

The Wednesday

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Editorial

Death and the Philosopher

There was recently a report in one of the British newspapers with a strange title: ‘UK libraries become “death positive” with books and art on dying’. There is apparently a scheme that has been in existence since 2018 to highlight the subject of death through ‘reading groups, author talks, film screenings, art installations and “death cafes” where people can meet for conversation,’ as *The Guardian* reported.

Death is a reminder of the finitude of human beings. It comes to them as something they suffer, and it raises the question of the meaning of such a suffering. Nietzsche once wrote that it is not suffering as such that is worrying to humans but the lack of meaning to their suffering (*On The Genealogy of Morality*, Essay II, paragraph 7) In former times theology gave meaning to life, death and suffering. But with disenchantment and turning away from myths and religion, individuals are left with the sheer facts of suffering and death.

In Camus’ novel *The Plague*, there are two short chapters on the reaction of the scientist and the priest to the plague. The first is concerned with the facts and looking for a scientific solution. The journalist in the novel tells the doctor: ‘You can’t understand. You’re using the language of reason, not of the heart, you live in a world of...abstraction’. The priest on the other hand takes the opportunity to moralise on sin and punishment. This is a classic case of a Nietzschean analysis of priestly power by which suffering is changed into guilt and internalised as guilt.

If neither the scientific nor the priestly answers to death were viable, what would the philosopher’s contribution be? Philosophers, since the early days of philosophy, have taken an interest in discussing death. A clear example is that of Socrates, who did not only argue for the immortality of the soul in the

Phaedo dialogue, but made his students witness his own death. Generations of philosophers supported this position, most notably, Leibniz and Kant. Leibniz’s monads are immortals, and Kant thought the soul to be immortal on moral grounds.

With the rise of materialist, reductionist philosophy, the religious answer was rejected or ignored. But what came in its place? Schopenhauer thought the survival of the species was more important than the death of the individual. This a naturalistic view – nature sacrifices the individual for the sake of life in general. But there is a more sophisticated version of this view which sees death in terms of the projects that individuals carry on with in their lives. If death is the possibility that ends all possibilities, as Heidegger said, in the project view, these possibilities will carry on in the lives of others. But the crucial question is: What does that mean to me, as an individual? Is this a satisfying answer for a person who is facing death?

Without rejecting this view totally, I would say that each individual has his or her own perspective on the world. This is a complex world of projects and possibilities that may or may not be shared with others. When the individual dies, this particular world dies, and the projects and possibilities will not be available to others. How would I feel if all my struggles and thoughts, loves and conflicts – especially the struggles and sufferings of both myself and other human beings - had no value in human life as a whole and in the mysterious greater scheme of things?

What I want to point out is that the project view is an objective view, and so it does not allow for the subjective side. There is a gap in this analysis. The gap is: How would it feel to the individual on the personal, subjective level? Perhaps, philosophers could say more on the meaning of death.

The Editor

The Thought Of Georg Simmel

Georg Simmel was both a philosopher and a sociologist. In his work as a sociologist, he was very interested in the philosophy of sociology, but here I will concentrate on his work as a philosopher. Simmel is a great thinker, but I am not sure how widely his work is appreciated. This is because he transcended specialization.

EDWARD GREENWOOD

Part I

The two works to consult and which I shall be discussing are the Harper Torchbook *Essays On Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics* edited by Kurt H Wolff published in 1959 and *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* a Free Press paperback published by Macmillan in 1950, also edited by Kurt Wolff. This contains several essays on Simmel by various hands and eight of his own essays. In part one I shall concentrate on the essay 'On the Nature of Philosophy'. It is interesting to compare this essay with Friedrich Waismann's essay 'How I See Philosophy'. Both men emphasize the visionary as opposed to the argumentative side of philosophy.

Simmel's point of entry into the subject is his claim that the 'fundamental effort' of philosophy is 'to think without presuppositions'. He concedes that such an effort cannot be completely successful. However, it does involve a sort of Cartesian *epoché* or suspension of *doxa* or doctrines as its starting point. Different philosophers have different aims. Epicurus' aim is pleasure, Schopenhauer's is to go beyond the Idea to the Will, for the Middle Ages philosophy was the handmaid of theology, for Kant the aim was the critical reflection of reason on itself. But each philosopher raises the problem in a way which suits the answer he or she intends to give. There is throughout a personal character to the quest, but this does not mean that an investigation into the personal psychology of the philosopher is the solution. That would take us out of philosophy into empirical humanistic science. The philosopher converts intuitions into concepts and connections. But the philosopher tries to relate the problems 'to the totality of being'. For Kant 'whatever does not conform to the conditions of space and time is not real'. Moreover, there is a subjectivity in philosophical theories 'in contrast to the objectivity of exact knowledge, empirical or mathematical'.



Edward Greenwood

Philosophical worldviews (as Dilthey had recognized) have a typicality which shows that individual eccentricities and idiosyncrasies are transcended. Simmel writes: 'There must therefore be a third something in man, beyond his individual subjectivity and the logical, objective thinking which is universally convincing. And this third something must be the soil in which philosophy takes root. Indeed, the existence of philosophy demands as its presupposition that there be such a third thing.' There are 'typical mentalities'. He continues: 'A feeling in us distinguishes, often with great instinctive sureness, between those convictions and dispositions which we recognize as purely personal and subjective and those which we believe to be shared by some - or perhaps all - other men. To be sure we could not cite any objective evidence for this phenomenon, but it seems as if something universal spoke in us, as if this thought or that sensation emerged from a more universal foundation in us which justifies its own content'. Simmel recognizes a parallel with art here, and those among us who are poets will see there is often an affinity between philosophical and poetic vision.

The great literary critic F. R. Leavis saw literary criticism as also needing the idea of a 'third realm' in his famous exchange with C P Snow over the two cultures of science and literature. It is often assumed that Snow won hands down because he was shamefully supported by much of the intellectual establishment of the time. But Snow evinces the assumption of what might be called 'the shallow Enlightenment' (there is a 'deep' one) that is he held 'the fatal assumption that science makes man wise, that it is destined to create a genuine and contented humanity that is the master of its fate'. On page 98 of his book *Nor Shall My Sword* Leavis wrote 'The literary-critical judgment as the type of all judgments and valuations belongs to what in my unphilosophical way I've fallen into the habit of calling the 'third realm' the collaboratively created human world, the realm of what is neither public in the sense of belonging to science (it cannot be weighed or tripped over or brought into the laboratory or pointed to) *nor* merely private and personal (consider the nature of a language, of the language we can't do without, and literature is a manifestation of language'. Leavis says that the university should be such a 'third realm' 'a real and vital centre of consciousness'.

Simmel goes on to make the following important observation on page 296: 'Philosophy should not be conceived as psychological confession or autobiography, for then it would have an object'. It could then be turned over to a humanistic science such as psychology for investigation and that investigation would not be a philosophical one. Of course, personal and psychological elements may enter a philosophy, but they are transcended in the philosophical activity which concerns itself with typicality. The 'type' may still be of interest even if we do not share the philosopher's view. This is why Socrates, Plato and Spinoza are never 'outmoded', so to speak, and are and will remain of continuing concern.

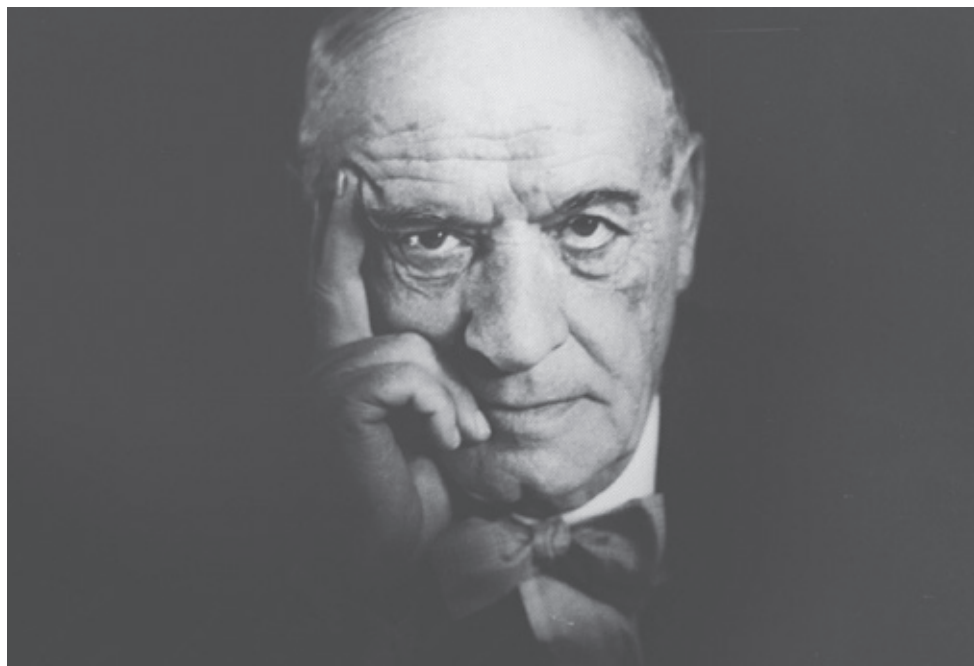
What should be said of Simmel himself as a philosopher? The main thing to say is that he is primarily a humanist philosopher of social life as it is led in the modern metropolis. This is a life dominated, as we shall see when we come to consider his sociology, by money. Money has enhanced individualism, though of course it has



Georg Simmel

not eliminated associations such as the family or club. Simmel, unlike Marx, does not see one factor, the economy say, as all determining. Very important to philosophy is his emphasis on the fact that the complex industrial and commercial specialization of modern society, combined with the loss of the Christian conviction that life has an overriding purpose, salvation, has led to the demand for some overarching single meaning to be given to our diverse efforts. For intellectuals this can lead to a turn to philosophy for an answer. For the masses it can lead to the capitulation to a charismatic leader who preaches a single purpose.

The two philosophers with whom he has the most affinity because of their primary concern with human and psychological problems rather than metaphysical ones are Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. In 1907 he brought out a monograph on both entitled *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* which was published in an English translation in 1961 reprinted by the University of Illinois Press in 1991. I discussed this book in issue 126 of *The Wednesday* (December 18th 2019). I will only repeat the two main observations. The first is that Simmel prefers Schopenhauer on the grounds that Schopenhauer is the more metaphysical, while Nietzsche confines



Ortega y Gasset

himself to the discussion of values and morality. I would reverse the judgment in Nietzsche's favour, for I think Nietzsche is right to see metaphysics as the offspring of religion rather than the reverse, and as such to be dispensed with. The second is that Simmel completely misinterprets Nietzsche's striking remark in the second book of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* that 'if there were gods how could I bear not to be a god! Therefore, there are no gods.' He completely inverts what Nietzsche actually says and claims that this shows that Nietzsche wanted to be God. But Nietzsche was the complete reverse of the mad Kirilov in Dostoevsky's *The Devils* who believed that if he shot himself during the momentary ecstasy of an epileptic fit he would indeed become God.

I want to conclude this essay on Simmel as a philosopher by considering his unusual interest for a philosopher in the subject of sexuality, a topic which he recognizes is in his time pushed aside as a topic of general open discussion. Here the book to consider is *Georg Simmel: On Women, Sexuality and Love*, Translated, edited and with an introduction by Guy Oakes, Yale University Press (1984). What other serious philosopher (I do not count Roland Barthes as one) has written on the subject of flirtation for example? In the essay 'On Love (A Fragment)' Simmel himself observes how few philosophers have written on what he calls 'the erotic problem'. He writes: 'Apart from individual exceptions, the discussions in the *Phaedrus* and

the *Symposium* and the extremely one-sided reflections of Schopenhauer are all that the great thinkers have contributed to this problem'. We might now add Ortega y Gasset. Simmel links love to both metaphysics and to religion (page 161-164). He writes: 'It is as if love came from its object, whereas in reality it proceeds to it'.

Sensuality is involved in genuine love (page 169). Love's focal point lies not in some external aim such as procreation but in love itself, love for its own sake (page 171). But there is something tragic about love. Simmel writes: 'Perhaps tragedy already lies in the pure autonomy of love. This is because there is a contradiction between the irredeemable immanence of emotion in its bearer and the embrace of the other, between withdrawal into the self and the desire for fusion, a contradiction in the process between the I and the Thou, which even this ultimate instance cannot secure from continual resumption' (page 172). Love is not something that can be 'earned'. Simmel continues: 'Nevertheless, everything unearned that we receive from another person is somehow oppressive, even if it is a blessing and a delight'.

The last observation is worthy of La Rochefoucauld. Only a man who has loved deeply as well as thought deeply could have written such things.

(This is part one of Edward Greenwood's talk to *The Wednesday* meeting 8th September 2021).

In the Gym

Now that you're down,
can you turn? Try rolling over.
You're upside down,
but both shoulders and toes
ought to hold onto balance -
after all, your head's not sure
of anything.

Crimped like a dead spider,
crushed where a foot stamped,
clamped in the stocks,
fiddlehead, F-Clef,
strung out on the senses!
Count up to ten, and then
see if you can

get out of this
without breaking your neck.

Erica Warburton



Reports of The Wednesday Meetings Held During September 2021

Written by RAHIM HASSAN

Altruism: The Scientific View

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 1st September.

Philosophers love to discuss egoism and altruism in their own *a priori* conceptual analysis. But what does science say about it? *The Wednesday* meeting invited the biologist Tim Schuurman to give a talk on ‘Altruism from a biological perspective’. The talk provided a deep insight into how to understand what is involved in altruism at the fundamental level. The question is whether it has supplemented or supplanted the philosophical view. But first one has to listen to what Tim talked about.

Tim defined altruism as: ‘a behaviour that results in a benefit to others at a cost to oneself’. This is incompatible with naturalism and egoism because there is no apparent motive for the agent to be involved in such a behaviour.

Tim went on to define what he means by ‘benefit’ and ‘cost’ from a biological perspective. He said that these could only be measured by ‘reproductive success’. Reproductive success refers to the number of offsprings generated by the individual. So, a person with many offspring has high reproductive success. Altruism will appear as a sacrifice of reproductive success and hence, it will lead to the demise of the agent’s lineage in

the long run. If one accepts this, then altruism seems incompatible with Darwin’s theory of natural selection.

Tim denied that such altruism exists or could exist. Some form of altruism might exist but only as apparent altruism. Such altruism is not what it appears to be when subjected to biological criteria and so would appear as indirect benefit to the agent. Biology is concerned with all of life, which means that it is also concerned with the phenomena occurring behind any particular behaviour. However, in terms of evolution this is much less relevant. So, altruism is not possible according to the theory of natural selection. Tim backed this thesis with mathematical modelling which shows that benefit will extend to kin and beyond them. A question was raised as to how to quantify the coefficient in his equations since it depended on many factors. Tim short answer was that the decisive factor is the proportion of genes shared.

But how about motivation if the issue to be considered in the context of society? Tim mentioned that the study of animals shows that a herd can develop rules for benefiting each other. And any member that does not conform to the rule will be forced out. So there is room for altruism through enforcement of rules with rewards and punishment. This could modify behaviour but still within the limits imposed by biology. Tim also referred to a distinction between ultimate causes of behaviour and proximal ones. It is the latter that includes the personal or psychological reasons. This seems to abate the concern of philosophers and bridge the gap of explaining our intuitive feeling of altruism. But even these rely on the ultimate causes which are biological, according to Tim.

There was a worry in the discussion about the possibility of applying scientific, quantifiable methods to human life. Agents seem to value many factors and look for meaning in actions that are not quantifiable. This maybe the case from a philosophical point of view but science looks for objective factors and turns even psychological content (intentions, beliefs, and desires) into probabilistic quantities. Perhaps one can deny that success is measured by ‘reproductive success’ but then one has to deal with natural selection and its consequences, which might be a debate for another day.



Tim Schuurman

The Mystical Thought of Ibn 'Arabi

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 22nd September.

Michael Cohen was invited by *The Wednesday* meeting to give a talk on the thoughts of the Andalusian mystic Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240). The presentation touched on some of the main themes in the writing and teaching of Ibn 'Arabi.

Ibn 'Arabi. He was born in Murcia, Spain, and died in Damascus, having travelled and taught extensively in his life throughout the Middle East. The number of books and manuscripts he left is voluminous, and much of his work has been preserved to the present day. It is not surprising that he set the foundation for much later mystical writing in the Muslim world and beyond.

Michael pointed out that Ibn 'Arabi used different literary modes in his writings, including poetry, anecdotes, and something closer to philosophical discourse. He also mentioned that in the last fifty years there has been a tremendous growth of interest in Ibn 'Arabi's work in the West, with many new translations, journals, and studies. Ibn 'Arabi's writings cover a wide range of subjects, from ontology and epistemology to eschatology, all predicated on the 'Unity of Being'. This theme was expressed throughout his writing and poetry, such as *Revelations in Mecca*, and *Bezels of Wisdom*. Michael explained that the Unity of Being is the view that there is only One Reality, which may be called God. This Reality manifests Itself to Itself in the creation. The whole manifested creation has no independent existence. It is the exteriorization of

this One Reality, which in a sense is both Interior and Exterior.

Michael also said that for Ibn 'Arabi, time has only relative existence. At every instant the cosmos returns to God and is remanifested; the revealing of the manifestation is perpetual. The One Reality is therefore both transcendent and immanent.

The manifestation takes place via five ontological presences (or levels). God in Himself is the first presence, followed by the presence of first determinations. These include what Ibn 'Arabi calls the 'Fixed Entities'. Michael said these are pure potentialities. Everything in the lower presences are the reflections or manifestations of possibilities inherent in the fixed entities. The third presence is the Imaginal level. Ibn 'Arabi takes it that the Imaginal world is the mediating ontological level between the world of meaning and the sensible world. The fourth presence is the manifested universe of things and creatures. The fifth presence is the Perfect Human. This presence reflects all the universe and the True Reality. The Perfect Human has been described by Ibn 'Arabi as a 'Mercy to the Universes'. He is the mirror where God sees Himself and reflects Himself perfectly. Michael thought that for most of us, the Perfect Human is only a potentiality. Nonetheless our specifically human attributes (self-consciousness, speculative thought, technology, agriculture...) are reflections in the created order of this potentiality. Ibn 'Arabi believed that different religions and beliefs are different perspectives of the One Reality. A realised person, reaching the highest point of mysticism, is beyond all perspectives. That is why Ibn 'Arabi says in one of his poems in his collection *Tarjuman al Aswaq* (Interpreter of Desires):

'My heart has become capable of every form; it is a pasture for gazelles and a convent for Christian monks, And a temple for idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba and the tables of the Tora and the book of the Koran. I follow the religion of Love: whatever way Love's camels take, that is my religion and my faith'.

Michael finished the talk by discussing the first chapter of the *Fusus al-Hikam*. This chapter deals with the creation of the first human, Adam and his relation to God and the world as a representative of God in the world. The talk was welcomed by the group and there was interest in further talks on these and other aspects of Ibn 'Arabi's thinking.



Michael Cohen

Confucian Influence on Japanese Society

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 29th September.

Members of *The Wednesday* meeting were treated to a rare insight into Japanese society and the norms that govern its practices in everyday life and business. Dr. Orie Miyazawa presented an excellent paper on 'Confucian Teachings and Power in the Edo Era (1603 – 1868) of Japan'. Orie is a lecturer at Kent University Business School, UK. Her main concern in this paper was the introduction, use and abuse of Confucianism to install discipline and establish an order of power during this period and its continuation to present day. She relied in her analysis on Foucault's ideas about power and discipline. The aim is to show how traditional social values have impacted Japanese society. The idea of the internalisation of norms and self-discipline explains how Japanese society came to be what it is now. Discipline is not imposed directly from outside, through a boss or someone in authority, but through self-discipline and established norms.

Confucius was a 6th century BC Chinese sage, socio-political philosopher, and teacher of religion and ethics. His aim was to create harmony and install piety, loyalty and obedience. The teachings of Confucianism became known in Japan in the 6th century AD, more than a thousand years after its appearance in China. It was also mixed with other teachings in the twelfth century. It only became a state philosophy and a source of power during the Edo era at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It went through another modification during the twentieth century and was influenced by Xiong

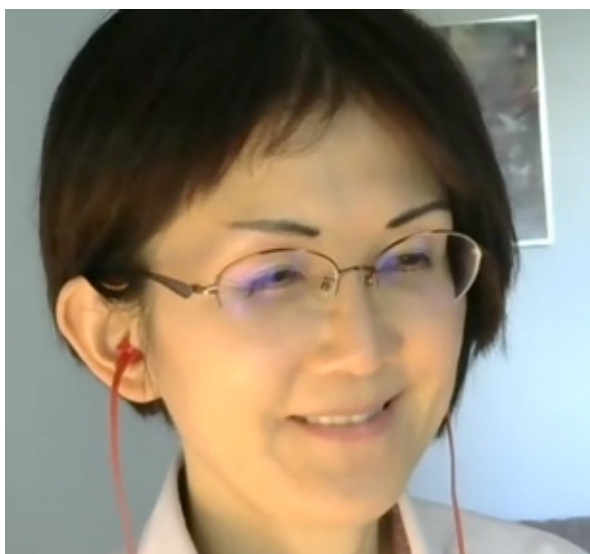
Shili and Feng Youlan at the beginning of that century, and recently by the Chinese philosopher Tu Weiming.

Western philosophers find Confucianism strange or unphilosophical because it does not engage in traditional philosophical problems that were raised in the west. Philosophy in the western tradition was concerned with epistemology while Confucianism is mostly concerned with the adjustment of the individual to his society and environment. At least this is how Habermas saw the comparison. Weber saw it as not interested in logic, another main interest in the western experience, but saw in it a great interest of this world, property and ethics.

The Edo government in the seventeenth century saw the advantage of using Confucianism to restore order and discipline in Japanese society after a long turbulent time and civil wars. As Orie put it: 'using Confucian teachings, the Edo government legitimised social hierarchy and a virtuous work ethos which became the foundation of stable society'. This resulted in a society where people respected social hierarchy, and their own social position. A very conservative idea. If you don't follow this moral discipline, you are then subjected to shame. Orie mentioned how important this practice is for business. It also became important for self-discipline during the Covid pandemic. People followed the correct procedure without being told to do so or policed by the authorities.

It is also interesting to notice how Confucianism affected the merchant class and their practices. The philosopher Baigan Ishida (1685 – 1744) taught them to conduct their work ethically and pragmatically, to have a fair amount of profit, integrity and loyalty. The *Kakun*, or Family Law and Business Practices rule book from the Edo era, teaches that you should be honest, work hard, be patient and self-disciplined, be collaborative, devote yourself to your bosses, learn arithmetic and writing to improve your business, look after your physical health and business health. The employees were treated as family members.

Confucianism seems to have shaped Japanese society, its ethics, worldview and business. Its idea of obedience and self-discipline has implications for the family, society and government. This goes a long way towards understanding Japan and its place in the world.



Orie Miyazawa

A Defence of Solipsism

Notes of The Wednesday Meeting Held on 18th August.

On Wednesday 15th September Ruud Schuurman gave a second talk on solipsism. In his first talk he argued that it is the view that only the self *is* (from Latin *solus*, 'alone' and *ipse*, 'self'), or only *I am*, and that there is nothing wrong with solipsism: The idea that only the self *is*, that only *I am*, is neither meaningless nonsense, as demonstrated by the opposition it faces and the endless attempts to refute it, nor obviously false, because:

- I cannot doubt that I am. / I can be certain that I am, and
- I can doubt that anything else is. / I cannot be certain that anything else is.

He readily accepted that solipsism seems at odds with lived experience, but so is science, so that in itself, is hardly a reason to dismiss solipsism. He suggested that solipsism is not ridiculed for any of the above, but it is unacceptable, because we fear the implications. Such fear is uncalled for because whether we accept solipsism or not, life will go on as usual.

In his second talk, he went on to explain why we may want to accept solipsism or, at least, consider accepting solipsism. He gave a very bold reason. According to Ruud, solipsism sets us free from all problems! Of course, he realized that this is an immense claim and that it needed to be argued for, which he did. Ruud started off by arguing that all of our problems are problems of the human being. For example, aging, illness, and death. He then went on to argue that we cannot be anything that appears to us. That the very act of perceiving shows that we are not what we perceive. Thus, we can neither be computers, nor hands, nor bodies, nor thoughts, nor feelings, nor intentions. In fact, we simply cannot be the human being, the empirical self, the biological organism. To summarize his argument:

- All problems are problems of the human being.
- Solipsism sets us free from (the identification with) the human being.
- Thus, solipsism sets us free from all problems.



Ruud Schuurman

He also explained solipsism further. Since solipsism is the view that only the self *is*, the crux to understanding solipsism is to Know Thyself, that is, to know that:

[-] You are not anything that appears to you: you are not the human being.

[+] You are that which all else appears to: the capacity to be conscious, consciousness.

According to Ruud, this allows us to simply watch our lives happens spontaneously and effortlessly: without the stress, the frenzy, the pain; without the illusion of being the human being or anything else in life; without the illusion of being in control of the human being, its actions, and the outcome of those actions; without the illusion of being responsible; without the illusion of being able to make mistakes, without the illusion of guilt, shame, and blame.

The talk itself took only half an hour, but the discussion easily filled the remaining hour and a half. One overriding objection was that Ruud presupposes that just because something appears, there must be something it appears to. Another important objection is that Ruud seems to presuppose that we cannot be conscious of our self. Unfortunately, time did not allow us to address these objections.

(This report was written by Ruud Schuurman)

Seneca's Prayer to the Great Spirit

Great Spirit, prevent my evil intentions.

See, I raise my pure hands to heaven
and let my mind float over all coincidences.

Grant me insight to learn from nature
to heal myself and others
and overcome evil.

Unleash my exalted mind
from my mortal body
and reveal your hidden secrets

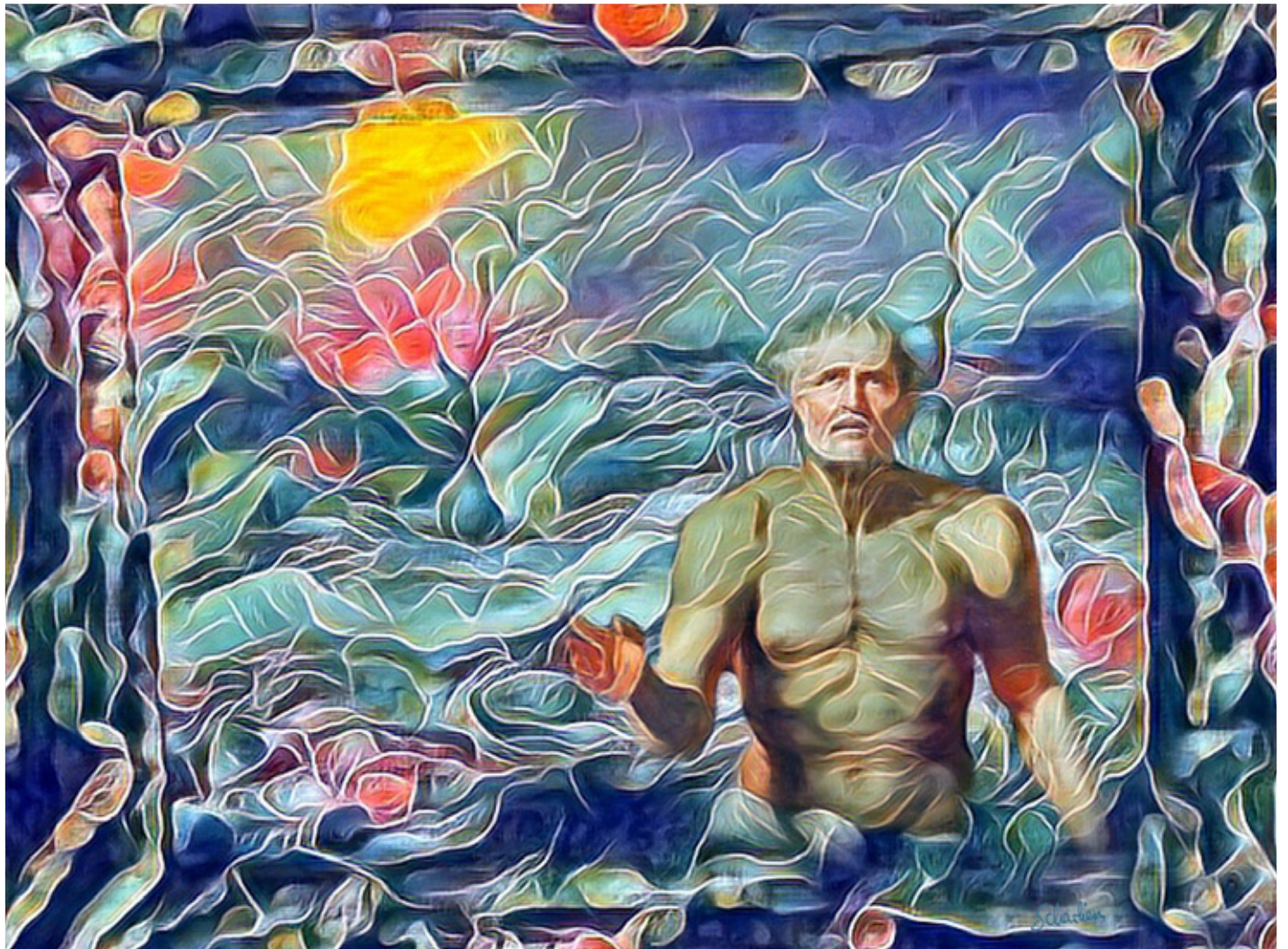
so that I can get closer to You, Great Spirit...

intramundane

Seneca's God is in all things natural

"quisquis formator universi fuit sive ille Deus est portens omnium, sive incorporalis ratio, ingentium operum artifex, sive divinus spiritus, per omnia, maxima, minima, aequali intentione diffusus".

Whoever created the universe - whether God Almighty, incorporeal Reason, or the Divine Spirit - is diffused equally through all things, the greatest and the least.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Monad



CHRIS NORRIS

If society, as a contemporary theory teaches, is really one of rackets, then its most faithful model is the precise opposite of the collective, namely the individual as monad... The enraged man always appears as the gang-leader of his own self, giving his unconscious the order to pull no punches, his eyes shining with the satisfaction of speaking for the many that he himself is.

T.W. Adorno,
Plurale Tantum, in Minima Moralia.

1

Each his own strife-torn monad, robber-band
Turned feral, microcosmic state of war,
And all the rival weaponries once manned
By armies now become the inner store
Of each, the arms-dump where *esprit de corps*
Gives way to psychic conflicts, where the rage
Of nations lingers as a muffled roar
And news of peace does nothing to assuage
The beasts still pacing in their mental cage.

It's what results from crossing your Ayn Rand
With Thomas Hobbes, the old desire to score
Off everyone, to grab their bit of land,
Or house, or spouse, and when you've wiped the floor
With them let conscience nag, seek out some sore
Spot hitherto repressed, and start to wage
Your private feud behind the tight-shut door
That keeps such shock-reports off the front page
Till public interest next moves on a stage.

You thought you had the whole thing nicely planned,
You masters of the universe, but your
Now queasy state may help you understand
Just how it works, the process you deplore
(Keep Marx and Freud locked in your bottom drawer!),
Since that's the social-psychic microphage
That ravens onward like a tidal bore,
The horror-show renewed from age to age
Of deadlocked mastery and victimage.

2

Think Leibniz: how the monads replicate,
Within themselves, the whole abysmal scene
Played out as capital in this its late,
Most predatory form makes war between
The nations just a backdrop to the spleen,
Resentment, dark suspicion, mutual fear
And atavistic drives that now convene
On every psychic battleground and steer
Each monad's armies in their microsphere.

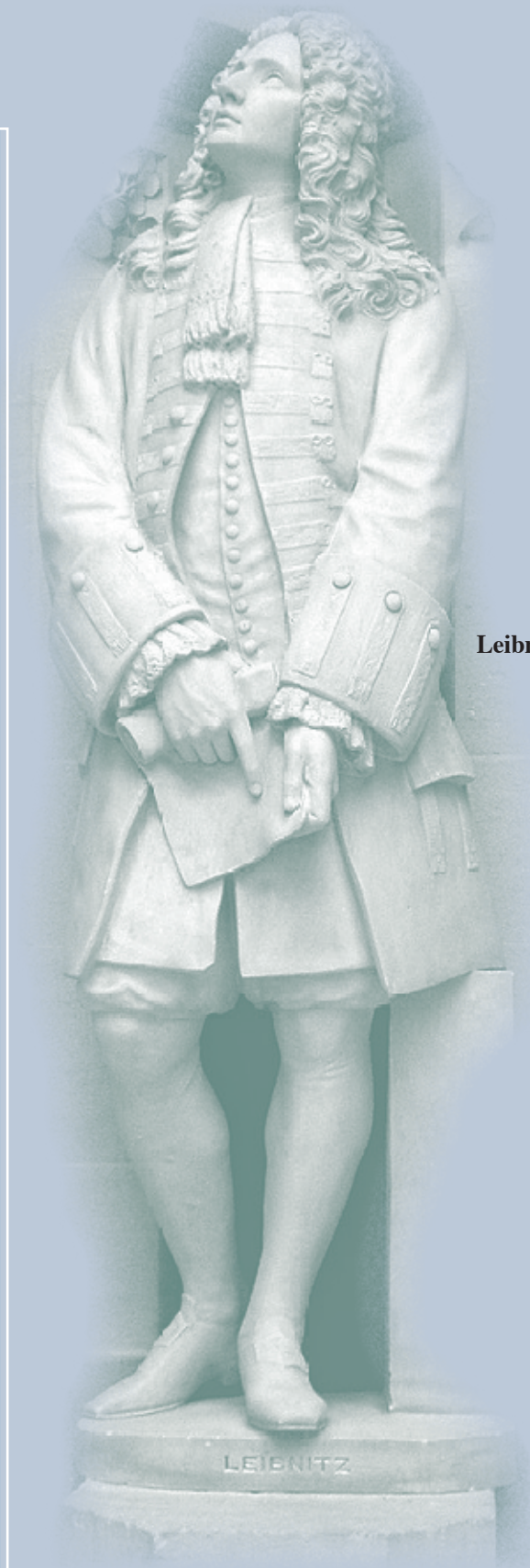
That's why armed conflicts soon accelerate,
How Id's raw products feed the war-machine,
And Ego labours overtime to sate
The vices stoked by its forced quarantine,
Its *saison en enfer* behind the screen
Upon whose glassy surfaces appear,
All interwoven, the monads passing clean
Through bandit-country where the last frontier
Subsumes embattled fiefdoms far and near.

3

Their usual trick, the demagogues – to make-
Believe they speak up for the multitude,
The populace, the many for whose sake
These tribunes of the people have pursued
A doubly noble path, one that eschewed
Self-interest while it led them to embrace
(Just hear the rage, the hate, the ugly mood!)
What every friend of freedom's sure to face:
A hero's doomed last stand or fall from grace.

Just listen and you'll quickly spot the fake
Heroics, the remorseless inner feud
Of voices, soapbox ranters out to take
Their psychic chance, sub-vocalisers cued
To join the mob cacophony renewed
Each time he accesses that inner space,
That pandemonium where he can brood
On past defeats, rehearse the devil's case,
And call them up, his scattered demon-base.

It's how the Nazis got their biggest break,
How Hitler had the eager masses glued
To his crazed oratory. They had their stake
In every raucous speech-harmonic screwed
A fraction higher, every hate-vibe spewed
As Id broke bad and Ego failed to brace
Against the swirling mass, the instincts skewed
By mind's death-driven impulse to keep pace
With each new stage in its extinction-race.



Leibniz

Philosophy of Food

Dr ALAN XUEREB

I have to admit, I love cooking and I love eating. Nevertheless, if you think that this is merely a daily Epicurean activity, think again! - Bertrand Russell once declared: 'As soon as we begin to philosophize, [...], we find, [...], that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given.'

Russell's assertion is echoed by philosophy professor Andrea Borghini when he asserts that a good philosophical question can arise from anywhere. Did you ever think, for example, that sitting down to dinner might serve as a good introduction to philosophical thinking? Philosophy of food reflects on the ethical, artistic, linguistic, social, political, identity-defining aspects of food. The social and the political issues, naturally, overlap with identity issues.

Ethical

From an ethical point of view, one may mention Peter Singer. His book *Animal Liberation* was a philosophical bombshell making people change what they ate.

Artistic

Food is of course very intuitively a need. However, over the centuries it has developed into a proper art. So, there is of course an aesthetic philosophical depth to food which deserves an article on its own.

Linguistic

The history of food is replete with cross-cultural influences. Indeed, food is a sort of cultural showcase. Consider sushi and pizza. Food and language have a symbiotic relationship. Language itself has been enriched through food. Take the English language for example. After the Norman invasion of England in 1066 many of the more refined Anglo-Saxon words describing food products were replaced with terms, borrowed from Anglo-Norman (such as 'beef' from the French word 'bœuf',). In contrast, common unfinished equivalents continued to use the native Anglo-Saxon term (such as 'cow' from the German word 'Kuh').

Social

In Malta, my native country, the upper and educated classes were culturally Italianate in all aspects, including culinary tastes. The lower uneducated classes were, on the other hand, largely tied to the products of their fields and to humble living. Whilst the defenders of Mediterranean food traditions belong to the upper class, the lower class individuals would like to reach an ideal



Pastizz – filo-pastry stuffed with ricotta or mashed peas



My version of Timpana – a pasta pie – a bridge between British pie tradition and Italian pasta tradition

whose origin is located in the colonial British time. A class struggle fought at table.

Political

Sometimes, the local cuisine is subdued by the coloniser perhaps not always through imposition but through a sort of cultural subservience of the colonised to the coloniser. In Malta, the predominantly



Mediterranean gastronomy had for some time yielded to the British culinary tradition. After moving into their newly acquired territory, the British sought to establish a modicum of familiarity for the thousands of British servicemen who were sent along the years to protect and garrison Malta. Moreover, the authorities trained local people so that they could serve these needs. Basically, the focus was on the transplanting of a sense of Britishness in Malta, whose colonial society embraced a fundamentally dissimilar way of life, and whose social texture was typically Latin and Mediterranean.

Identity

However later on the quest for Maltese food became an assertion of national identity.

Italy, especially Sicily, has left significant traces on Maltese food. Soups like *minestra* (vegetable soup), *kawlata* (pork soup), and pasta dishes like *ravjul* (ravioli) or *timpana* (baked macaroni pie), with their hundreds of sauces, are all dishes of Italian influence. Sicily has also greatly influenced the sweets and desserts of Malta with its *kannoli* (crisp ricotta-filled pastries). The Arab influence is present in the word *magrut* (a date-filled pastry diamond) sold as a street snack. The other typical and delicious Maltese snack, *pastizz* (filo pastry croissant filled with ricotta or mashed peas), typically eaten with a strong English tea with milk in the middle of the morning, may also be found in Lebanon.

Gastronomy's international cultural importance has been recently displayed by UNESCO's recognition of the *fira*, the Maltese flattened sourdough bread, which will be the first Maltese product on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list.

Undeniably, Man does not live by bread alone.

The Wednesday

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What Does A Room Speak Of In Its Silence?

What does a room speak of in its silence,
What would these books say if they could speak
Of our shared past? Their silence mocks interrogation.

And even photographs... what can they tell,
Mere trophies from the currents of Time's sea
Washed on the uncomprehending beach? History
Can never tell us what's about to be.

Where are you now and what is it you are doing?
Are you even in this world, this cruel world
That mocks the troubled selves that constitute it?
The sphere spins on. We do not feel its spinning,
Stones are so stable, paths invite our tread,
But where is all the accumulated past
All the detritus of the days now dead?

Edward Greenwood

