

Foreword

Invitation to the Banquet

With the printing of this volume of *The Wednesday* books, I feel the magazine has come a long way from its humble experimental issue some eight years ago. I also feel that each Wednesday meeting, monthly magazine and the subsequent books are invitations to a banquet of a special kind. It is a banquet of both wisdom and wise people. The interest and participation of the guests is beyond worldly pleasures. One could argue that philosophy started at a banquet, based on the evidence of Plato's dialogues, especially the *Symposium*.

The topic of banquet and philosophy was discussed by Kant in his remarkable book *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Kant makes a distinction between good living, such as the enjoyment of food and drinks - or sociability - and virtue. The enjoyment of good living is important for the embodied person, with all his predilections, but virtue is spiritual and concerns the human's higher interests.

Kant does not shy away from the details of the banquet. He suggests that it should be of a manageable size - ten is a good number. He seems to follow the advice of the 4th Earl of Chesterfield who says that the company must not number fewer than the *graces* or more than the *muses*. The Greek graces must have been taken as three, and the muses nine. Chesterfield thought that every overly large dinner party was vulgar. Kant thought a large party interferes with the flow of conversation and divides the group into small separate conversations. I think this argues in favour of our weekly meeting with its limited number, who are involved in the highly intellectual discussion.

Kant warned the philosopher against having a solitary meal. 'The *savouring* human being who weakens himself in thought during his solitary meal gradually loses his sprightliness', he said. On the other hand, Kant added, 'he would have gained if a table companion with alternative ideas had offered stimulation through new material which he himself had not been able to track down'. This is relevant to a question I always think about: is creativity a lonely task or is it communal, as the German Romantics suggested with their idea of *Symphilosophie*?

Readers of this volume are invited to inspect our weekly banquets through reading this volume. I hope that they will enjoy them as the group members do. Thank you for your interest in *The Wednesday* and your continued support.

The Editor