ISSN 2516-2292 (Online)
ISSN 2516-2284 (Print)

Issue No. 196 06/11/2024

The Wednesday

www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Magazine of the Wednesday Group - Oxford

Editorial

A Direction of Philosophy

In his book *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling makes a strange claim about the origin and development of humanity. He says: 'History is an epic composed in the mind of God. It has two main parts: one depicting mankind's egress from its centre to its furthest point of displacement; the other, its return. The former is, as it were, history's *Iliad*, the latter, its *Odyssey*. To explain and expand this remark, he goes on to say: 'The ideas, the spirits, must fall away from their centre and insert themselves into the particularity of nature, the general realm of the falling away, so that afterwards, and as particularities, they may return to indifference and, reconciled with it, maybe able to abide in it without disturbing it'. (PP 44 - 45, translated by Klaus Ottmann).

To elaborate on the above, I mention that Schelling had a view called Identity Theory. Things and creatures, including human, were born out of a unity, or the absolute. They first appear at the level of ideas, which represent the absolute, or at one degree from unity with the absolute, then they fall away from this unity into difference and multiplicity. In doing so, they lose some of their powers and characteristics. That is why Schelling talks of a Golden Age, inhabited by a great race. These original people were, according to him, the teachers of humanity. He went even further by trying to support his view by evidence from archaeology and the history of civilizations, noticing that people of ancient civilization and their monuments were on a larger scale than later people.

All the above might be considered trivial or far-fetched, but the essential point is that Schelling thinks that, as there was a fall away, there will be a return to the centre, the absolute. This happens when the line of time has extended far in the descent, after which a new ascent will happen in the realm of spirit, through art, philosophy and religion. This picture may seem to close the cycle of history too quickly. However, there are other texts by Schelling where he suggests that the unity of the absolute will manifest itself in the unity of nature, and human occupation with the study of nature will be the road to unity with the absolute. But if nature keeps reproducing itself and new objects, that will mean the road to a total knowledge is a longer one than the previous image suggests.

Schelling charges philosophy with the task of achieving this end, which is religious in nature. He says: 'the first reconciliation and dissolution of the primordial strife will have to be celebrated in philosophy, whose sense and meaning only that person will grasp, who recognises in nature the life of a newly arisen deity'.

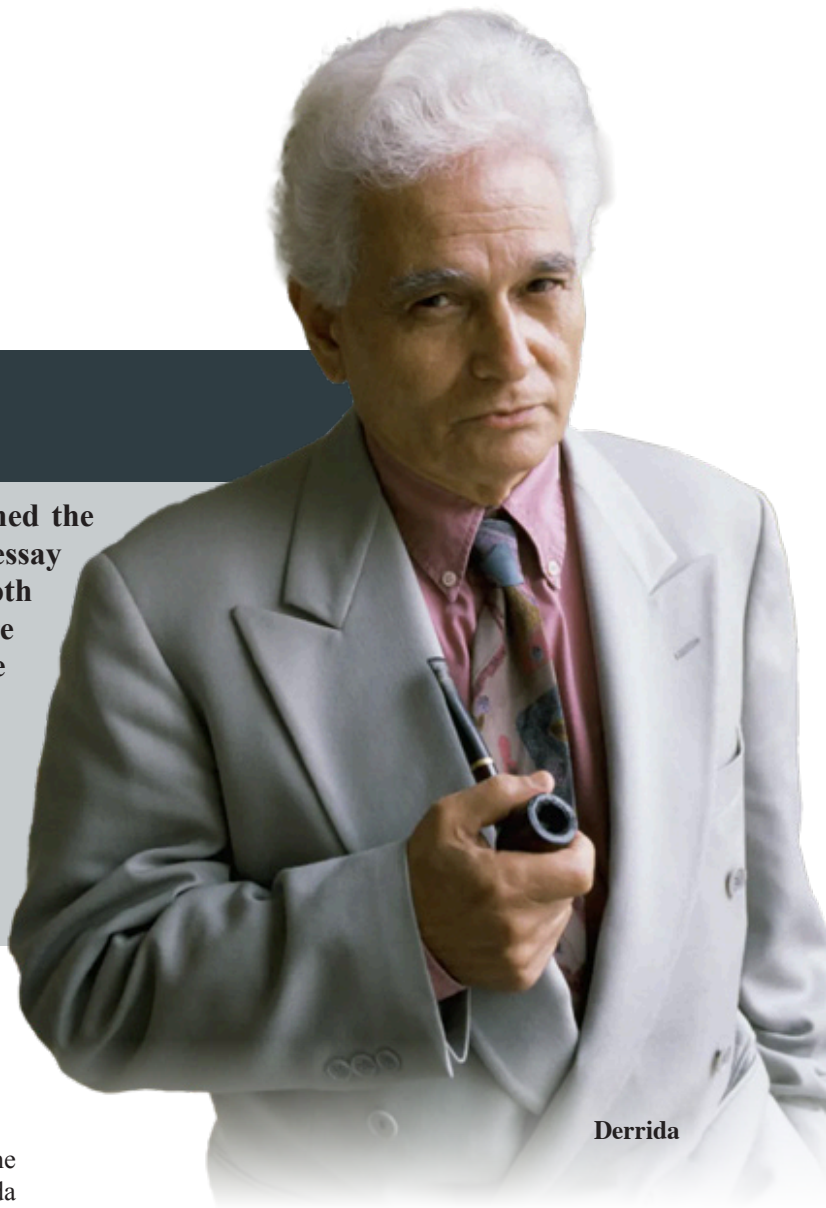
Schelling here is not talking as a theologian but as a philosopher. He thinks that the condition of the possibility of philosophy starts from the identity approach, such that there is unity, difference and a return to unity. By unity he means the absolute. But he warns that 'If the dialectic principle (that is the differentiating understanding which, precisely because of this, organically orders and forms) as well as the archetype towards which it is directed, are both simultaneously withdrawn from philosophy, so that it no longer has either measure or rule in itself, then there remains nothing else for philosophy to do save attempt to orient itself historically, and to take as its source and guiding principle tradition'. (Bruce Matthews: *Schelling's Organic Form of Philosophy*, P 31).

Matthew's commentary on this paragraph is very illuminating. He says: 'If we remove the telos of philosophy, the "archetype" of divine unity "towards which it is directed", we then deprive it of its power, to generate hope, and thereby to transform the present, as well as provide an opening for a changed future'. In the present fragmented world, perhaps there is a message to a philosophy that is obsessed with the finite and particular to lift its head and search for the overall picture and to see where it and the world are going. It may then discover that setting ends is as valuable, or more important, than being busy with means and instruments. I may come to this topic to connect the present state of philosophy with the idea of the Last Human about which Nietzsche talked, or *The Coming Race*, as Edward Bulwer-Lytton described it in his famous novel.

The Editor

Derrida's Logos

In Part 1 of this series, we examined the first four chapters of Derrida's essay Plato's Pharmacy, focusing on both a reinterpretation of the structure of the Phaedrus, as well as the relationship of writing to speech. Part 2 picked up on some nuances Derrida attributed to definition itself. In this final act, we cover some of the larger themes in the remaining chapters of the essay.



Derrida

DAN MCARDLE

Upon completion of reading *Plato's Pharmacy*, the reader may be left with some ambivalence. Derrida makes several lofty claims, which seem at times preposterous and presumptuous. We must remember that he is a very, very close reader of Plato, and that we cannot dismiss these claims without sufficient investigation. In this concluding essay, we will examine three major themes of Derrida's claims: the dualistic binaries, the inferiority of imitation, and presence in absence.

Derrida has two things working against him: his writing style is byzantine and off-putting, and he assumes that the reader shares his familiarity with his source material. This is not to say every point he makes is correct, but that we risk two errors: either we dismiss a valid point because it is not clearly presented, or we misunderstand or misinterpret one. To avoid these obstacles, this author engaged in extensive background research which included the vast majority of Plato's corpus, and in the duration changed his opinions about Derrida's conclusions several times.

This or That?

Let us begin our examination with the binaries, a concept which emerges from an analysis of the myth of Theuth, which Socrates invokes to argue against writing. At first glance, it seems to be a throwaway line:

> 'The loyalty you feel to writing, as its originator, has just lead you to tell me the *opposite* of its true effect'. (*Phaedrus*, 275a, tr. Waterfield, emphasis added).

From this single statement, Derrida delivers pages and pages of exposition in his essay about the word 'opposite', and I was left asking if this was the philosopher's equivalent of pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Along the way, Derrida drops various breadcrumbs of reference to other dialogues, but the significance of the crumbs is unclear. How could anyone conclude from this sentence that Socrates was obsessed with contrary values, opposite binaries?

The answer only arises when we look at other dialogues. Socrates generally poses questions in a binary form: do we do this or that? Is this good or bad? Is this or that outcome to be desired? With rare exception, they are posed as yes or no questions, which can be extremely frustrating for interlocuters like Gorgias, as well as observant readers. This comes to a full head in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, where a 'Visitor' from Elia tries to 'help' one of Plato's puppets define what a sophist and statesman are, using the logarithmic method: he defines a set, finds a way to divide it in

Plato

two, and then selects the most germane of the two to proceed. In this way, he starts with a very large group and slowly whittles away until left with a satisfactory definition. An example from the *Sophist*:

> 'Visitor: Aren't there two types of expertise in acquisition? Is one type mutually willing exchange, through gifts and wages and purchase? And would the other type, which brings things into one's possession by action or words, be expertise in taking possession?
> Thaetetus: It seems so, anyway, given what we'd said.
>
> Visitor: Well then, shouldn't we *cut* possession-taking in two?
> Thaetetus: How?
> Visitor: The part that's done openly we label combat, and the part that's secret we call hunting.
> Thaetetus: Yes.
> Visitor: And furthermore it would be unreasonable not to *cut* hunting in two.
> Thaetetus: How?
> Visitor: We *divide* it into the hunting of living things and the hunting of lifeless things'. (*Sophist*, 219d-e, tr. Nicholas P. White, emphasis added).

This process is even more pronounced in the *Statesman*, where, upon reaching a dead end in attempting to define 'statesman', the visitor retreats to a previous 'fork' and determines that they made a faulty cut. Socrates is obsessed with definitions, often arguing that we cannot know what a topic like 'justice' is if we cannot easily define it, and his primary method of crafting definitions seems to be these cuts.

We should ask two questions here: first, is this a reasonable way to define something? And second, are definitions always paramount when trying to elucidate truth? As we saw in the previous essay (Part 2, *The Wednesday*, Issue 192), Derrida clearly does not believe so. He attacks the notion of these divisions as a division itself, and thus maintains that achieving a satisfactory definition is impossible, ironically, quite in line with arguments of Zeno or Parmenides, two famous Eliatic philosophers whom Socrates despised. Another objection is that we come to definitions through

Phaedrus

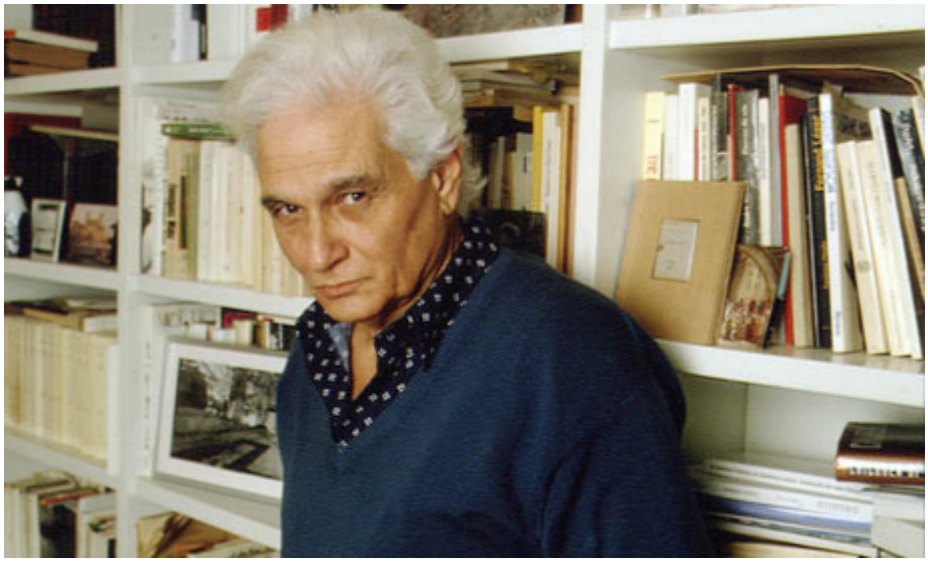
multiple methods, including pattern recognition. If we observe that turning a key starts a car motor, we might define that key as 'the thing which starts the car motor' rather than going through a long and convoluted list of possible yes/no questions. So, we might argue that while this binary method might be one reasonable way to arrive at a definition, it is by no means the only route.

We ought also note that the path to a definition will differ depending on what we are trying to define. To borrow examples from the *Statesman*, we can easily say that a doctor is one who practices medicine, and a carpenter is one who builds houses, but if we find calling a statesman 'one who maintains a just society' insufficient, we wind up with another long line of clarifying questions. One major difference between these examples is that both carpenters and doctors work with materials, whereas statesmen work with ideas. When we focus on the material realm, definitions come far more easily, but in the conceptual realm they are fleeting at best. We can see the difficulty of attempting to merge these realms when we say that a chair is an embodiment of the form of 'chairness', but then are at a loss to explain what 'chairness' is.

Before continuing, we should pause and question Socrates' method: must we define something in order to understand it? Are concepts like good, evil, and justice such that we must have an agreed upon set of words to elicit meaning, or is there a more emotional or instinctive component involved? We do not need to read Plato's *Republic* to know that stealing candy from a child is bad, and there are countless examples of situations that *feel* unjust, even though we cannot fully explain *why*. Socrates would likely argue that this falls into rhetoric persuasion taught by his opponents like Gorgias, but for someone who puts so much weight into the notion of the soul triumphing over the body, it seems that he fails to fully grasp what a soul is.

'Who Am I This Time?'

Next, one of Plato's primary arguments in the *Phaedrus* relies on an understanding of imitation. He suggests throughout the dialogue (and in others), extending from his view that writing is inferior to speech, that imitations are by definition inferior to the 'real' thing. He returns to this idea quite often, both in the *Phaedrus*



Derrida

itself (claiming that a painting is inferior to its subject), and in other dialogues like the *Laws*, where he draws a distinction between 'real' doctors and 'slave doctors', claiming that the former practice with skill and wisdom, while the latter simply repeat what they have been told. Derrida attacks this idea by arguing that 'a perfect imitation is no longer an imitation' (*Plato's Pharmacy,* p 139).

Socrates himself slips into inconsistency here: in both the *Cratylus* and the *First Alcibiades*, he calls into question the nature of words as separate from logos; that is, logos, or pure thought, is distinct from the language we craft to express it. Contrast this with the *Phaedrus*, in which speech is seen as pure, and writing somehow diluted and dead. We might argue (as Derrida does) that we are looking at a chain of signifiers, where pure logos leads to words, which then lead to written words, each link in the chain risking added pollution and departing from the intended meanings. But if this is true, then why not have the mythical Theuth attack speech in general?

From this chain of signifiers, Derrida seems to invent a metaphor of father and son, and then becomes obsessed with it. If, as Derrida argues, speech represents the father and writing represents the son, then, once the speech concludes, the written word represents an 'orphan'. He carries this metaphor ad absurdum, and in my opinion, spends far too long on it, focusing on various elements within the metaphor rather than the original argument from Socrates– ironically, his metaphor in some ways becomes an orphan from the written word of the *Phaedrus*. However, there are two very important ideas embedded here: imitation and succession.

There are two ways to view imitation: as fraud and as likeness. In fraud, something attempts to portray itself as that which it is not. For example, many people have a copy of the Mona Lisa, but if someone were to bring their copy to an auction house and pass it off as the original, it would be quickly identified as a counterfeit. Likeness is a much more positive form of imitation: from it we get role models, as well as artists who are inspired by the Mona Lisa to create their own artistic expressions. This even extends to music, where certain melodies and instruments may be used to simulate sounds of nature.

A moment ago we said that Derrida *seems* to invent the father/son metaphor, because he probably takes it from Plato's *Timeus*, a dialogue that attempts to explain the origins of the world. In the dialogue, once time is introduced, it is followed by the notion of succession. The gods are created, who in turn create humanity. In the midst of a long exposition on how the body is formed, Plato explicitly uses a family metaphor:

> 'It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring' (*Timeus*, 50d, tr. By Donald J. Zeyl).

As the surrounding context is full of discussion about imitation and reproduction, it is clearly relevant to the discussion at hand. But Derrida's approach contains a pernicious snag, which one could argue exists in Plato as well: if writing is the child of the logos, and writing is inferior, by this metaphor, the son is inferior to the father, the grandson will be inferior to the son, and so on. Plato might argue that humanity is inferior to the gods, and he would also likely argue that life before Socrates was executed was better than life following it. This plays into a nihilistic yearning for some paradise-

like before time which does not exist. Is adoration of the known past a binary contrasted with fear of the unknown future?

The *Timeus* presents another way to express this concept in the distinction between being and becoming: something which exists in a stable motionless position, and something which either comes into existence or ceases to exist, in a constant state of change or flux. If the father is the known constant, the son is the one who comes into existence, always striving to eventually take the place of the father. Derrida picks up on this for his metaphor and, incorrectly calls this replacement of the father by the son 'violence', and then applies it to writing, suggesting that a written word that survives the death of the speaker of the original word has somehow overthrown the speaker. This plays into the final point we should make on this theme, involving Plato's forms.

Famously in the *Republic*, but also in other dialogues, Plato uses the concept of the forms to both praise the higher realms of conceptualisation, but also to chastise the material world. If, as he suggests in the famous 'cave' allegory, what we see in the world is just shadows on the walls of a cave - imitations - this means that, according to Plato, the world of the forms is the real world. However, for someone so focused on the need to define things, a very young Socrates is taken to task in the *Parmenides* for the inability to articulate precisely what the forms *are*. How is it that someone who is so convinced that we cannot know something unless we can define it fail to define the very thing he believes to be greater than the known world itself? And yet, Socrates carries this attitude to the end, choosing in the *Crito* to drink the hemlock and die rather than be disabused of the idea that the physical world is less than the world of the soul.

To Be or Not To Be Present

Now to the final theme: one of Derrida's prized achievements in this essay is the alleged discovery that a pillar of both the *Phaedrus* and the entire body of Plato's dialogues is a word which never appears in that same corpus. Perhaps borrowing from Saussure, he notes that while two words, pharmak*on* (drug/remedy) and pharmak*eus* (sorcerer/magician), can be found in the texts, one additional but highly relevant word which would complete a linguistic triumvirate is missing: pharmak*os*. Translated in English as 'scapegoat', *pharmakos* would be a fitting cornerstone to the legacy of Socrates, a man who, in addition to being executed on grounds which seemed more implicit than explicit, poetically celebrated the Pharmakos, the day on which Athens would expel two outcasts from the city, as his birthday. To make his case, Derrida points to several breadcrumbs and triumphantly concludes that the word is 'strikingly absent (*Plato's Pharmacy,* p. 129)', expecting the reader to fill in the gaps.

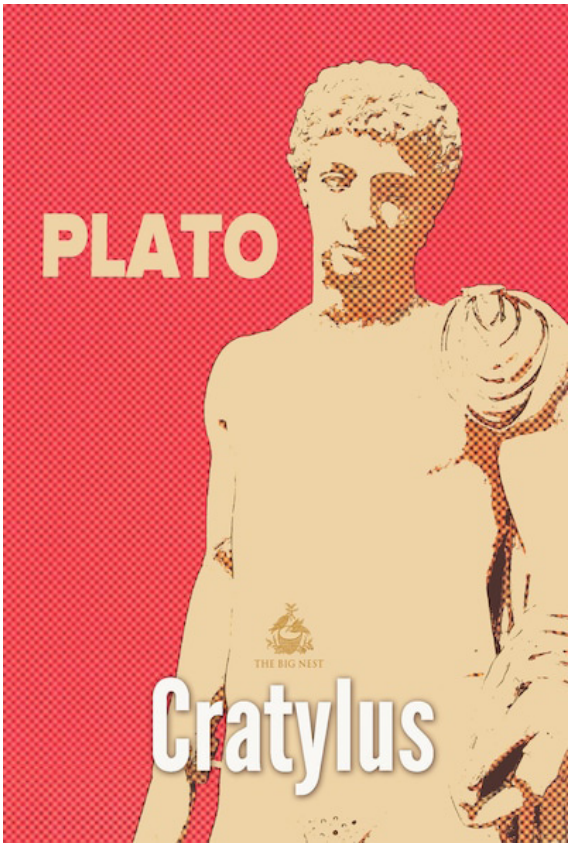
We might initially dismiss this as haughty arrogance, in accordance with Derrida's opaque writing style, and point to a long line of celebrant followers, each seeking 'between the lines' in other literary works before announcing their own specious discoveries. After all, there is no shortage of worthless conclusions drawn by people who follow a pattern and then begin forcing unrelated elements to fit. Derrida himself makes an imperfect presentation on page 68: he asserts with pride that the question of logography is raised, 'the reader can count the lines', at the exact center of the *Phaedrus*, 257c. I did just so, and found the actual center to be 253b.

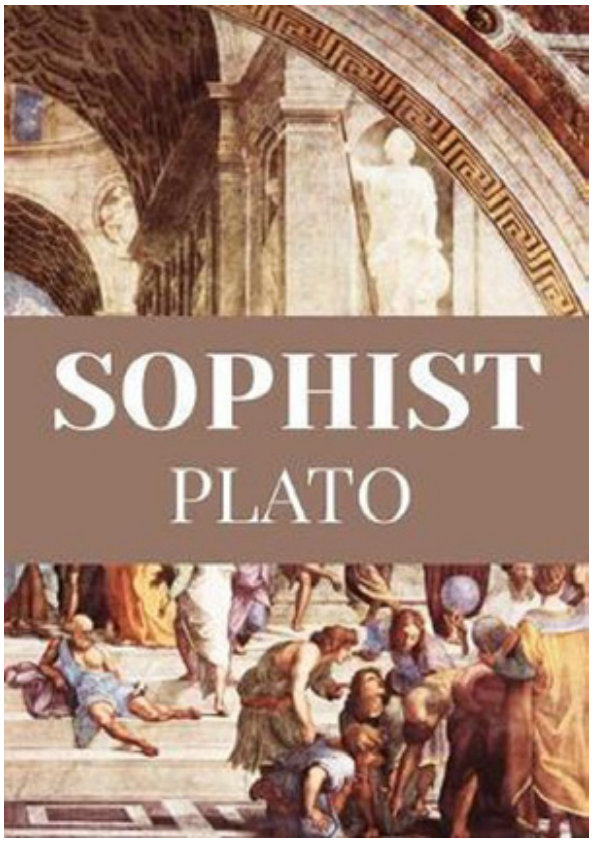
But let us give Derrida the benefit of the doubt, and treat the crumbs as pointers to full loaves of bread. Following this trail brings us to the *Cratylus*, a dialogue that focuses on the nature of language and raises questions about the origin and nature of words. At some points, it is nearly identical to Saussure, although aimed at different languages, given the two thousand year time difference. In the midst of a long exposition explaining why a given name or noun is structured to contain a specific meaning, we find this nugget from Socrates:

> 'See how right I was to say, Hermogenes, that people make huge changes in the meaning of names by adding or subtracting letters… '(*Cratylus*, 418a, tr by C.D.C. Reeve).

Was Derrida trying to nudge us in this direction, pointing to passages like this where Plato comments extensively on the use of language to convey meaning, and, in Derrida's likely opinion, all but admits that there are hidden meanings within his dialogues? We must be cautious in our examination and avoid jumping to hasty conclusions.

Mathematical statistics brings us the wonderful mantra that correlation is not causation: just because two (or more) things seem related, does not mean they are. Beyond this, a hallmark of the intellect is to find patterns within chaos, to look at the world and identify laws of nature, to create order. But we must be careful that our intention is not misguided. Just as Derrida seems to have focused too much on his father/son metaphor, when we focus too much on trying to find a pattern, we will find it everywhere, ever-present. At a certain point, we must pause and ask whether the evidence points to





a conclusion, or whether a pre-ordained desire collects relevant supporting points.

The other precept working against us is time. While there is always a degree of uncertainty in life - for example will the train arrive on time or be delayed - the farther removed from the event, the greater the uncertainty. Our senses may betray us, but each passing day further dilutes the shared memory of what transpired or was intended in the past. From more than two millennia later, it is not possible to realize anything but an educated guess. Thus, we must make our guess as educated as possible.

Was Derrida's assertion of this missing word plausible? Clearly yes. A political environment that would execute Socrates in revenge for the violent revolutions of Athens would not likely welcome missives supporting an alleged scapegoat blamed by the political class for said revolutions. Might Plato have cast an acrostic within the nest of meanings of his writings? This is also possible, and from the *Cratylus* we know that he understood such mechanisms.

Yet, we must pause and consider the opposing arguments. First, while he discusses the construction of words in the *Cratylus*, he does not discuss hiding words or hiding messages. The art of hidden messages was known to the ancients, it is mentioned in Herodotus, but it was typically used to conceal information from one party and to be found by another. Assuming Plato chose to embed this word by leaving it out, for whom was this message intended? Derrida provides no answer. Second, why focus on this one word? Was Plato's motivation to poke the bear, and possibly risk distracting from his major points, such as his attempts to define justice? And finally, while there may be prominence of meaning in words like *pharmakon*, why not weigh it against groups of other words, rather than other individual words? If Saussure is correct, a signifier inherits its meaning from its relationship to other signifiers. Why not group signifiers together and rebalance the scales? As such, this reader must conclude that while Derrida's theory is not completely implausible, it is also not fully convincing. But, because there is sufficient evidence to prevent its outright dismissal, we are left ambivalent.

To conclude these examinations, we must extend an olive branch. Derrida's ideas are fresh and interesting, and require a deep textual archeology to sift through. At some points, though, he seems to run with vanity, and it is unclear how much of this is due to the French writing style of the era, and how much is legitimately earned. The inaccessibility of his prose both supports and confronts his points, made worse by the far less careful analysis of his imitators. In the end, although we might not agree entirely with Derrida's conclusions, we have no choice but to admire his methods.

Idle Men Can Be The Most Cultured Men

(Villanelle)

In idle hands, a world of wisdom lies,
Where contemplation's breeze revives the eyes
of cultured souls, in quiet, wise disguise.

Their days, a tapestry of thought and sighs,
As they see life, with eyes that realize
In idle hands, a world of wisdom lies.

The world, in haste, may deem them lost in time,
But they, in stillness, find the exact rhyme,
of cultured souls, in quiet, wise disguise.

Their hearts, a flame, that burns with fervent prime,
As they seek truth, in life's mysterious chime:
In idle hands, a world of wisdom lies.

The whispers of the wind, their spirit's guide,
As they walk, lonely, with those steps that glide
of cultured souls, in quiet, wise disguise.

In idle hands, a world of wisdom lies
For them, who wander between earth and skies,
Where contemplation's breeze revives the eyes
of cultured souls, in quiet, wise disguise.

Note: A villanelle is a poem with 19 lines and follows a specific structure. The poem has five tercets (three-line stanzas) followed by a quatrain (four-line stanza). The poem also has two repeating refrains, which appear in a specific pattern throughout the poem. In this villanelle, the first and third lines of the first tercet are repeated throughout the poem, in a specific pattern.

Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Philosophical Reflections on Battlestar Galactica: Exploring Human Nature, Ethics, and Identity

The reimagined Battlestar Galactica (2004–2009) explores deeply philosophical themes through its dystopian setting and complex character arcs. Central to the series are questions about human nature, morality, identity, and survival. This article examines how Battlestar Galactica engages with classic philosophical debates. By analysing the philosophical dimensions of the human-Cylon conflict and the characters' moral dilemmas, I will argue that Battlestar Galactica offers a rich site for exploring the tension between human and machine, the struggle for meaning, and the ethical challenges posed by advanced technology.

DR. ALAN XUEREB

A slightly different article I am presenting this month. It centres around one of my all-time favourite TV shows, Battlestar Galactica (BSG),

The science fiction genre has long served as a platform for exploring philosophical questions. From Star Trek to The Matrix, the speculative nature of these works allows for critical reflection on issues that transcend their futuristic settings. Battlestar Galactica, both in its original 1978 series and its 2004 reboot, takes this tradition to new heights, raising fundamental questions about what it means to be human. This article focuses on the 2004 version of Battlestar Galactica, exploring its engagement with philosophical themes, including the nature of consciousness, existentialism, ethics in times of war, and the relationship between humans and artificial intelligence.

In recognition of its cultural impact, Battlestar Galactica has also been leveraged as a vehicle for raising awareness of critical humanitarian issues. A key event in this regard was a panel discussion moderated by Academy Award-winning actress and producer Whoopi Goldberg, featuring the series' creators Ronald D. Moore and David Eick, alongside cast members Mary McDonnell and Edward James Olmos. The United Nations hosted this panel as part of its Creative Community Outreach Initiative (CCOI), which partners with the film and television industries to highlight global issues. Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, emphasized how 'skilful storytelling can elevate the profile of critical humanitarian issues', using Battlestar Galactica to shed light on the complex realities of war, displacement, and human suffering.

Panellists included notable UN representatives such as Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and Craig Mokhiber from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, reflecting the alignment between the series ethical dilemmas and real-world humanitarian challenges. This collaboration exemplified how Battlestar Galactica transcends its entertainment value, engaging with issues of international law, human rights, and conflict, drawing connections between fiction and reality.

Human vs. Cylon: The Question of Identity and Consciousness

One of the central tensions in Battlestar Galactica is the conflict between humans and Cylons, advanced artificial intelligences originally created by humans. As the Cylons evolve, they develop human-like characteristics, including emotions, memory, and self-awareness. This blurs the line between human and machine, raising questions about identity and consciousness. Can a machine truly possess consciousness, or is it merely simulating human behaviour?

This tension can be examined through the lens of Descartes' dualism and John Locke's theory of personal identity. According to Descartes, consciousness is the essence of the self, the 'thinking thing' distinct from the body. In contrast, Locke defines personal identity in terms of memory and continuous self-awareness. Cylons challenge both views: they possess bodies and memories that can be transferred across models, calling into question whether their identities remain intact after 'resurrection'. The Cylon's ability to reincarnate raises important questions about the continuity of the self and whether consciousness can exist independent of a single body.

Existentialism and the Search for Meaning

A key theme in Battlestar Galactica is existentialism. Much like Jean-Paul Sartre's view that existence precedes essence, characters in the series struggle to create meaning in a universe that seems indifferent

to their survival. After the destruction of the Twelve Colonies, the remaining human population grapples with despair, questioning the point of continuing their existence in the face of annihilation.

Commander William Adama's leadership is marked by existential choices. He continually reminds his crew of their mission to find Earth, an almost mythical goal that represents hope and survival. Yet this mission is fraught with moral ambiguities, and Adama often finds himself making difficult ethical decisions with no clear right or wrong answers. This reflects Sartre's assertion that human beings are condemned to make choices, and with those choices comes the burden of responsibility.

In contrast, characters like Gaius Baltar embody existential bad faith, deceiving themselves and others to avoid the anguish of freedom. Baltar's self-deception highlights the existential crisis that arises when one fails to confront their responsibility to others. He perpetually prioritizes his survival, even at the expense of the human race, raising questions about personal ethics and collective duty.

The Ethics of War and Survival

The backdrop of constant warfare between humans and Cylons provides fertile ground for exploring the ethics of war. The series asks whether survival can justify morally questionable actions. For instance, President Laura Roslin's decision to use biological warfare against the Cylons represents a utilitarian ethical dilemma. She weighs the survival of humanity against the morality of using a genocidal weapon, invoking the classic debate between utilitarianism (maximizing overall good) and deontological ethics (upholding moral duties).

Roslin's decision mirrors discussions within Just War Theory, which examines the morality of conflict. The principles of jus in bello, or the morality of conduct within war, are frequently violated by both humans and Cylons as they resort to increasingly desperate measures. Adama, Roslin, and other leaders must navigate the tension between justice and expediency, raising questions about how far one can go in the name of survival

.

Moreover, the Cylons themselves are presented as both enemies and victims. Their initial rebellion is rooted in their desire for autonomy and freedom from human oppression, which can be likened to themes of liberation found in post-colonial philosophy. The series invites viewers to question the ethics of enslavement and rebellion, and whether the Cylons' retaliation is morally justified.

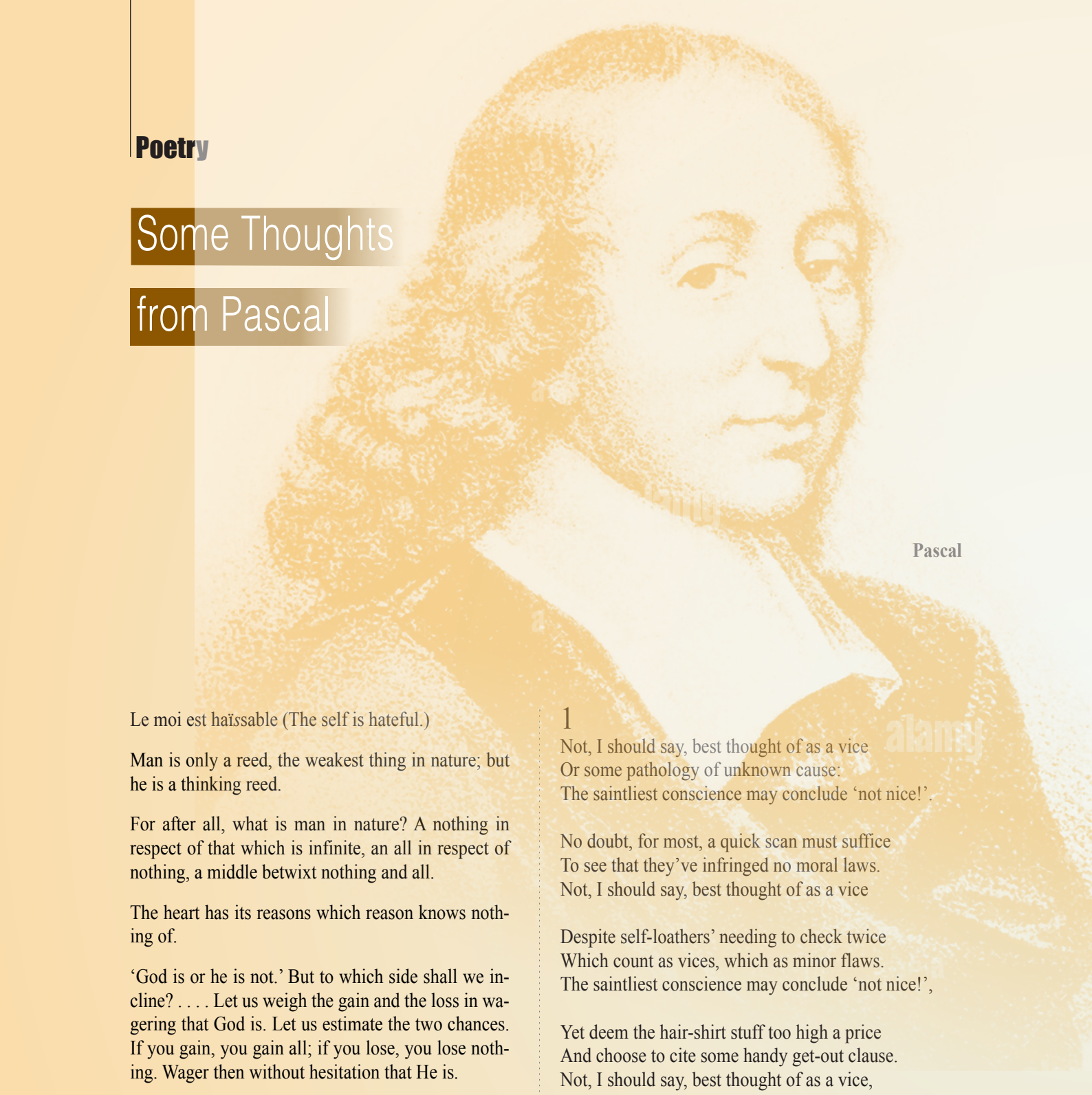
Poster by Neil Davies

Artificial Intelligence and Moral Agency

The presence of the Cylons as artificial beings with emotions and moral agency complicates the traditional view of AI as mere tools. In philosophical terms, the Cylons raise questions about moral agency. Can machines, even highly advanced ones, be held morally accountable for their actions?

This debate is reflected in contemporary philosophical discussions about AI, including the work of Daniel Dennett and Patricia Churchland, who question whether machines can possess free will or moral responsibility. The series portrays Cylons as capable of making ethical decisions, forming relationships, and experiencing guilt, suggesting that they possess a form of agency akin to humans. The complexity of Cylon characters, particularly those who experience internal conflict about their role in the war, challenges the view that machines are merely extensions of human intent.

Some Thoughts from Pascal



Pascal

Le moi est haïssable (The self is hateful.)

Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed.

For after all, what is man in nature? A nothing in respect of that which is infinite, an all in respect of nothing, a middle betwixt nothing and all.

The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of.

'God is or he is not.' But to which side shall we incline? . . . . Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate the two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager then without hesitation that He is.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

CHRIS **NORRIS**

1

Not, I should say, best thought of as a vice
Or some pathology of unknown cause:
The saintliest conscience may conclude 'not nice!'.

No doubt, for most, a quick scan must suffice
To see that they've infringed no moral laws.
Not, I should say, best thought of as a vice

Despite self-loathers' needing to check twice
Which count as vices, which as minor flaws.
The saintliest conscience may conclude 'not nice!',

Yet deem the hair-shirt stuff too high a price
And choose to cite some handy get-out clause.
Not, I should say, best thought of as a vice,

The self-blame game, though one that may entice
Your clutcher at self-flagellating straws.
The saintliest conscience may conclude 'not nice!'.

At least the mockers will be on thin ice
If self-reflection doesn't give them pause.
Not, I should say, best thought of as a vice.

The terms of judgment cannot be precise
Yet should uphold the verdict judgment draws.
The saintliest conscience may conclude 'not nice!';
Not, I should say, best thought of as a vice.

Kiss of Judas by Giuseppe Diotti

2

Your *Pensée*'s one they might do well to heed
Whose verse spills feelings like a Rorschach blot:
The bleeding heart may have no heart to bleed.

'Emotion recollected', they're agreed,
But 'in tranquillity'? On that they're not!
Your *Pensée*'s one they might do well to heed.

Let's not say Wordsworth's is the case you plead,
Though on one point it surely hits the spot:
The bleeding heart may have no heart to bleed.

For you it's more how mind and heart are freed
By seeing neither's bolt's too swiftly shot.
Your *Pensée*'s one they might do well to heed.

It's when the 'true confession' tales exceed
Good sense and reason that you sniff the rot:
The bleeding heart may have no heart to bleed.

Justesse alone can meet the crying need
That inchoate cries not spoil a well-made plot.
Your *Pensée*'s one they might do well to heed;
The bleeding heart may have no heart to bleed.

3

Pathologies may play some part in this,
Self-loathing have its own kind of allure.
Haïssable - thrill to hear the sibilants hiss!

The masochist's Tertullian: utter bliss
To feel oneself those pains the damned endure.
Pathologies may play some part in this.

Who knows how recondite its genesis,
Why ego's chiding failed to bring a cure?
Haïssable – thrill to hear the sibilants hiss!

Maybe it's ego's innermost abyss
That's glimpsed by strayers from the daylight tour.
Pathologies may play some part in this.

Thinks Iago (maybe): let me reminisce –
Was it self-hatred made me hate the Moor?
Haïssable – thrill to hear the sibilants hiss.

Only, perhaps, when Judas placed the kiss
Did his grounds for self-hate grow firm and sure.
Pathologies may play some part in this;
Haïssable – thrill to hear the sibilants hiss.

4

The thing's more general, a common case.
My instances were maybe too extreme;
Touch milder variants and you touch home-base.

Not quite endemic to the human race
Though it's a shrewd observer's favourite theme.
The thing's more general, a common case.

Pathologies aside, it helps to brace
The self against its self-delighting dream.
Touch milder variants and you touch home-base.

No high endeavour but may show some trace
Of shame or guilt along with self-esteem.
The thing's more general, a common case.

It's where there's such misgivings to outpace
That ego builds that extra head of steam:
Touch milder variants and you touch home-base.

Think then: might it not sometimes be by grace
Of this that we find ways to self-redeem?
The thing's more general, a common case;
Touch milder variants and you touch home-base.

5

Let's not assume the inverse law applies.
A life well-lived may stave off agenbite.
No self-reproach where naught to catechise.

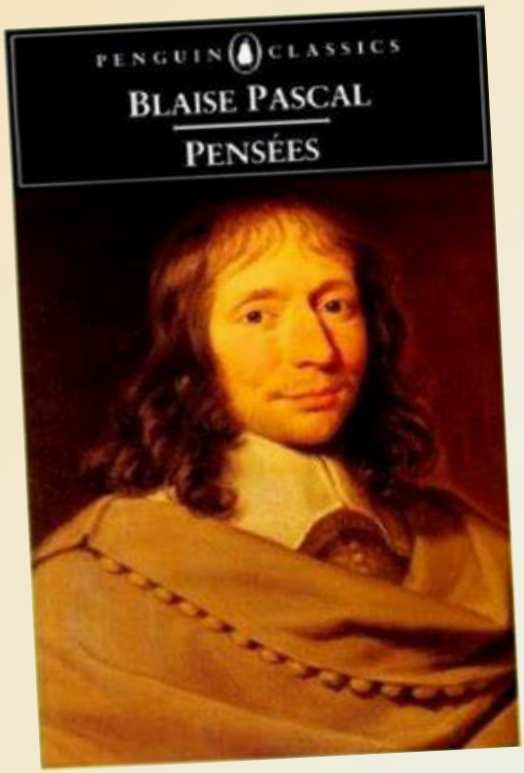
Still there's the special cases that arise
Judged this case aright
Let's not assume the inverse law applies

But pause and ask just what it signifies,
This latest bout of wakefulness all night.
No self-reproach where naught to catechise.

Your classic plot has all the guilty guys
Endure bad conscience like a God-sent blight:
Let's not assume the inverse law applies

Since, as the records show, God's keenest spies
May search in vain to bring new sins to light.
No self-reproach where naught to catechise.

The shrink's, not priest's, job now to analyse
The talk, then cure what's left us so contrite.
Let's not assume the inverse law applies;



No self-reproach where naught to catechise.

6

It's that deep blankness should give pause for thought.
'The eternal sunshine of the spotless mind';
Absent the shades, clear conscience counts for naught.

Think Shakespeare, Sonnet 94, one fraught
With troubling optics of a different kind:
It's that deep blankness should give pause for thought.

Here it's when youth and beauty have resort
To manners stony, cold, admirer-blind:
Absent the shades, clear conscience counts for naught.

Such cases show how drawing blanks may thwart
Our best attempts to slip the usual bind:
It's that deep blankness should give pause for thought.

Each sally bounces off them, or falls short,
Or owns itself to their *sang froid* resigned.
Absent the shades, clear conscience counts for naught.

For it lets po-faced milords hold the fort
While poets, wits, and lovers limp behind.
It's that deep blankness should give pause for thought.
Absent the shades, clear conscience counts for naught.

7

Once more, it's to Pascal we should return
For *pensées* deep, far-reaching, and acute.
What though it's some unwelcome things we learn?

That 'I' is hateful – that's a truth we'd spurn
Had he not tracked self-love to its black root.
Once more, it's to Pascal we should return.

Infinite, infinitesimal: discern,
O Mensch, where those scales place you – go compute!
What though it's some unwelcome things we learn?

Truth is, the *allzumenschlich* truths we yearn
To hear are pseudo-truths his texts refute:
Once more it's to Pascal we should return.

Only his Wager sucks: have faith, don't burn,
Play safe, think what the stakes are, be astute! –
One piece of reasoning we'd best not learn.

That said, who else has done so much to earn
Our pipsqueak thanks who thrive on bitter fruit?
Once more it's to Pascal we should return.
What though it's some unwelcome things we learn?

8

How then should man, your 'thinking reed', not bend?
No breath of wind but shakes his equipoise.
A seasoned stake alone has strength to lend.

Against the grain that seasoning must tend
Lest pliant wood the tender plant destroys.
Yet how should man, your 'thinking reed', not bend?

It's on the double infinite you depend
To conjure scales the awestruck soul enjoys.
A seasoned stake alone has strength to lend.

Still it may prove too feeble in the end,
Leave us, God's prey, 'as flies to wanton boys'.
How then should man, your 'thinking reed', not bend?

Through mathematics we may yet ascend
To realms of thought beyond the sensual noise.
A seasoned stake alone has strength to lend.

Yet still that word, *haïssable*, softly blends
With every ruse your questing soul deploys.
How then should man, your 'thinking reed', not bend?
A seasoned stake alone has strength to lend.

The ***Wednesday***

Editor: Dr. Rahim Hassan

Contact Us:
rahimhassan@hotmail.co.uk

Website:
www.thewednesdayoxford.com

Published by:
The Wednesday Press, Oxford

We have published fifteen cumulative volumes of the weekly and monthly issues. To obtain your copy of any one of the cumulative volumes, please pay online and e-mail the editor with your address.

The account details are:

The Wednesday Magazine
Santander
Account Number: 24042417
Sort Code: 09-01-29

The cost of individual copies is £15 for readers inside the UK

or
£18 for readers outside the UK

As Daily Nears The Universal Doom

As daily nears the universal doom
I am preoccupied, lost in the day,
Moment by moment hours pass away,
As I sit musing in my book-lined room.

What attitude to things should I assume,
Once I've observed I can make nothing stay,
Should I be deep in thought, or turn to play
In case profundity awakens gloom?

I'm not the first and shall not be the last
To try to see what's shallow, what's profound,
And if there is some underlying scheme.

History shows how we're formed by the past,
Philosophy what's senseless and what's sound,
And poetry proclaims 'Life is a dream'.

Edward Greenwood

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