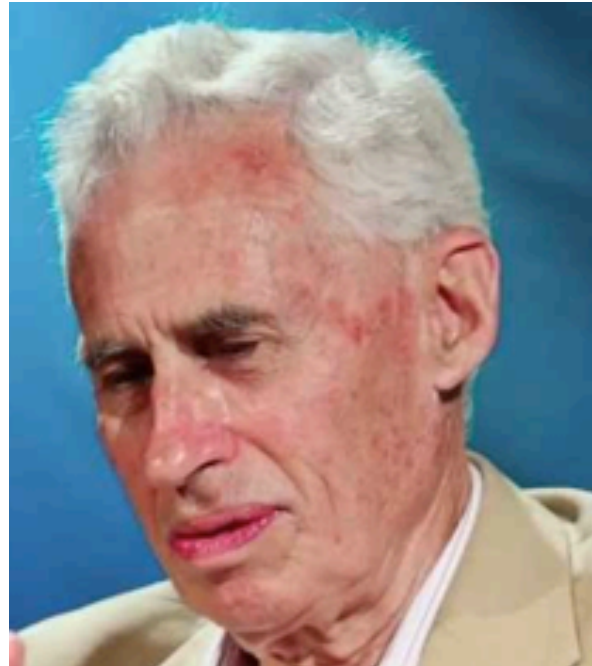
Laurence Peddle

restaurant table, with her familiar bright smile and all her other distinguishing features, then I have no direct observational experience of her body in the intervening hours. To this I give not the slightest consideration, for I recognise her, and in so doing I see that she recognises me. The explanation is either that bodily continuity is irrelevant or, both similar and different, that it is part of the epistemic furniture; which is to say, part of the framework of certainty by which uncertainty and doubt are supported.

If I make it seem as if nothing much rides on it, the reason is that the bodily continuity criterion



A. J. Ayer



Richard Swinburne

saddles the wrong horse. Its rider is not personal identity but that of solid physical objects persisting over time and surviving changes. What matters is that these objects include the bodies of individual human beings, this being the link with personal identity if we now establish it by going deeper into the analysis.

Since a quick way to attain depth is via the distinction between grammatical persons, I shall start by claiming that continuity and resemblance criteria come into their own when one's concern is to identify mainly but not exclusively other individual people. This is to be understood as obtaining within a system in which reasoning in general is in play, hence the complexity that, in my view, it would be difficult to over-emphasise. Given what such a difficulty implies, it follows that the criteria in question, in fact all the criteria of personal identity that involve observing mainly other people, suffer considerable shrinkage relative to the endless complexities of the interconnections by which the system is constituted.

What is also exposed is how distorted these criteria are, for the system or sub-system of physical object identification is one in which difference and change are on equal terms with similarity and resemblance. Thus, the child in a photo is the old man who shows

it to me; and the cap the child is wearing, preserved over all these decades, is the one that the man fetches from a cobwebbed trunk in a corner of the attic, where we are rummaging through the dusty cupboards of his past. The cap is faded and moth-eaten but recognisably the same, at least when conjoined with his telling me that it is the same and my believing him, just as I believe him about the photo.

How can I prove that the criteria in question pertain only to the link between body and personal identity? Quite easily, for what is implied is that they are separate, as will become evident when I now turn to the grammatical first-person. Suppose, but only briefly, that I wake up one morning and am shocked when I look in the mirror and see a stranger looking just as shocked as I am. This is inexplicable and very distressing, or it would be were it not for the stranger looking so much younger than I do or did. But not even in the slightest is it capable of casting doubt on my personal identity. On the contrary, it is because I know that it is myself looking at my new or transformed body that I appear to myself in my reflection to be so taken aback.

(Laurence Peddle gave a presentation on Personal Identity to The Wednesday meeting 8th December 2021)

Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During December 2021

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

Friendship from Aristotle to Nietzsche

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 1st December.

The Wednesday group is based on friendship and mutual respect. We were saddened two years ago by the death of our dear friend and member of the group Ray Ellison. We decided since then to mark the anniversary of his demise with a talk on friendship. It is an occasion to celebrate the idea of friendship amongst members of the group. It is in this spirit that we invited Edward Greenwood to give us a talk on friendship.

The core philosophical idea of friendship came from Aristotle. Aristotle's account of friendship is in books VIII and IX of *The Nicomachean Ethics*. He begins by mentioning the need for friendship in social life. 'Nobody would choose to live without friends.' Sometimes friendships are between those like each other, sometimes between those who differ from each other. Friendship must be reciprocal. Aristotle mentions three kinds of friendship. Friendship can be founded on the grounds of utility, pleasure or the joint pursuit of goodness. The latter is the noblest kind of friendship in his view.

For Aristotle, the friendship between father and son or husband and wife involve subordination. The best friendship is that between equals. He suggests that loving is more important in friendship than being loved, giving rather than receiving. He regards

'the thinking part' as most near 'the individual self'. Therefore, a friendship involving intellectual interests is the best type. He also noted that to some degree one must love oneself, by which Aristotle means one's best self. A friend is a kind of second self.

Edward then traced Aristotle's ideas in Shakespeare, particularly in *Hamlet*, in the ideas of Hobbes, the age of Enlightenment, and in the romantic movement. It is not only that Coleridge called his magazine *The Friend* but there was also the friendship between Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Finally, Edward finished with a section from Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* book 4 section 279, which is titled 'Star friendship':

'Star friendship, — We were friends and have become estranged. But that was right, and we do not want to hide and obscure it from ourselves as if we had to be ashamed of it. We are two ships, each of which has its own goal and course; we may cross and have a feast together, as we did — and then the good ships lay so quietly in one harbour and in one sun that it may have seemed that they had already completed their course and had the same goal. But then the almighty force of our projects drove us apart again, into different seas and sunny zones, and maybe we will never meet again — or maybe we will, but will not recognize each other: the different seas and suns have changed us! That we had to become estranged is the law above us; through it we should have come to have more respect for each other — and the thought of our former friendship should become more sacred! There is probably a tremendous invisible curve and stellar orbit in which our different ways and goals may be included as small stretch. Let us rise to this thought! But our life is too short and our vision too meagre for us to be more than friends in the sense of that sublime possibility. — Let us then believe in our star friendship even if we must be earth enemies.'



Raymond Ellison

Pruning Truth out of Justified True Belief

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 15th December.

The definition of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) has puzzled the philosophical community for a long time, perhaps since Plato. Peter Stibrany gave *The Wednesday* meeting an excellent presentation on the topic, calling for the removing of the condition of truth from this definition. He argued that this definition presupposes omniscience, i.e., the complete knowledge of an independent and transcendent entity called 'truth'. However, in his opinion, removing omniscience and adjusting the Justification criterion appropriately makes the definition philosophically coherent. In the amended version that he suggested, he is well placed to answer the challenge posed by Edmund Gettier (1963).

The JTB says that to know something (P), three conditions must hold: that P is true, that you believe P and that you have a justification for believing P to be the case. Peter objected to this definition from the start. According to Peter: 'the T in JTB looks like some species of category error.' Here lies what Peter calls an 'omniscience' error, that is to assume some independent judgment that P is true in advance of the other conditions. It is also circular. Without an omniscient narrator, there is no independent truth available; the matter turns out to be 'Justified Belief

all the way down'. According to Peter, an independent truth criterion makes no sense.

Peter gave an example. Imagine that you see a hat in a glass case in a shop. You are convinced it is blue. There is no problem with your eyesight or your colour vision. But the assistant working there tells you that it is a white hat illuminated by a blue light. On the classic definition, you can't say you know the hat's colour. However, your initial judgment was right: the hat is blue, and you have a justification for that. The shop assistant talked about the hat's colour under different circumstances, for example with a white instead of blue light. Peter said this suggests that there is a 'domain of application for justification'. When you judged the hat to be blue under the conditions at the time, you were right, but the shop assistant changed the situation and put you in a different domain of application. The disagreement about the colour with the shop assistant, for example, is one about different domains of application.

What Peter found problematic in this case is that the shop assistance is helping himself to an omniscient position, the claim that he knew the truth. But this, Peter said, is how 'epistemologists smuggle into their JTB examples an omniscient narrator to infallibly decide the Truth condition.' As he put the point: 'The Truth criterion implies omniscience, and therefore does not belong inside the definition of what it means to Know.'

Peter then dealt with Gettier problems and suggested some solutions. He found that these problems suffer from 'inadequate verification'. Some philosophers replying to Gettier suggested that our knowledge as JTB should include infallible justification. But Peter objected that such an approach brings back the problem of omniscience. He, instead, called for pruning truth out of the JTB formulation, keeping in mind the domain of application and replacing infallibility with competence to solve the Gettier type cases. Finally, Peter concluded with what he called the 'Competence Proposal' 'Competent Justification demands acting in the world, it demands testing and verification. And within the domain of this Justification, we asymptote to infallibility.' The talk generated a very interesting debate and Peter replied to all objections.



Peter Stibrany

Induction and the Sceptic Challenge

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 22nd December.

Laurence Peddle gave a second presentation to *The Wednesday* meeting this month. His first presentation was on 'Personal Identity', but the latest presentation was on 'Induction and its Problems'.

Laurence made a distinction between a narrow scepticism; scepticism about the past and the future and a general scepticism about all knowledge. Although he accepted the force of the sceptic argument, he found the position of the sceptic inconsistent.

David Hume raised doubts about induction because predictive statements go beyond the evidence, they are not logically entailed by it and have no other grounds; therefore, we have no reason to believe them. Take for example the belief that the sun will rise tomorrow. On the standard view, the sceptic is not denying that the sun has risen but that it will rise tomorrow. But we cannot infer the future from similar events in the past. However, our knowledge does not come only from inferences but also from testimony and a whole system of beliefs and shared understanding of the world and language.



Laurence Peddle

But what about statements made about the present? These are statements based on sense-data. Take for example a table in front of you. It is brown and rectangular. But the table may look different under a different light or a different position of the observer. Sense-data statements seem to be immune from scepticism because they are reports of an immediate experience and they don't go beyond that. However, understanding such statements requires the ability to distinguish the component of the statement, such as 'brown' from other colours and 'rectangle' from other shapes. So, the statement 'I am having a visual impression of a brown rectangle' is charged with meaning only in a wider context in which linguistic skills go beyond the present occasion of their use. But doubts may be raised about these linguistic skills. Thus the present is no more immune than the past and the future against the sceptic. Laurence put the point more technically, that the truth of a statement is not logically guaranteed by its referring directly to what is experienced. He concluded that the sceptic's arguments apply to all empirical knowledge, whether of past, present or future.

What the argument of the sceptic shows is that there is a gap between evidence and belief. Laurence seems to accept this. If you are sitting in a room, you can make statements about your direct experience but not about events outside the room. 'For instance, there is no evidence in this room for the sun having risen, and yet I believe that it has and that it will rise in the future'.

Laurence then turned towards language to find in it a defence against the sceptic. Philosophy is propositional, and the sceptic needs to put his case in a proposition, such as 'No inductive inference is valid'. But the understanding of this statement requires linguistic skills and memory that go beyond the present condition. If the sceptic is right about his statement, then he could not make it in the first place: 'We have seen, however, that he has no reason to believe anything about the past, thereby ruling out any knowledge of his own words, whether written, spoken or thought. The solution to the problem of induction is therefore that the sceptical thesis is self-refuting'.

Nietzsche and his Friends on Religion

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 29th December.

The nineteenth century saw the application of history to matters of philosophy and religion. Edward Greenwood gave *The Wednesday* meeting a presentation on the views of religion. They were the historian Jacob Burckhardt and the theologian Franz Overbeck. Both were friends and colleagues of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's views of history, philosophy and religion were also mentioned.

Edward started with some biographical notes on Nietzsche. Nietzsche was appointed professor of classical philology at the University of Basel in April 1869 at the young age of twenty-four on the strength of a recommendation by his teacher Ritschl in Leipzig. There, he met two distinguished scholars Jakob Burckhardt, famous for his book *The Civilization of The Renaissance in Italy*, and the theologian Franz Overbeck with both of whom he formed close friendships. Nietzsche kept in touch with both when he retired in 1877. It was his letter to Burckhardt June 5th 1889 that alarmed both. They thought he had become mad. Overbeck set off to Turin and took Nietzsche by train to the asylum in Jena.

Both Burckhardt and Overbeck were atheists. They applied critical history to the sources of Christianity. There were affinities between their criticism of Christianity and the writings of their mutual friend Nietzsche. For Burckhardt, 'religion rises from human nature's eternal and indestructible need'. Like Nietzsche he sees a pessimistic, life-denying element in Christianity, but he does not use the term nihilism as Nietzsche does.

Edward then turned to the historically orientated work in theology of Franz Overbeck. Burckhardt as a historian was interested in personalities and events, but Overbeck as a theologian was primarily concerned with ideas. In his book *On the Christianity of our Contemporary Theology*, Overbeck studied the various ways in which contemporary German theologians tried to bring religion into harmony with contemporary culture. In section two of the work, Overbeck divided contemporary theologians into the apologetic and the liberal. They vary as to how much of traditional Christianity they accepted and how much they abandoned. Even the apologetic theologians cannot escape the influence of David Strauss's *The*



Jacob Burckhardt

Life of Jesus of (1835). Applying historical method to the sources of Christianity, it was observed that many of the events recorded in the *Gospels* were the products of people who were not eyewitnesses but were writing for communities thirty years after the events. Edward added that: 'Moreover the allegorical interpretations so common in the medieval period were now discredited. Christianity as surveyed by history became a religion for the educated few, not for the many. Miracles raised difficulties for critical history'.

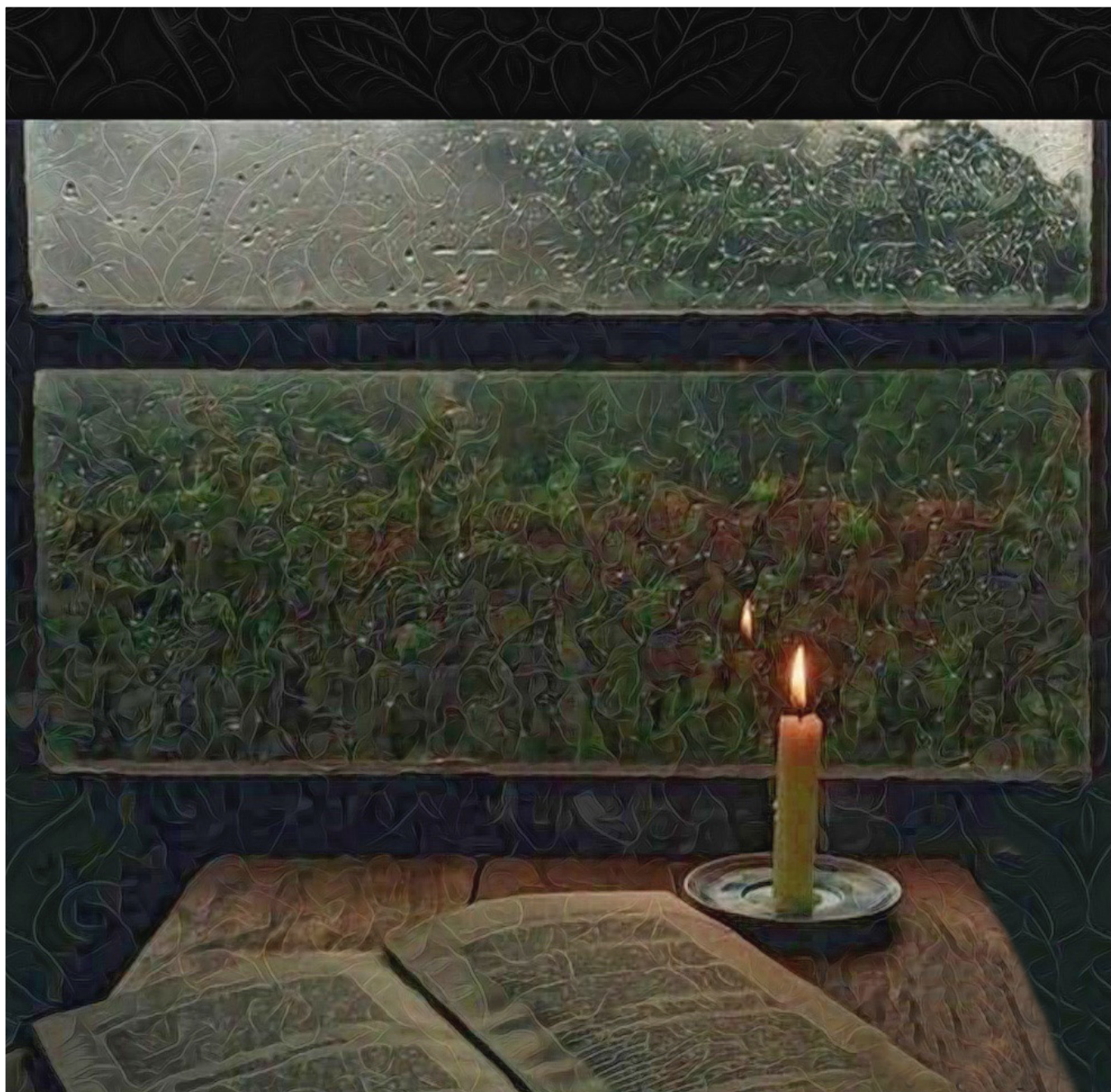
Edward went on to mention Andreas Urs Sommer's *The Spirit of History and The End Of Christianity: The Comradeship In Combat Of Friedrich Nietzsche And Franz Overbeck*. He said 'Sommer poses the question as to whether history has a meaning now. Christianity had given it a direction and a meaning in the past'. The three thinkers Burckhardt, Overbeck and Nietzsche, rejected the idea of progress. Edward said that 'Christianity gave that sense of a wider shared providential purpose.' Burckhardt and Overbeck were limited by their research of history. Nietzsche on the other hand tried to establish a new religion under the banner of Dionysus to replace the old one. 'Burckhardt watched the later developments of his philosophy with dismay, the calm Overbeck with more equanimity'. In his conclusion, Edward mentioned that 'the loss of faith brought great sorrow and pain to many people'.

Reading on a Rainy Evening

The hours went. Since I was sitting still,
I listened to the rain's uneven sounds,
as if it answered to the wind's remark.
My book was dark.
Its pages were like faces, those, in passing,
we've seen and lost, dissolved to thoughtfulness.
Around my book time slurred, accumulated
and words, now vague, in shadows, would express
the evening and dusk and nothingness.

I did not read on. Slowly, lines got broken
and words fell off, pearls from a silken thread,
rolled far away, wherever they must go,
I knew it then, when darkness further spread.
Above the words and thoughts about unspoken,
some blooming gardens heavenwards would grow.
Sun showed itself for one more time before
all separated things met one another fast
like blacked-out people on a lonely shore.
And strangely so, as if it was important,
a last harsh sound of a shut-closing door.

When I put down my book, it seemed to me
I knew all things around me, as inside,
without a border, nothing in between
but limitless, such understanding seen
as unison in one and everything.
Earth grew
and covered the whole sky with stars,
and I, among them, lifted off and flew.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Bloomsday: Divagations



CHRIS NORRIS

She put the comether on him, sweet and twenty six. The greyeyed goddess who bends over the boy Adonis, as prologue to the swelling act, is a boldfaced Stratford lass who tumbles in a cornfield a lover younger than herself.

And my turn? When?

Come!

**Stephen Dedalus
in James Joyce's *Ulysses***

A hundred and two years have gone by since that Thursday of June 16, 1904, when 'the man in the macintosh' appeared at Paddy Dignam's funeral, and despite persistent investigations and guesswork his 'name' and 'identity' still remain a mystery.

Jina Politi, 'Who Was the Man in the Macintosh?'



James Joyce

1

Who's come to make us up to death's thirteen?
Who's come to make
 of this poor dust-to-dust
A mystery-tale for Paddy Dignam's wake?

See how it flaps in every passing gust!
See how it flaps,
 that coat, as if to shake
The Dublin dust off all our mental maps.

A minor scene, few living hearts to break.
A minor scene
 yet set to lift the wraps
On sites from Kiernan's pub to Stephen's Green.

Cross paths we must at certain space-time gaps.
Cross paths we must
 at intervals to glean
What occult quest subtends my Wanderlust.

'Message opaque: press on!' is what they mean.
'Message opaque',
 so I'd much better trust
His turnings-up will show which route to take.

The hours elapse, the chronotopes adjust.
The hours elapse
 as our excursions snake
Their way around those lotus-eater traps.

It's in between that chance asserts its stake.
It's in between
 those glimpses that perhaps
Some stroke of destiny may intervene.

So long discussed amongst those scholar-chaps!
So long discussed
 yet still the myth-machine
Spins stories, never stops to gather rust.

2

From street to street he must have tacked and veered!
From street to street,
Hades to Night-Town, through
Dread Circe's precinct and the Sirens' beat.

Odysseus or some dope-head in his crew?
Odysseus or
the Poldy Bloom they treat
With gentle scorn: his Molly knows the score!

What was it steered us kindred souls to meet?
What was it steered
myself, the wandering Jew,
And him if not the ground beneath our feet?

Just tell me: who landmarked my out-of-door?
Just tell me: who
so nearly disappeared
From memory till that raincoat came in view.

A wife to greet as one more *nostos* neared.
A wife to greet,
though faces showed they knew:
A late homecoming to keep Molly sweet.

All mythic lore when that boy's had a few.
All mythic lore
and Shakespeare – the complete
Works in his head, eternal sophomore!

Behaviour weird, stuffed full of self-conceit.
Behaviour weird
yet we get on, us two,
Him the high-flyer, me to tweak his beard.

The name's a clue (what else could it be for?).
The name's a clue,
leaves Dedalus afeared
Of what self-harm his clever brain might do.

3

I knew his dad, poor Simon, decent man.
I knew his dad
would thank me to take care
Betimes of his hell-bent, precocious lad.

It works both ways for us, unlikely pair!
It works both ways
since he, star undergrad,
Has scholarship to help me through this maze.

His part: to scan the magic writing pad.
His part: to scan,
decipher, paraphrase
The text that keeps my daily route to plan.

At times I'd swear it's his own plan he lays.
At times I'd swear
that's how it all began,
Bloomsday fine-detailed in his college chair.

Each day he'd add new members to the clan!
Each day he'd add
some mythic name to bear
The coat of arms in which my life was clad.

My works and days have meanings to declare.
My works and days
gain shape they never had
As he strikes up in his Homeric phase.

Sometimes I can persuade myself he's mad;
Sometimes I can
believe his talk conveys
Mythemes enough to gird my daily span.

And Mac-Man's there; at vision's fringe he stays.
And Mac-Man's there,
no soul-guide surer than
That psychopomp in his wet-weather-wear.

4

He haunts me yet, though Dignam's six months dead.
He haunts me yet,
 not Paddy's ghost (no fear!)
But him: same outfit every time we met.

'Just change your specs', young Daedalus would jeer.
'Just change your specs
 And, if he's still there, get
Your shrink to run some psychiatric checks'.

'Take thought', he said: 'you've cause enough to fret'.
'Take thought', he said;
 'much better lend an ear
When tattlers tell what Molly does in bed'.

Mac-Man, draw near: here's consciences to vex!
Mac-Man, draw near:
 here's gossips to beset
With your mute glances, message crystal-clear.

A false vignette those gossip-mongers spread!
A false vignette
 that has brute Boylan smear
My Molly's name to win some bar-room bet!

There's more to sex than fills the tattle-sphere.
There's more to sex
 Than Aeolus would let
Peep out above the *Freeman's* lower decks.

Would we could shed that Dublin etiquette!
Would we could shed
 that constant prayer-turned-sneer
That makes such pap of all our daily bread.

What if he's here to help, not haunt or hex?
What if he's here
 to aid against the threat
Of lives-gone-wrong this side of death's frontier?

5

At times I think we're following a script.
At times I think
 we're ciphers in some great
Compendious text where all things interlink.

That's just the kind of stuff he loves to prate!
That's just the kind
 of stuff a bit of drink
Has Dedalus spouting when he's thus inclined.

Clues to decrypt through every textual chink!
Clues to decrypt
 with some that bring to mind,
Like Hamlet, home-truths better kept tight-lipped.

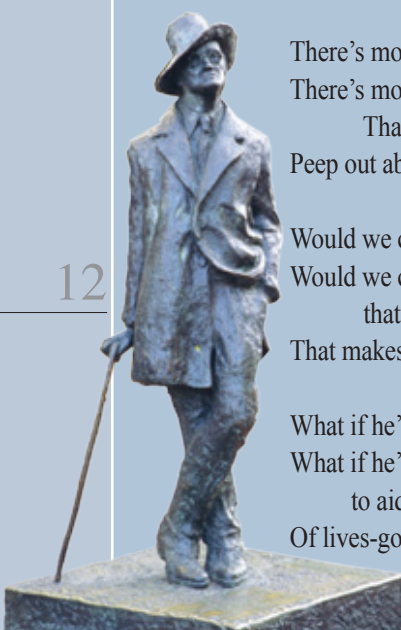
Take nothing straight, leave plain intent behind.
Take nothing straight;
 that's how young Dedalus slipped
The scholar's leash and took the poet's bait.

'He's on the brink, like Simon, lid half-flipped;
He's on the brink',
 they say, but let's just wait:
I bet he'll top the bill and dodge the shrink.

All intertwined, they think; a savant's fate
All intertwined
 with that familial kink
That marked them, father-son, twin dooms assigned.

They've Stephen tipped a star, but then they wink.
They've Stephen tipped
 for great things but then wind
The film back and there's Simon asset-stripped.

No genius trait but with high risks combined.
No genius trait
 but has us watchers gripped
By fears lest ill chance fix an early date.



James Joyce

6

Odd, but I've got this sense it's my name-day.
Odd, but I've got
 this feeling I'm the one
In whom today those loose ends form a plot.

Their view of me? Fair game for gentle fun.
Their view of me?
 a harmless chap but not
First choice for wild or witty company.

Scoff as they may, my X's mark the spot.
Scoff as they may,
 my cross-town route's the key
To every main event along the way.

One long home run, this poor man's *Odyssey*.
One long home run
 with pretexts for delay
That let me stretch it out till Molly's done.

He killed the lot, those suitors at their play.
He killed the lot,
 hacked breastplates by the ton,
Dispatched the grooms, and left them all to rot.

I let him be, that wild son of a gun.
I let him be,
 that Blazes Boylan, hot
For Molly, she for him – no killing spree!

For who's to say they'll break our marriage-knot?
For who's to say
 this isn't just what we
Two need to keep our demon-thoughts at bay?

Our little son, our Rudy – still I see
Our little son
 who died so soon and pray
That by their sin some good might yet be won.

7

Yet it's in my own skull their worlds perdure!
Yet it's in my
 sensorium they all
Cross paths, strike deals, fall out, or just walk by

As if they show themselves just when I call;
As if they show
 up instantly when I
Walk their way and remark some face I know.

The sirens' lure distracts me on the sly.
The sirens' lure
 says 'forget Molly: go
To Bella Cohen's whore-house for your cure'.

My mirror-hall reflects no scene so low.
My mirror-hall
 has angles that ensure
No entrance there however low I crawl.

It's MacMan's eye directs the wayward viewer!
It's MacMan's eye
 keeps watch lest I should fall
For Bella's wiles, give lust another try.

Ask what I owe to Dedalus and I'll stall.
Ask what I owe
 to him and I'll reply
'Whatever mind's cracked landscape might bestow'.

No quadrature of Dublin forecast dry!
No quadrature
 but some rain-blessed tableau
Reveals him there, the drifter's cynosure.

My life in small, its star-sign caught just so.
My life in small,
 its private griefs no fewer
But closer wrapped against each coming squall.

‘PANSPERMIA’

– mixed media on canvas (2015)



The Nativity Crib

Panspermia Theory and The Origin of Life

Dr ALAN **XUEREB**

The Ancient Greeks had three principal Delphic aphorisms. The one concerning us today is ‘know thyself’. We are better off when we know ourselves. When we know our origins, our identity. What makes us tick! This does not mean that all those who do not know their origins, their identity or what makes them tick are somehow less worthy. It simply means that those who know their origins may have the support and comfort of tradition. Those who know their identity may accept their true selves. Those who know what makes them tick may more easily make a coherent plan of life. Here, I will reflect then on the idea of origins.

Imagine if we got it all wrong and life did not start here on Earth but somewhere else? Imagine

that this ‘life’ was carried all the way from its point of origin through the vastness of space and transplanted (by accident or otherwise) on this planet as primordial microorganisms, giving rise to the familiar Darwinian evolution. Imagine that the ‘primordial soup’ was in fact alien. What I have just described is called ‘panspermia’.

The panspermia theory mainly argues that life is originated in space, in spatial ice, and continuously distributed to the planets by comets and meteorites. The first known mention of the term was in the writings of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Anaxagoras. There were others who contributed to this idea, but ‘panspermia’ as a scientific theory is owed to the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius,

whose work won him the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1903.

The traditional position of theology and some philosophies view the origin of life as the result of a supernatural event which is permanently beyond the descriptive powers of chemistry and physics. In its most general form, this view is not necessarily contradictory to contemporary scientific knowledge about prebiotic evolution, although the biblical descriptions of creation given in the first two chapters of Genesis, taken literally and not metaphorically, are inconsistent with modern knowledge.

However, the implications, philosophical and others are many. If the planet we inhabit is not the one that gave birth to us, it might mean that somewhere else there may have evolved similar lifeforms to humans. If panspermia has been the original cause of humanity, it may also mean that life could have been intentionally seeded here. A bit like in the movie Prometheus to mention a science fiction classic. Another implication is that if panspermia worked the first-time round, could it work if humanity tries to seed life on some other planet, say Mars? Would that make us gods? In any case, if panspermia is possible the Greek maxim 'know thyself' takes on a whole new meaning.

One should not forget the other, prevalent, theory called abiogenesis, or informally that the origin of life is the natural process by which life has arisen from non-living matter, such as simple organic compounds. While the details of this process are still unknown, the prevailing scientific hypothesis is that the transition from non-living to living entities was not a single event, but an evolutionary process of increasing complexity that involved molecular self-replication, self-assembly, autocatalysis, and the emergence of cell membranes.

Indeed, many, like present-day panspermia advocate, astrobiologist Chandra Wickramasinghe, maintain that this sequence of events is 'superastronomically improbable', and thus the notion of panspermia is a far more parsimonious explanation for the origin of life. The two theories are not necessarily in contradiction to each other. Their point of conflict is normally on the 'where' and not on the 'how'.

All this complexity has been reduced to a mental image I had when producing this small relief. The work of art was one of my earliest attempts to create something three dimensional on a two-dimensional medium. It symbolises the origin of life whether one labels it panspermia or abiogenesis in reality. However, I thought that panspermia was a more extreme and a philosophically more challenging hypothesis, so I chose that title.

May you all have a Happy New Year full of philosophically challenging ideas!

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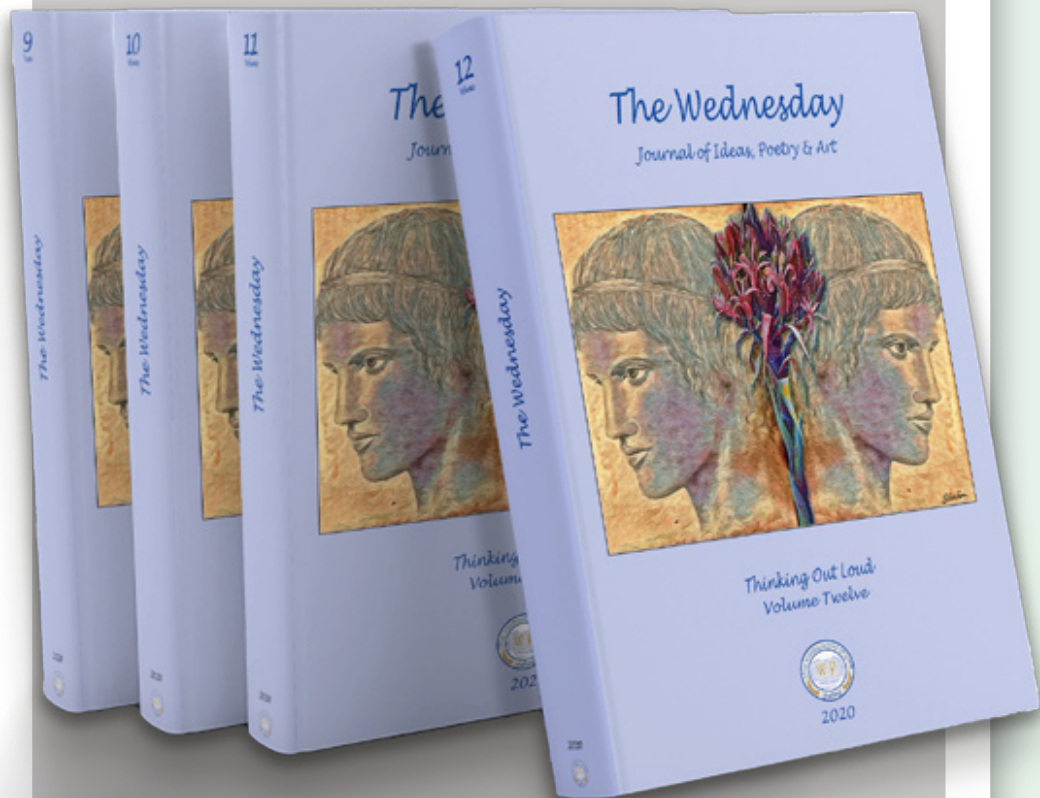
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