

The *Wednesday*

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Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford



Editorial

Rules of Engagement

I am delighted that *The Wednesday* has reached its seventh anniversary. This issue marks the occasion. It is a good opportunity to remind the readership that the magazine started out as a record of *The Wednesday* group weekly meetings, and was weekly for almost three years, before changing to a monthly publication. The cumulative books have reached fifteen so far, and hopefully will keep rising. During its seven years of publishing, it has not only made an impact on the general readership, but also achieved its purpose of integrating the group into a formidable intellectual force. It has brought solidarity and focus to members of the group. The quality of presentation has improved considerably, and the discussions are a pleasure to listen to and to participate in every week.

I am not going waste space by self-congratulation, so let me move to some serious points. The debate every week takes the form of philosophical discussion, although the aim of the group goes further than philosophy to express ideas in general, literature, poetry and art, as can be seen from reading the magazine. Through these discussions, I came to reflect on the nature of philosophy and philosophical discussion. I may not do justice to all the points I have in mind, but I will discuss one important observation. Any debate has the element of a power struggle, even when it is done between friendly members of a group, especially when the group members have disparate views, sometimes diametrically opposed. What is required in this case is a large measure of intellectual honesty, in presenting views of other philosophers and in interpreting these views in a way that does not do violence to them by distorting them through one's own assumptions, especially when one's own assumptions are narrower than those of the writer.. It was Nietzsche who was credited with the idea that each interpretation is an exercise of power and also with the idea of intellectual honesty. In addition to that, there is a need for the principle

of charity. The opposite view should be put in the best possible construction and faithfulness to the original, together with respect for differing views.

The other point I wish to make is that philosophy is a never-ending quest. It is a departure from the empirical, common everyday view towards a new and maybe uncharted land. Deleuze called such adventure 'de-territorialisation', and the resulting thought 'nomadic'. It is an unceasing movement. In the words of Schelling: 'He who wants to truly philosophise has to let go of all hope, all desire, all nostalgia; he must not want anything, not know anything; he must feel simple and poor, give up everything in order to gain everything. It is a difficult step, difficult to, as it were, depart from the last shore'. This puts the experience of philosophising into the bigger picture of spiritual quest in the deepest and most honest way. It is in this open spirit that a dialogue should be conducted, and not by repeating the same views and getting more entrenched in a particular spot or a land. Mary Midgley once gave the example of a person who lost his keys and started searching for them in a lighted spot, although he had lost them further on. When asked to go and look somewhere else, he said he preferred this spot because it has light.

If philosophy is nomadic, always on the move, it will be difficult to continue without the support of companions, and fellow travellers. This is what *The Wednesday* provides in its weekly meetings and its publications. May I take this opportunity to thank all members of the group and all readers for their loyalty and support. My special thanks are to my editorial team and my excellent designer. I am also eternally indebted to my writers, poets and artists who made the magazine such a success. Happy anniversary to them all.

The Editor

Derrida's Logos

In part 1, I have examined the first three chapters of Derrida's essay Plato's Pharmacy, in which Derrida makes the case that, contrary to long held opinions, Plato's Phaedrus is an extremely well designed and thought-out dialogue. He then turns to consider why Socrates would invoke an Egyptian myth to make a case to condemn writing (pharmakon), and in doing so, suggests that spoken words are 'alive' while written words are 'dead'. In part 2, I will focus on chapter 4, in which Derrida makes a strong case that the nature of the pharmakon is complex, not easily defined, and therefore cannot, despite Plato's best efforts, be thought of as either good or bad.

Part 2

DAN MCARDLE

In Chapter 4 of *Plato's Pharmacy*, Derrida turns to what seems at first to be a very simple task: defining the nature of the *pharmakon*. He first looks to how the term was translated in the past, and finds the results unsatisfying. After all, if a word can be translated as both 'remedy' and 'poison' depending on context, perhaps these translations only cover part of the full meaning of the word. In his examination, he finds something interesting. We can agree that 'remedy' and 'poison' exist, much like 'good' and 'evil', as binary opposites; that is, we define 'remedy' as the opposite of 'poison,' to the exclusion of it. If we have a remedy, that means there must be no poison in it, since the presence of poison will negate its very nature of being a 'remedy'. Another way to look at this: a poison must, by definition, exist within a boundary, and the remedy to the poison is outside of that boundary. But this definition brings us to a new binary opposite, because 'inside' and 'outside' are also exclusive of each other. What this means, according to Derrida, is that 'writing as a *pharmakon* cannot simply be assigned a site within what it situates, cannot be subsumed under concepts whose contours it draws (P 103)'.

What is a definition?

To understand why this is significant, we need to step back and discuss what definitions are. If we break the word 'definite' into component parts, we get 'de' and 'finite'— or 'of the finite.'

Definitions are a way that we can take a concept, draw a boundary around it, and then use it in communication. It typically takes one of two forms: either a description comprised of words or symbols, or a series of examples. This is especially evident in areas like law, where we might have both the specific text of a law, as well as instances where the law would be properly applied. In some sense we could describe this as inductive and deductive definitions, where we either create a general definition and then craft examples around it, or we look at various examples and find a common pattern, thus inferring a definition. Both forms of definitions have the same aim: to encapsulate a signified meaning in a way that can be communicated.

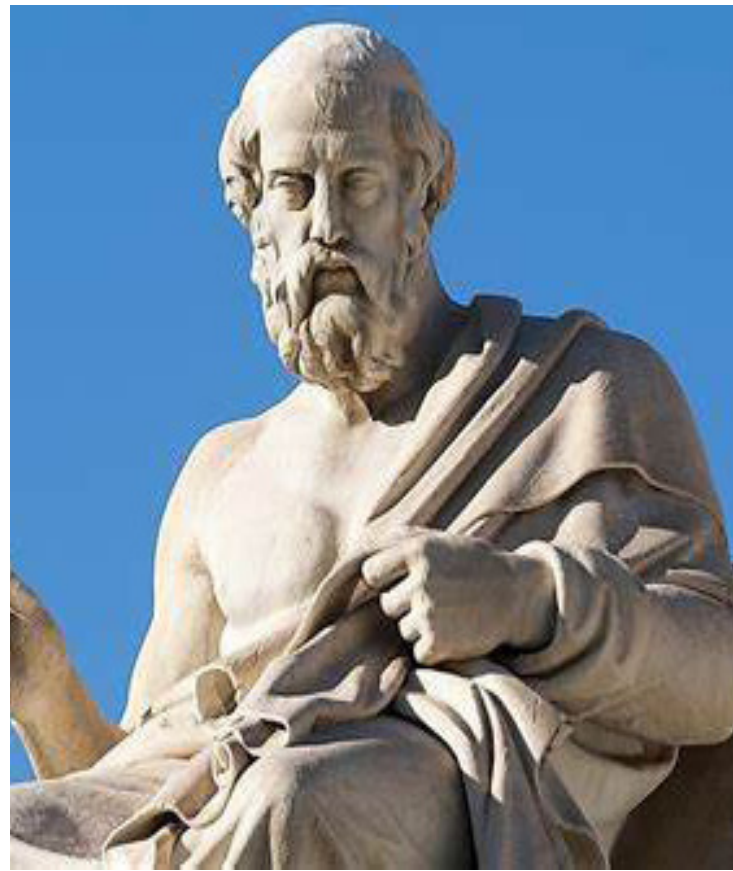
Socrates would likely argue that we cannot define a concept solely through examples, because what we aim to describe transcends the examples, a kind of pattern or principle inherent within every example. Without concretely stated rules, there is too much wiggle room, and it is easy for someone to use persuasion and rhetoric to attempt to draw people to a false conclusion which seems to live within the examples but does not. While a list of examples can give us a general understanding for future reference, it lacks a certain mathematical and scientific rigor, and leaves too much open to interpretation. Heavily influenced by the Pythagorean school, Socrates approaches with a



Socrates

mathematical background. We can see evidence of this in many dialogues, such as in the *Meno*, in which Socrates invokes geometric proofs to illustrate one of his points, using them to set out defining laws.

Why does Socrates care so much about definitions? Recall that Plato's dialogues were written after the Peloponnesian War, and in the dialogues, Socrates brings up many points which were obviously reflections about what happened during the war. Why should he be seeking ways to fully understand concepts like truth, good, and justice, if not to create a golden standard against which to hold future governments? Thucydides showed us that, despite Solon's reforms, Athens still managed to find itself at the center of a major power struggle. In many ways, the 'perfect' city of the *Republic* was likely Plato's indirect response to people like Thucydides. If we examine the questions posed in the *Republic*, they have a feeling of mathematical rigor to them. How often does Socrates bring up a suggested ideal, only to



Plato

then deliver examples which show its failings? Critics would call them straw men arguments, deliberately crafted to be easily ripped apart, but a mathematician might see Socrates as creating philosophical 'equations' and then running a series of 'variable' questions through it to see how well the results hold up. In some sense, these inquiries comprise a 'pre-scientific' scientific methodology.

The idea that we could have formulas which describe the 'correct' way that societies operate is tempting, but efforts to create them always fall short. Newton tried to harness all of physics into simple and comprehensible rules like his laws of motion, which, if taken literally, would transform the entire world into a giant math equation. However useful his laws have been for physics, they neglect the concept of free will, and they fail to explain how motion begins in the first place. They also focus exclusively on the material world, which Socrates would have hated. Likewise, for international relations, we see many



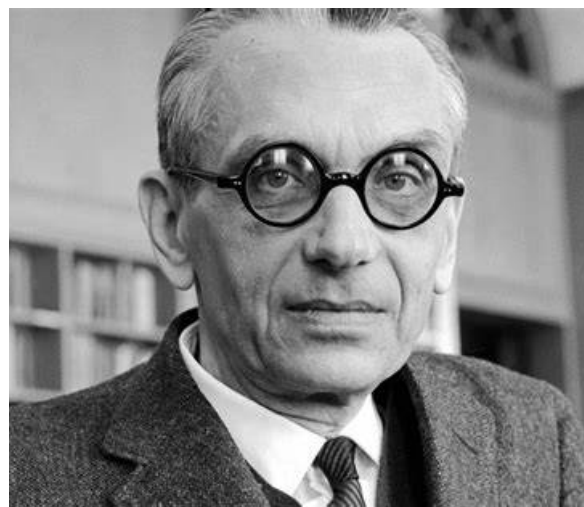
Derrida

attempts to explain how wars happened after they happened, but the calculations for preparing for or preventing wars always fall short. The Prussian general von Clausewitz comments on this in *On War*: ‘so-called mathematical factors never find a firm basis in military calculations. From the very start there is an interplay of possibilities, probabilities, good luck and bad that weaves its way throughout the length and breadth of the tapestry (Book 1, Section 21).

Such calculations assume that, unlike the world of definitions, mathematics remains a world of purity. But is this really the case? Several developments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries raised this question, to astonishing results. Ferdinand de Saussure, a linguist and one of the founders of semiotics, proposed that words (signs) consisted of a signifier (the symbol) and a signified (the meaning). Meanwhile, in mathematics, far more disruption was happening. To understand this better, we must turn to Nagel and Newman’s excellent essay *Gödel’s Proof*.

Gödel’s challenge

The heart of mathematical consistency as established by Euclid maintains that from a given set of fundamental axioms, we can make statements of fact, and use these statements to craft formulas. Inherent to this logic are the assertions that all statements can be derived from these axioms, and none of the derived statements can or will contradict each other. For example, if



Kurt Gödel

we assert that ‘ $1+1=2$ ’ is true, this also means that ‘ $1+1=3$ ’ is false. Prussian mathematician David Hilbert, possibly borrowing from Saussure, proposed the notion of symbolic ‘mapping.’ If a math statement is $1+1=2$, then a mapped statement might be ‘one plus one equals two.’ In this way, we can take the symbolic structures which represent mathematics and translate them into a new system without breaking any of the relationships between the symbols. Russell and Whitehead used a similar technique to craft their opus *Principia Mathematica*, in which they attempted to reduce all mathematical notation to the simplest possible signifiers.

In 1931, Kurt Gödel showed that such attempts would in principle always fail. He demonstrated that any formal system able to prove even basic arithmetic statements consistently would also include a statement that the system could neither prove nor disprove, thus establishing that any consistent formal system would be incomplete. In other words, the mythical purity of essence for which Socrates yearned remained just that, despite millennia of adherence to Euclid’s axioms.

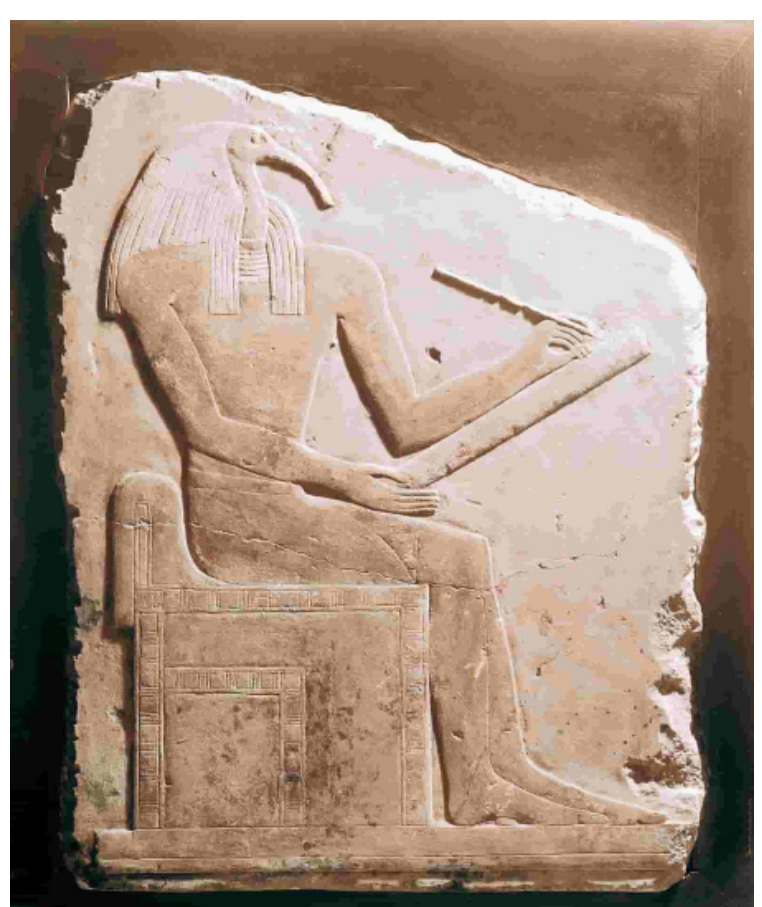
With this in mind, we return to Derrida’s argument. If a word is a signifier which points to something being signified, we need to somehow ensure that everything bounded in the ‘signified’ is relevant, that nothing unrelated is signified, and that nothing that should be signified is left out. That is, we have meaning inside the bounds of

signified, and non-meaning outside of bounds. Just like how in math, we need to ensure that $1+1=2$, and never 3, if we treat signifier words as a sort of mapping, then in theory we can arrive at a perfect harmony of signifier and signified that would finally make Socrates happy. But Gödel showed us that mathematics itself lacks this harmony, and therefore it can also not be found in philosophy. To quote Derrida directly: ‘We cannot qualify it, name it, comprehend it under a simple concept without immediately being off the mark (Page 104).

If Gödel’s theorem was a response to Socrates, showing that, despite appearances, mathematics lacks the purity he sought, then perhaps Derrida’s observation is a response to Plato, showing that erasing writing does not somehow retain a purity of *logos*. Rather than trying to blame the instrumentation or a memory lapse, Derrida points out that the very words themselves contain elements of impurity. Why else would we need the interactive nature of speech, if not to correct misunderstandings brought on by incomplete signifiers? While it is true that writing captures these shortcomings and through time magnifies them, it is only enhancing something that already existed.

Spoken and written words

According to Derrida, Plato claims that writing ‘is not simply a recourse to memory but, within such recourse, the substitution of the mnemonic device for live memory, of the prosthesis for the organ’ (page 108). It is easy to see why Derrida disagrees with Plato here: the invention of the phonograph. If Plato’s (and Socrates’) argument is essentially that writing overtakes speech as the dominant path by which *logos* propagates, the ability to record, not simply a *graphein* (written) representation of signifiers (words), but to record the phonetic sounds of the words themselves, suggests that the spoken word is *itself* a signifier. Therefore, as Saussure (and subsequently Derrida) would argue, the link to *logos* does not come from the spoken word, but from some unison or intersection between the spoken sound and amorphous thought



Thoth the Egyptian god of wisdom and writing

(*Course in General Linguistics*, Part 2, Chapter 4, Section 1).

Based on this, we can see several challenges Derrida might make to Plato’s assertions. Consider issues with translation. Let us assume that Plato is correct, that writing something down is an attempt to foil time, to create a fake permanence that weakens our memory. If the spoken word contains a certain purity, why not translate it into other languages, so that others can enjoy the pure lessons of Socrates? Suddenly we run into the same problem: rather than having one continuum of spoken word, and one of written, we have two independent continua of spoken words. While shared words between languages do exist, we know that languages also evolve over time. Socrates would know this too, because of the different dialects used within Homer. So, if we have an idea which is spoken, then translated via speech into a parallel oral tradition, in a few centuries when semantic drift has occurred, which language best represents the original *logos*? It seems that we run into all the same problems that we would with writing.

The same issue arises with the changing nature of time itself. Let us assume the role of the King, and argue that writing destroys our memory. And, in



Saussure

our fantasy illusion, we want to hear the purity of the *Iliad* from the bard himself, Homer. We invite Homer to come sing to us at our royal palace, and over the next three or four days, are filled with a sense of awe and wonder. When Homer departs, we retain fond memories of the experience, sharing them our subjects, children, and so on. Twenty years later, steeped in nostalgia, we decide we want to relive the experience, and so invite Homer back to sing a second time. Now, instead of experiencing the song fresh, we are comparing it to our twenty-year-old memory. Does it live up to the hype? Surely many of the words and phrases have changed, and the song may be markedly different from how we remember, and bear little resemblance to what our children were expecting. It may also be that certain phrases grew or fell out of favor, depending on circumstances which have transpired. Which form should take precedence, our memory or the new spoken word?

Words and connections

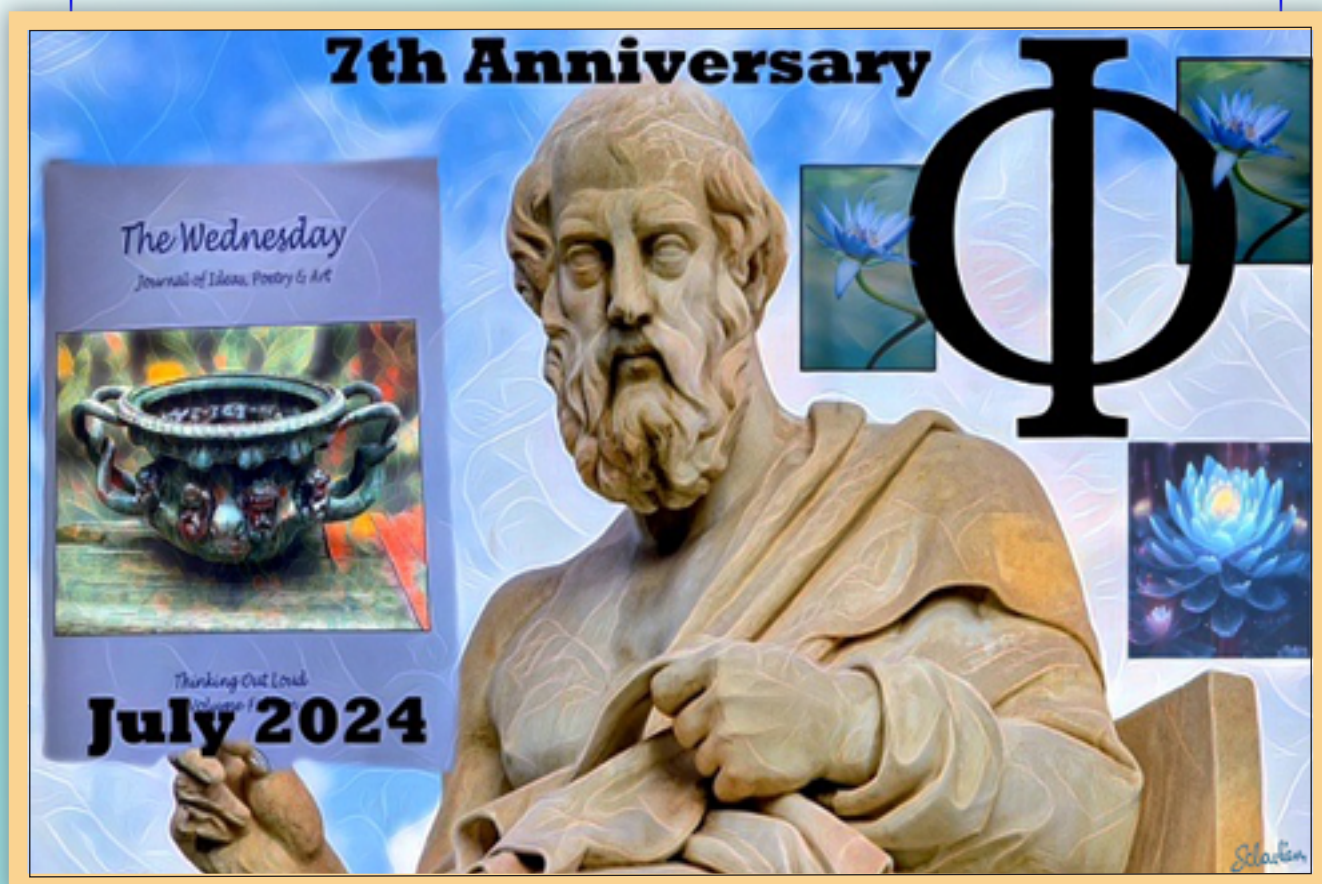
If we take Plato's argument at face value, we have three competing paths to *logos*: the spoken word, the written word, and the spoken word against its past and future incarnations. Which should take precedence? If we re-examine Parry and Lord's findings on oral tradition, we might understand why this conflict has arisen. Without the written word, the speaker (or singer) joins a timeless tradition with no known beginning, no known end, and no sense of ownership. The moment words are written down, we introduce time. In

effect, the act of writing down words creates a record in time, and this creates a past, present, and future. It is naive to suggest this is the *only* way in which we discover time: after all, we are born and we eventually die. But it is clear that introducing time to the oral tradition is offensive to Plato, who then writes down his complaint.

And now we should turn to what is actually signified by words. Derrida (controversially) reduces the entire dialogue of the *Phaedrus* to this singular word *pharmakon*, and argues that every point made within the dialogue can trace its roots back to an argument over what a *pharmakon* is, and whether it has the impact on memory and morality that Socrates (or Plato, or the King) claims. What is truly fascinating is how, by reducing the dialogue to a single word, rather than casting aside shells husks of meaning and simplifying things, Derrida's analysis has the impact of splitting the atom. Notice how his essay, carefully crafted and analysing a single word, is somehow longer than the original dialogue itself.

At this point, we could introduce a strong objection: by hyper-focusing on a single word, Derrida neglects the importance of everything else. But how true is this? Saussure claims that spoken language, captured in a period of time, consists of a multitude of signifiers which relate to each other, as well as to the signified. One way to visualize this might be to envision characters in a complex play, who all relate to each other somehow. Perhaps we could connect together characters who appear on stage together, who talk with each other, or who talk about each other. Once we do this, we could count the lines connecting to each character, and use the numbers to determine who is the protagonist, the supporting actors, and so on. If we now replace each character with a word or signifier, and propose that this spoken dialogue (here, the *Phaedrus*) resembles a play, we compile the words or themes within the dialogue, and sort by these links. Derrida's argument will be that the word *pharmakon* will have more connections than all others. This does give the word prominence over other important themes (like *logos*), but it does help explain his hyper-focus.

At Your Desktop Every First Wednesday of the Month



Enjoy Reading It

On Hölderlin

EDWARD GREENWOOD

In the *Sturm und Drang* period in German literature there was a turning away from the dominance of French neo-classic culture to Shakespeare and to the classical Greeks. In 1788, a year before the French Revolution, Friedrich Schiller published his seminal ode '*The Gods Of Greece*'. In this poem he anticipates not only the odes of Hölderlin. Living nature had been replaced by the mechanical and dead view of Newtonian physics. Nature now was no more alive, but as lifeless as a mechanical clock:

'There the beautiful world still flourished and the light throng sent flowing beautiful beings from the land of fable. Ah, there your magic dwelling shone very differently, it was different there! There your temple crowned Venus Amathusia'.

One may compare here Keats who three decades later claimed in his poem 'Lamia' that the reductionist Newtonian physics had unwoven the rainbow. Verse five speaks of the achievements of Pindar in his odes - models for later lyric poets - and of Phidias in the unsurpassable architecture of the Parthenon. Verse ten exalts in the Dionysian with Eros leading her band of maenads celebrating wine and intoxication. Death was not in those times associated with the skull as *memento mori*, but rather with a kiss as a tender farewell. Elysium is a place of joy where Orpheus plays his lyre, Admetus greets his wife and Philoctetes retrieves his bow:

'Beautiful world where are you?' he asks. 'Come back'. The north wind has killed the flowers. Newtonian physics has turned nature's movements into the rigidly controlled movements of a mechanical clock: 'Nature, deprived of gods, slavishly follows the law of gravity'.

This is the disenchantment which the sociologist Max Weber was later to diagnose as characteristic of modern times. The cinema captured this with the Chaplin film of that title. Instead of the outgoing gods we have for Hölderlin a solipsistic God viewing his own image. Hölderlin thinks that if the gods were like human beings, as the Greek gods were, we human beings would be more like gods. The ode is a curious compound of narrative and analysis so that the analysis is incorporated in the narrative.

This ode set the agenda for Hölderlin. He was a great admirer of Schiller. Schiller alas and his friend Goethe held somewhat aloof from Hölderlin and there are some disobliging remarks about his unbalance in their famous correspondence.

Johan Christian Friedrich Hölderlin was born on March 27th 1770 and died on June 7th 1843. Sadly, during the last thirty-six years of his life he was incapacitated by mental illness. He did, however, manage to write some fragments of poetry. We have seen that Heidegger concluded his *Introduction to Metaphysics* by quoting one of them. Heidegger also wanted to develop a kind of German religion which drew on the Greek gods. Hölderlin began to suffer from madness when he was in Bordeaux in 1802, but even then he produced a fine poem '*Andenken*' 'Dedication'.

Hölderlin was born in Lauffen Am Neckar and his early life was surrounded by mourning because of the early deaths of his father and stepfather. He attended the Tuebingen *Stift* or Foundation in preparation for becoming a Lutheran clergyman but when he graduated in 1793 it was clear that he had repudiated the ministry. His education had given him a good foundation in ancient Greek. He met Fichte, Schelling and Hegel and all four laid the foundations for the later development of German Idealism while they were still students. He introduced Hegel to the work of the great presocratic Heraclitus. In 1794 he met Goethe and Schiller and began work on his prose narrative about the Greek uprising against the Turks *Hyperion*. They were all great enthusiasts for the French revolution and his friend Sinclair was arrested for treasonous plotting, but later released. For a time, it seemed Hölderlin might be arrested too.

Hölderlin worked as a private tutor and while in Frankfurt am Main he fell in love with the wife of his employer. Her name was Suzanne Gonthard. This affair brought him great unhappiness. In 1802 while in Bordeaux he composed *The Death Of Empedocles*. At this time in his life, he was struggling to find some kind of compromise between Greek culture and Christianity. The most convenient edition of Hölderlin is the Penguin edition *Friedrich Hölderlin: Selected Poems And Fragments* published in 1966 with translations by Michael Hamburger.



Hölderlin

Heidegger turns to his memories of what are crucial lines from Hölderlin at several important parts of his work. This helps to support his contention that poetry is a form of philosophy and philosophy a form of poetry. In 'What Calls for Thinking?' in *Basic Writings* edited by David Krell, we find a verse from Hölderlin's 'Mnemosyne':

We are a sign that is not read,
We feel no pain, we almost have
Lost our tongue in foreign lands.

And in the famous essay 'the Origin Of The Work Of Art', Heidegger quotes from 'The Journey';
That which dwells near its origin abandons the site.

While in his essay 'The Question Of Technology' Heidegger, speaking of the dark times in which he lives in which the worker and technology have become dominant as opposed to the citizen of ancient Athens, quotes the famous lines from 'Patmos':

But, where danger is, grows
The saving power also.

In the essay 'The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking' where there is presumably a pun on end as termination and end as aim, we find the following lines from 'Festival Of Peace':

Much, from morning onward,
Since we became a conversation and hear from one another,
Have human beings undergone, but soon (we) will be song.

We have here several dominant leitmotifs in Heidegger's philosophy confirmed by poetry. These are the seeking for a sign, the concern with primeval origins (usually the province of myth), and with soteriology or being saved, and the return of poetry itself.

I will now quote from 'Hymns' (page 258 of Hamburger's translation):

There is a yearning that seeks the unbound. But much
Must be retained. And loyalty is needed.
Forward, however, and back we will
Not look. Be lulled and rocked as
On a swaying skiff of the sea.

The poem '*The Journey*' has nine stanzas. It opens by comparing Swabia 'my mother' with Lombardy. Both have forests and Swabia is bordered by Switzerland. The second verse speaks of the 'purest water' of his region, a region in which loyalty is innate. One can see how Heidegger, also a loyal Swabian, would respond to this warmly:

Therefore
Innate in you is loyalty. For whatever dwells
Close to its origin is loath to leave the place.

Walk On Water

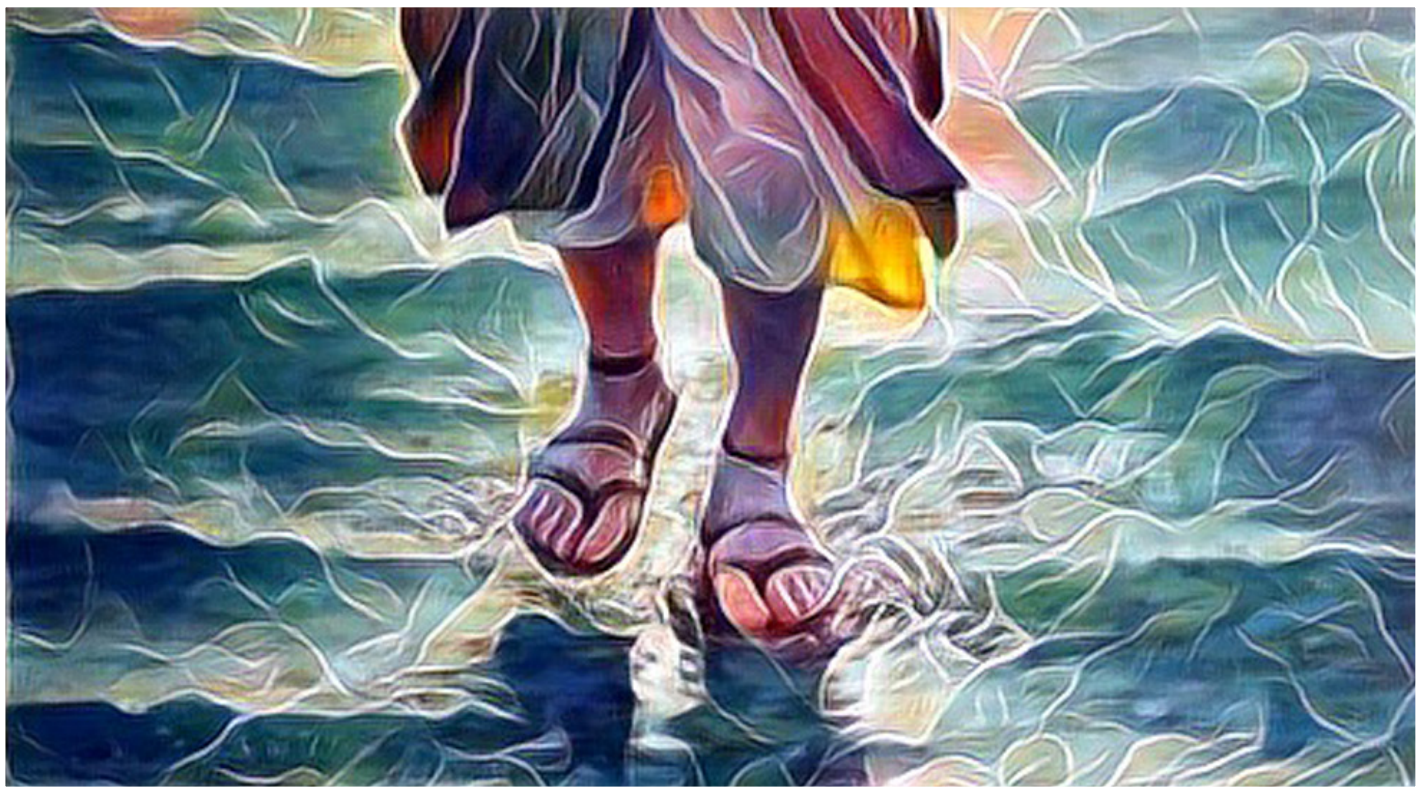
Walk on water and think of me
on a bed of nails. Do your miracles, submit
to your own infallibility,
but don't ask me, how I can sleep now,
how I escaped the fire
walking over blistering coal with my bare feet.

Don't feel sorry over things that do not materialize.
Watch the cataract sky, clouds that obscure vision,
falling concave and surging convex.

In the fisheye of heaven, you only see slivers of truth:
one's suffering is another one's pleasure,
one's loss is another one's gain, everything
fits snug into each other, folded hands like flowers in the bud.

Bloom and doom you see, when you mirror
yourself in my eyes.
Drown, when the light zaps you.
Or keep walking on water.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*



Toys and Play

We must not forget that the most enduring modifications in toys are never the work of adults, whether educators, manufacturers or writers, but are the result of children at play.

For who gives the child his toys if not adults? And even if he retains a certain power to accept or reject them, a not insignificant proportion of the oldest toys (balls, hoops, tops, kites) are in a certain sense imposed on him as cult-implements that become toys only afterwards, partly through the child's powers of imagination.

The process of emancipating the toy begins. The more industrialization penetrates, the more it decisively eludes the control of the family and becomes increasingly alien to children and also to parents.

Walter Benjamin, One-Way Street and Other Writings

12



CHRIS NORRIS

Give the toy-makers, market-watchers, crews
Of adult minders, teachers, salesmen-squads,
And so forth – give them time and what's the odds
That, just a century on, you might well choose
To date that first pronouncement, maybe lose
The 'never', and acknowledge how the gods
Of industry and finance make the mods
And tweaks while it's the ad-hooked kid who screws
The pre-fab bits together. 'Play' indeed,
Play of a kind, but look for any sign
Of creativity, inventiveness,
Or technical resource and you'll concede
That making sure the bits and bobs align
'As shown' must signify: regress, regress!



Call me a Luddite, sentimentalist,
Or harker-back to my own childhood days
When ‘things were so much simpler’, and I’ll raise
No great objection save to say you’ve missed
My point: that kids can make a decent fist
Still, in our age, of doing things in ways
Much cleverer, more rewarding than when play’s
Become just following plans that pre-exist
And pre-require each plug-in. How ignore
The larger context here, the Fordist-style
Production-line, the task that alienates
The worker from his work, the endless chore
That puts an end to all that’s versatile,
Free-thinking, innovative – suspect traits!

We thinkers, too, must sense the growing threat
When, grown-up children, we assemble thoughts,
Words, idea-constellations, and all sorts
Of hybrid artefact in forms as yet
Untried, hence with no standard to be met
Or plan provided, no kit-builder ‘oughts’
That treat inventiveness as school-reports
Treat any lapse from the example set
By some exam-board. After all, how guard
Against the sheer platoons of those who’ll take
Our choicest texts (or excerpts) and convert
Them into easy primers for the hard-
Of-learning, or seize every chance to make
Quite sure no passage sounds a thought-alert?

For it’s going on apace in that realm too,
Let’s say, the cultural-intellectual sphere
Where, as with toys or games, already we’re
Unwilling witnesses as they accrue,
The handbooks, pass-notes, vain attempts to do
In short-and-simple what took many a year
Of strenuous thought before it could appear,
At some point, out of some muse-haunted blue
And thus redeem the time. I thought to head
Such *haute vulgarisation* off at source
By juxtaposing image, text and gloss
In unique constellations so they’d tread
With greater care, or take the wiser course,
Just read attentively and spurn the dross.

With toys at least there’s progress of a kind,
A fast-expanding range of new techniques
In manufacture for the child who seeks
Such stimuli as benefit a mind
More techno-scientifically-inclined
Than, as with me, the sort whose troughs and peaks
Are like those tidal moods the poet speaks
So often of, or that moon-gazers find
So much their element. Not so with such
Purported gearings-up as might yet lay
My image-clusters waste, neglect the art
Of my verse-nurtured prose, and miss the touch
Of Brechtian tough-mindedness that may,
‘With any luck, give dialectics heart.

Life Beyond Death

Dr. ALAN XUEREB

I am writing these short reflections with a heavy heart, whilst my ex-colleague and friend is still not buried. She was taken by an unforgiving, unyielding immortal illness in the prime of her life. The grim reaper does not negotiate with creation. He is an unwavering undertaker.

Every philosopher at some point of his or her journey is compelled to think about the human condition, in its *fullness*. As paradoxical as it appears, that 'fullness' implies *sine qua non* the notion of death. And as faithless as it may sound, death is the only certain thing all living creatures have. This sounds nihilistic and it probably is. But it is also hopeful in a very indirect and fascinating manner.

Toward the end of his life, in the instants preceding the carrying out his death sentence by poison, Socrates considers, 'in deep serenity', the relation of truth and death: 'The one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death' (Plato, *Phaedo*. 64a). Try to visualize a scenario where you are resting on your death-bed, how would you evaluate your current existence? If you could trek back in time to this present moment, with your 'death-bed' perspective, would you make any key alterations to the way you currently live? Questions such as this, if contemplated deeply enough, in theory can catalyse a significant change in consciousness, for when we have a truly profound grasp of our own mortality, our trivial qualms and pains tend to wilt away as unsurprisingly as apples from trees.

In Heidegger's vision, it is the meeting with our own demise that most profoundly focuses the question of Being. 'Only humanity "has" the distinction of standing and facing death, because the human being is earnest about Being (*Seyn*): death is the supreme testimony to Being (*Seyn*)'. 'Death opens up the question of Being'. Thus, Heidegger's thorough scrutiny of human mortality was prompted by the interrogation about what can death tell us about the fundamental meaning of Being? In his view, the human being (which he named Existence) through death becomes aware of his (or her) boundedness, and thus, Heidegger chooses human beings as the only way of understanding existence among creatures.

Death was a predominant concept of Heidegger's thought throughout his entire philosophical career. The



Quantum Soul

massive popularity of his book *Being and Time* owed much to his emphasis that 'preparedness for death' is a fundamental key to authentic existence – that the disclosure of authentic *Being* only occur when *Dasein* challenges its own finitude by determinedly accepting that it is always, and inexorably, on a 'journey towards its own death'.

If you are thinking that this is fascinating wait until you read what comes next.

Biocentrism

Biocentrism posits that death is merely transport into another universe. Michele Angelo Besso was a close friend of Albert Einstein. Upon his passing, the father of relativity said, 'Now Besso has departed from this strange world a little ahead of me. That means nothing. People like us ... know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion'.

We often think of the afterlife as a spiritual or religious belief, when in a way, its pursuit is also somewhat familiar to science. Medical doctor Robert Lanza takes things one step further. He thinks we start out with a wrong assumption, that we have it all backward. It isn't the universe which is supreme, but life. In fact, life and in particular consciousness are essential to the makeup

of the universe, he says. Through the theory of biocentrism, he believes he can prove that space and time do not exist, unless our consciousness says they do.

In quantum physics, particles can be observed in several different states at the same time. This is called superposition. They in fact, exist in all possible states simultaneously. In terms of predicting what a particle will do, nothing is absolute. Each state has its own range of probability. In Lanza's view, each corresponds with a different universe.

This coincides with the 'many worlds' theory, also known as the multiverse. Each universe is thought to operate with its own physical laws. Anything that can occur does, with one possibility playing out in each realm. Our life, Lanza believes, at one stage or another, is occurring across many universes simultaneously. Yet, your life on one world would not influence your life in another.

Critics argue that unexplained phenomena in physics only occur on the Forbes quantum level. They also point out that there is no direct evidence of the existence of other universes. Several physicists have told Forbes that Lanza's writings look more like works of philosophy rather than science.

Human quantum consciousness

The above criticism is addressed by Professor Roger Penrose and Professor Morais Smith in two separate theoretical efforts. Our brains are composed of cells called neurons, and their combined activity is believed to generate consciousness. Each neuron contains microtubules, which transport substances to different parts of the cell. The Penrose-Hameroff theory of quantum consciousness argues that microtubules are structured in a fractal pattern which would enable quantum processes to occur.

Professor Morais Smith says 'This new knowledge of quantum fractals could provide the foundations for scientists to experimentally test the theory of quantum consciousness. If quantum measurements are one day taken from the human brain, they could be compared against our results to definitely decide whether consciousness is a classical or a quantum phenomenon'.

In the meantime, at least for me, the fear that pervades my soul is not so much about my own death, or to put it more bluntly, about what will happen to me, but more about the parting from my loved ones. In a way it is the death of 'others' that afflicts me. As to the Socratic death-bed-assessment we started with, Bertrand Russell's advice may help in shedding some light on what is important to live for, and be remembered for. In his words: 'only kindness can save the world, and even if we knew how to produce kindness we should not do so unless we were already kindly'.

Only this *kindness* should stay engraved in the hearts of those who remain in this valley of tears after we have departed from it. That is one reason why we should indeed, in the final analysis, persistently strive to be kind to each other.

The Wednesday

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In landscapes that are never bleak.

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As ardently I look around
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As does a towering mountain peak.

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And truths beyond what words can say
Through words can somehow make their way,
And bring us what we've sought in vain.

Edward Greenwood



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