

The *Wednesday*

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Editorial

When Philosophy Meets Mysticism

It is a long time since a philosopher addressed the topic of mysticism. William James lectured on the topic in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Russell took it up in his *Mysticism and Logic*. The latter was only concerned with the concept of intuition as it was used by Bergson. It was not really an attempt to take mysticism seriously. But now we have a philosopher who takes mysticism seriously and tries to understand it from its own sources (texts and experiences) since the thirteenth century. Simon Critchley in his latest book *On Mysticism* shows the relevance of mysticism to philosophy and culture. He points out that 'mysticism is about the possibility of ecstatic life' that has been ignored by philosophy, but re-instated by Nietzsche and Bataille. He also blames the Enlightenment tradition that 'blinds us to what is rich, strange, and provocative about the tradition of thinking and experience that we label as mystical.'

The book deals with mysticism in Christianity, and within Western culture there is a special reference to Julian of Norwich. Critchley does not deal with mysticism in Eastern religion, Judaism and Islam, which have rich resources, but I understand the methodological limitation of the book. Mysticism declined after the reformation that ended the monastic life, but as Critchley shows, the mystical practices had mutated and transformed themselves in later centuries into art, poetry and music. He says the word 'mysticism' did not exist before the seventeenth century and only came to be widely used in the nineteenth century.

Critchley points out that art, poetry and music replaced mysticism in catering for our 'spiritual hunger'. In this respect, the poetry of TS Eliot has a special significance, and he spends a good deal of time analysing it, because of its Christian nature and the way it reflected the spiritual crisis of the century and our present time. Critchley is excellent in explaining mystical language which uses contradictory terms, negations and exaggerations. He extends his analysis to modern writing to show, for example, how this is reflected in Eliot's texts, especial the *Four Quartets*. His philosophical training enables him to come up with a memorable sentence. Explaining *via Negativa*, he says it is 'a language that ceaselessly undoes itself'. Some Kantian principles seem to be reformulated, such as 'Mystical experience without theology is blind. Mystical theology without experience is empty'. One can hear here Kant's

definition of knowledge!

But what interests me here is the encounter between the philosopher and mysticism, which Critchley describes from a personal perspective. He tells us in a chapter called 'Confession' that he went through a conversion experience while visiting Canterbury Cathedral when he was twenty-four. He had an experience that did not last, but it 'began to feel like an ersatz epiphany'. At the time, he felt ashamed of it. He also says that in his earlier works he 'argued persistently for the centrality of religious disappointment'. But his thinking shifted over the years. He realised that his earlier views on religion were 'simply too philosophical, that is, too abstract and metaphysically minded'. Now he considers the connection between religion and aesthetics, and to see how both cater for 'that intense spiritual hunger that we all have'. However, I wonder whether in reducing mysticism to aesthetics he trivialises mystical experience. Mystical experience is not just aesthetic but aims at the beyond and the transformation of the mystic.

My intention here is not writing a book review, but to draw attention to an unusual book. It is readable and enjoyable. It is informative and has great insight into the language of mystical texts and practices, such as what he called, after Anne Carson 'decreate' or emptying of the self in order to contemplate and take up a journey to the Divine.

I will add a final comment to link philosophy and mysticism by referring to their roots in Greek philosophy. It goes even further back to what is known as the Hermetic tradition of old Egypt. These trends have influenced Islamic mysticism since the ninth century and also infiltrated Christian mysticism, mainly in the form of Platonism in all its stages and major figures, especially Plotinus. For example, the writings of Ibn al-Arabi, a contemporary of Averroes and Maimonides, were clothed in figurative and theological language that covers up many of the Neo-Platonic thoughts, and echoes of these could also be found in Meister Eckhard and others. Nearly two decades ago a book came out to highlight the influence of this tradition on modern philosophers (See: Glenn A. Magee's *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*). I hope Critchley's book will generate more philosophical interest in this subject to enrich both philosophy and mysticism.

The Editor



A Philosophical Conversation About Freedom

Contemplation

This paper aims at entering a conversation about freedom. I am not proposing a fixed position - although naturally all views should be tested in discussion and argument. Instead, I would like to have a conversation about freedom as a practical philosophical issue situated within popular culture.

ERIC LONGLEY

I would like to begin by distancing my thoughts from some abstract philosophical views on freedom, then I would like to draw on some comments from popular culture on freedom, finally I will try and set out the issue of competing freedoms in the material world, which remains unresolved for me.

Buddhism

The Buddhist position seems to be that freedom is not about having more choices or possessions but about liberation from suffering and recycle of rebirth. It seems to me that this definition is about choices and possessions and must be if we are to be liberated from suffering. Suffering comes in many forms, including lack of resources and in some cases lack of choices. For those caught in a poverty trap there are no choices, their existence is to suffer the lack of resources. The Buddhist conception of freedom seems - like some others

- to offer no relief from suffering at all. It is a vacuous abstract freedom, not relevant in the material world. I want to talk about a freedom that addresses the practicalities of suffering and oppression, not a freedom that ignores the material world. Buddhism - like other religions - offers relief from imprisonment by denying a lack of freedom or postulating eternal freedom in an afterlife as compensation for temporary suffering now. Freedom and religion are irreparably mutually incompatible.

German Idealism

For German Idealism we are free because we are rational. Is that really so? Does 'reason' set out an attainable immutable unarguable moral absolute? Does reason compel freedom, or merely try to explain it? The *cul de sac* of German Idealism and reason leads nowhere and it is only when reason is inverted and provided with a materialist



Fichte

base that freedom starts to take on a practical and identifiable character.

There is Schelling's freedom, which posits that there can be no free will if there is a God that determines matters, even if only in the last instance. A God that allows free will within certain boundaries limits free will and in such a case freedom cannot be absolute. God and freedom are mutually antagonistic. The Hegelian word salad which reconciles freedom to being in God does not offer practical insight or relief.

Conceivably free will or freedom as an absolute cannot exist in practical terms. Perhaps freedom is a constantly mutating quality woven into the social relationships that dominate a society. Can there still be freedom if it cannot be absolute? Is there room for a socially based freedom historically determined and constantly evolving? Is this the only room where freedom can exist? Is freedom specific, that is to say is freedom specific to certain activities or things only? In other words, can there be different freedoms? Freedom *from* what? Or freedom *to* do what?

Freedom and Popular Culture

It is not that I think historic or classical culture



Schelling

does not have anything to tell us, but I think that to regard historic culture as having value and modern popular culture as having no value is, to say the least, silly. It fails to recognise the aspirations, needs and hopes of the mass of the population. Classical culture and "the traditions of dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brain of the living", as Marx said. Donald Trump's victory in the US Presidential election owes much to his opponent's failure to connect with most of the population. That failure led to a leadership vacuum where the Democratic Party were unable to provide a contemporary political and cultural leadership narrative that was popular with the electorate. Consequently they lost the election. Trump on the other hand identified common popular concerns and addressed them – however much we might rail against his policies and politics as being negative and regressive as well as idiotic and unworkable, the fact is that the liberal/left failed to identify popular issues and deal with them in a way that attracted support. I am reminded of Margaret Thatcher's first election, when for better or worse she offered a vision overthrowing the post war consensus, and the Labour Party offered free television licences. Those not in touch with the populace are destined to be ignored and forgotten. We can interpret history, but that does not change

Philosophy

what happened, merely why we think it happened.

Philosophy is politics by another name. And because it is politics by another name it is important to society even though society may not recognise that. The ghettoisation of philosophy to the Universities and Radio 4 is in part due to its retreat from popular culture. Philosophy is failing and falling. Where once working men and women would discuss ideas, now philosophy has left the stage to the clowns and comedians of the Republican Party and the Daily Mail, with its prepacked opinions challenged by no one, the easy reading gloop of processed politics!

Probably the greatest living popular lyricist (poet even) and certainly one of the most popular today is Bob Dylan. Dylan has often dropped ideas of freedom into his works.

Ah, my friends from the prison, they ask unto me
'How good, how good does it feel to be free?'
And I answer them most mysteriously
'Are birds free from the chains of the skyway?'

It would be easy to over analyse what Dylan means in this lyric, and I will now do that. Clearly the friends are in prison - what sort of prison we are not told, but a prison nevertheless. The prisoners ask how good does it feel to be free - presumably because they are not free or do not see themselves as free. Clearly for the prisoners freedom represents a good feeling or bestows a good feeling. In both cases the prisoners and the birds, freedom is relative to their situation. Dylan's lyric does not admit to there being absolute freedom.

Dylan answers 'Mysteriously' because something is mysterious only if it is not thought through. Once the idea of freedom is seen as relative it is no longer mysterious. Dylan answers a question with another question; in doing so Dylan calls on the questioner to discover for themselves what freedom is. In a way Dylan is saying that no one is free. We are all prisoners of our own device (Frey Felder and Henley – The Eagles).

Dylan's early works were written at a time when the struggle for equal rights was raw and troubling. There seemed to be no way that freedom could be achieved in the USA from a rabid racist

dominant culture, where even the law was used as a weapon against the very people it should have protected. Dylan's lyrics, verging on the surreal, still have hope that a change is going to come, that the "chimes of freedom are flashing". Dylan's concerns are not an abstract freedom, not a denial of material suffering for reincarnation or a place in heaven, but a concern for relief from real material suffering that freedom can deliver.

Far between sundown's finish and midnight's broken toll
We ducked inside a doorway as thunder went crashing
As majestic bells of bolts struck shadows in the sounds
Seeming to be the chimes of freedom flashing
Flashing for the warriors whose strength is not to fight
Flashing for the refugees on the unarmed road of flight
And for each and every underdog soldier in the night
And we gazed upon the chimes of freedom flashing

Regrettably, how freedom's chimes are to be given concrete expression - that is, how freedom is to be achieved - is not spelt out. All too often popular culture expresses dissatisfaction with the lack of freedom without showing how that freedom is to be achieved. It is as though culture sees its role as that of the critic and shies away from politics - even though critique by its very nature is political.

Dylan is not the only popular writer to sing or write about freedom. Paul McCartney writes about freedom after his experience sitting on a plane being unable to take off because the twin towers horror was happening. McCartney wraps his lyrics around the idea that 'no one is going to take my rights from me'. What those rights are is not fully explained, but the idea of individual rights burns strong in popular culture, reflecting as it does the dominance of the philosophical and cultural needs of capital as a mode of social production.

Similarly, Mick Jagger is able to sing 'I'm free to do what I want any old time'. It is a hymn to individualism. Freedom is individualised - there is no social, merely the freedom of the individual against the social. This was at a time when youth culture in western democracies was lifting off, opposition to received culture and wisdom faced a brave new critique in pop culture. Not surprisingly, this criticism was aimed at freeing the individual, because this was the first post war generation, and the war had been an enormous overwhelming



Bob Dylan

power for collectivist thought. The post war welfare state was born out of this collectivist politics, but that did not stop the post war generation taking up the individualist critique of collectivism, which had tended to regimentation instead of being the platform for individual freedom.

Freedom in popular culture is often associated with romance and not as a political or philosophical idea. It is seen more as a good feeling than a quality of existence. For Donovan Leitch freedom is just such a feeling when he writes

Freedom is a word I rarely use
Without thinkin' mm-mmm
Without thinkin' mm-mmm
Of the time, of the time
When I've been loved

Here love is equated with freedom. The only way I can reconcile this is to think of love and freedom both as feel good states. Here freedom is nothing but a feeling and there is no analysis or description of what freedom might be other than a good feeling.

Contrary to Leitch, Charles Bukowski proposes love as a move away from freedom, almost a self-imprisonment amounting to suicide:

Find what you love and let it kill you. Let it drain you of your all. Let it cling onto your back and weigh you down into eventual nothingness. Let it kill you and let it devour your remains. For all things will kill you, both slowly and fastly, but it is much better to be killed by a lover.

On this small, very small, sample it seems that popular culture values freedom without knowing what freedom it seeks, apart from wanting to feel good, equating that with freedom and being free from oppression as an individual need rather than a social need.

Freedom as a Social Construct

I am reminded of Jeanne Warren's words the other week: 'We find our freedom through others'. Freedom is a social construct here. Indeed, freedom can only be social or relational. To argue the rights of the individual over the collective is to assert a right that is self-awarded. Freedom is not Fichte's 'I' which can only exist by positing the 'non-I', itself an extension or projection of the 'I'. Fichtean

Philosophy

freedom is another word for isolation which is not freedom, as you are not free *from* or *to* do anything until the other or the social is recognised.

The problem that brought me to this presentation is the antagonism between freedom *from* and freedom *to*. Popular culture settles on a freedom from without specifying what we are to be free from, least it upsets someone! Freedom is freedom from and equates to feeling good. Popular culture wants to feel good.

If for the moment we park on one side the notion of absolute freedom it seems to me we are left with two overriding notions of freedom, freedom *from* and freedom *to*. These two freedoms are mutually irreconcilable but are strangely two sides of the same coin. Freedom *from* allows me to exist without restriction. As a passive freedom this works but if it is an active freedom then freedom from restriction allows me freedom *to*. Your freedom to do something imposes on my freedom from your actions – or put another way your freedom to play your music loud impacts my freedom from noise, your freedom to exploit my labour oppresses my freedom from exploitation.

In allowing freedom *from* I am allowing freedom *to*. If I grant you freedom, then unless specified it is freedom *from* and *to*. Granting you freedom *from* restriction necessarily allows you freedom *to*. Granting you freedom *from* restriction allows you freedom *to* restrict my freedom. Is that not a contradiction?

Freedom *to* is restrictive, where we have mutual opposed actions or aims then my freedom *to* imposes on your freedom *to*. Freedom *to* is by its very nature anti-social because it necessarily imposes on or restricts freedom *from*. So freedom *to* cannot be universal freedom.

Freedom *from* is freedom *to* and freedom *to* is freedom *from*, they are two sides of the same coin. Is there a case for saying freedom *from* is superior to freedom *to* in that freedom *from* comes first? For example, you cannot have freedom *to* until restrictions have been removed and there is freedom *from*.

For practical purposes is it possible to use the

concept of balance between freedom *from* and freedom *to*? That is freedom *from* is on balance preferable to freedom *to*? One of the problems here is how preference is established. Some would argue the greatest happiness to the greatest number assessment should determine the question. Others might argue that this leads to a different set of problems not least ascertaining the desire of the greatest number. I think that a hierarchy of freedoms does not work, or does not work without its own difficulties.

So far I have treated freedom as an absolute quality. Each freedom, *from* and *to*, are to be universal and absolute. Instead, can freedom be specific and limited?

At this point I need to register that freedom and democracy are mutually antagonistic – for example democracy, whether by delegate or representational representation or by plebiscite or election of lawmakers, involves by its very nature a restriction of freedom, the imposition of the political will of the majority over the minority!

Freedom and Property

It has always struck me as odd that philosophy, from Kant onwards with few exceptions, accepts the right of property without setting out any conclusive or persuasive moral justification for private property. The inequality of wealth and access to resources arises from and is maintained by the right of private property. Private property can only ever be the right to hold something against the needs and rights of the propertyless.

Is this all edging closer to the idea that freedom cannot be universal or absolute, and that we must look to a freedom that is practical and socially acceptable? I feel resistant to this because it smacks of the liberal acceptance of private property that oppresses so many. Liberalism, by its very nature as the freedom of the individual, supports freedom to over freedom from. Liberalism as I understand it denies freedom through other people but does extoll freedom *to*.

Is it not the case that liberal politics and theory does not seek to remove private property as the source of inequality and oppression, but seeks merely to distribute the profits of private property to a level



Paul McCartney

where the antagonisms of private property over the poor are softened to the point where opposition to private property is undermined. Liberalism does not solve the problem but salves it. If freedom includes freedom from poverty then liberalism is not in favour of freedom.

It is difficult to see how there can be a universal freedom. If there is no universal or absolute freedom can we only talk of relative freedoms, freedom from poverty, freedom from oppression, freedom to say what you want, freedom to be what you want and so on.

Philosophy and the Public

Popular culture and politics in Europe from 1750 onwards was dominated by the struggle against monarchs and despotism, the birth of individualism and nations. Philosophy was alive and there were public debates and lectures. Philosophy has since retreated to the shadows and popular culture has accepted the status quo with respect to freedom, whilst maintaining a pretence of antiestablishment rebellion.

Where does all this leave freedom? As a social matter we need to distinguish freedom from equality. We can have both, but we need to understand what we mean by each. As a starting point, freedom has to encompass freedom of opportunity, freedom from oppression and freedom from poverty. Freedom from poverty must involve a notion of equality of access to resources and how to construct the principles that will act as a practical guide. A good starting point would surely be from each according to their ability, and to each according to their need. I have yet to hear a persuasive argument against this as a good starting point!

Popular culture reflects its own times, but if philosophy is to be weaned off the respirator it must start to engage actively with popular culture. If philosophy can infect and affect popular culture it will be a mutually beneficial disease. 'The Owl of Minerva' has long gone and the idea that philosophy like the house cleaner cleans and tidies up after the party, is the tradition of dead generations. Philosophy must now embrace the freedom of politics to argue and prepare for that which delivers freedom.

Perfect Synchronicity

He thought back to the hour at dusk
when a bird's call sounded outside him
and deep within him in perfect synchronicity,
so that it did not break off,
at his body's boundary,
but merged both sides into an unbroken space,
mysteriously sheltered, a single region
of purest, deepest consciousness.

With that, he closed his eyes,
so as not to be dissuaded
of so unique an experience
by the external contour of his body,
and the infinite
passed over into him from all sides
that he could believe he felt
within himself
the gentle composure of the celestial stars
which one by one had been appearing.

Leaning against a fence,
he would grow aware of the star-filled sky
through the branches of a tall tree,
and how then the universe would look back at him,
face to face.

Or how, if he but submitted to it long enough,
it would be absorbed so perfectly
in the clear solution of his heart.

Then the magic of creation
would be dispersed
throughout his whole being.



Poem and Artwork by *Scharlie Meeuws*

Doors and Pictures: Wittgenstein

A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.

(Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations)

A man will be imprisoned in a room with a door that's unlocked and opens inwards; as long as it does not occur to him to pull rather than push it.

(Wittgenstein, Culture and Value)

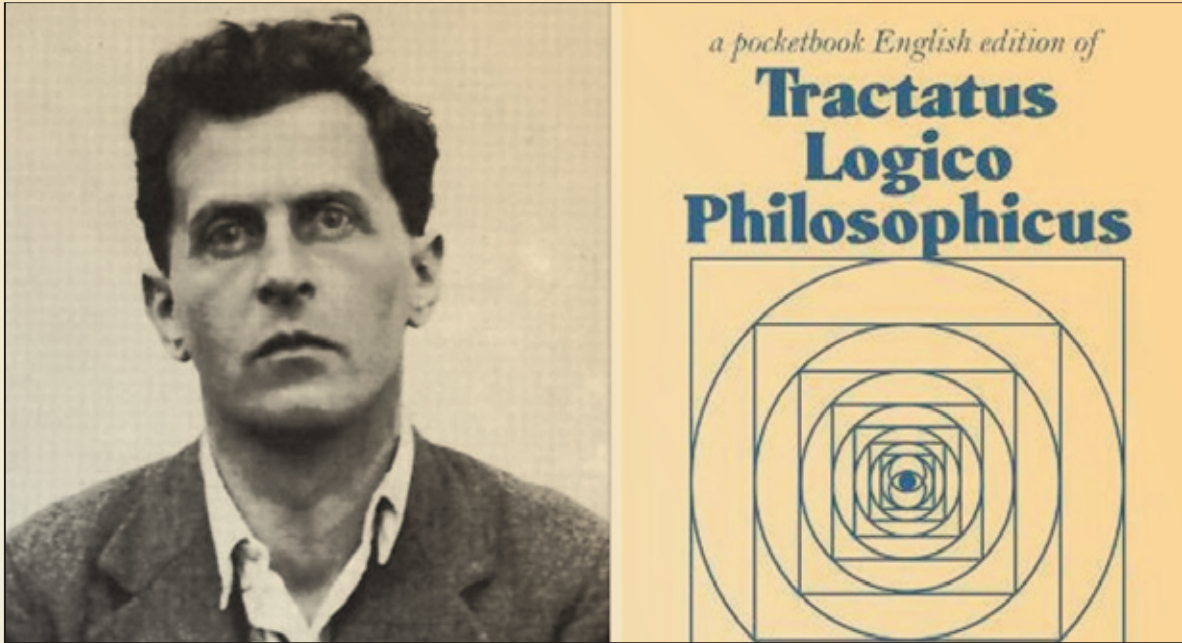
I think I summed up my attitude to philosophy when I said: philosophy ought really to be written only as a poetic composition.

(Culture and Value)

He had this thing about what you could say
And what you couldn't say but only show.
To make that point, he thought, the only way
Was to push 'say' as far as it would go.
With that in mind he'd put up an array
Of reasonings *more geometrico*,
Along with a meticulous display
Of numbered parts that made it seem as though
The thing was too well-built to go astray.
This would ensure that those chaps in the know,
Bertie and his lot, had their role to play
As dupes in Ludwig's stratagem to blow
A T-shaped hole in everything that they,
Like his Tractarian double, took as so
Self-evident as strictly to convey
No more than syllogistic might bestow
By way of sense or content. Yet dismay
Set in when those same chaps proved far too slow
To take his point, or eager to essay
Some risk-containment exercise that no
Depth-rumblings might disturb. This helped allay
Their nagging sense that he'd contrived to stow
Something in his oblique communiqué
That threatened to upset the status quo
Of language, truth, and logic. Anyway
They picked it up, the cryptic undertow
In this strange work of Russell's protégé,
But made sure it was kept so far below
Deck in the first translation as to stay
Disarmed of any spanners it might throw
Into the works. For there they'd ricochet
And cause no end of philosophic woe



CHRIS NORRIS



Wittgenstein

To Russell and those heralds of the day
When mystics would repay the debt they owe
To logic. Then they'd see fit to obey
Such rational demands as bid them toe
No line where superstition's apt to prey
On trust or faith says reason should forego
Its privilege. Keep saintliness at bay,
His colleagues thought, lest worldly wit lie low
In deference to it and extend the sway
Over weak minds of any holy joe
With some new crack-brained gospel to purvey,
Or any US-style politico
With God on board. That stuff was now *passé*,
So Russell thought, that Sunday-School tableau
Got up with all the *faux-naïveté*
By which the firm of Jesus Christ & Co
Had managed so adroitly to portray
Their potentate as power's most powerful foe.
Yet this ignored Saint Ludwig's *dieu caché*,
His hidden god (think Pascal, think Godot),
Whose failure to arrive as promised may,
To souls elect, reveal the vapid flow
Of saying's intellectual cabaret
Struck dumb. Thus having nothing à propos
To say – and falling silent – might defray
The cost of all those endless to-and-fro
Discussions spawned, he thought, by the decay
Of what once found expression (think Rousseau)
In sentiments that showing might relay
Once all the saying's done. On this plateau
The tribe of *bons sauvages* join Mallarmé
In savouring only fragrances that blow

Poetry

From flowers that have their place in no bouquet,
Or hues that vanish in the gaslight glow
Of rainbows shadowed by the the grey-on-grey
That passes muster in the Savile Row
Of logic-suited thought. The first rule: pay
No heed to anything we cannot sew,
Us stitchers-up, to standards checked OK
For sticking to the proper ratio
Of words to thoughts and things lest words outweigh
Truth's currency and thinking undergo
Such figural bewitchments as betray
Its old malaise. His message: we should grow
Alert when language 'went on holiday'
Since here it often held in embryo
All the misshapen progeny that lay
Athwart the path to thinking's *vrai niveau*
Of common speech. Such were those *recherché*
Linguistic idioms that he thought *de trop*
Since parasitic on the DNA
Of communal accord, or the escrow
That underwrote our forms of everyday
Folk-usage. This he showed us, *modulo*
The need for umpteen exegetes to say
Just what it was his words were meant to show,
As witness the shelf-bending dossier
Of monographs and endless *de nouveau*
Renditions of old themes whose overstay
He'd hoped his *Tractatus* would long ago
Have laid to rest. Last irony: that they,
His acolytes, should be the ones whom no
Strict rule, like his, against such making hay
With words and concepts could persuade to throw
The habit off despite its threat to fray
The bonds of communal accord and so
Permit such verbal licence (aka
Delinquency) to twist the quid pro quo
That constitutes a true *communauté*
De langue et vie. His tragedy: to know,
If dimly, that he'd pointed them the way
And sounded the linguistic tallyho
That led his followers to a disarray
Of language-games as likely to kayo
That prospect as the mutants on display
In some linguistic isle where Doc Moreau
Spliced metaphors like genes. And so, *malgré*
His dearest wish, this anti-Prospero
Saw monstrous life-forms bred out of Roget
By language-games from his own portmanteau.



Wittgenstein

The rigid rods of logic made a cage
From which your spirit kept the world at bay,
And did not let the darkness of the age
Diffuse dismay.

What was the ground philosophy might hold
If a new logic had usurped its part?
And it had turned the warmth of vision cold
And chilled the heart.

Occasional enchantments might still glow,
As when through dying ashes a brief spark
Bursts out until its momentary glow
Dies down in dark.

'The Duty of Genius' some claimed ruled your days,
But why be great when all around on earth
Appeared to be so petty that their praise
Was of no worth?

But still you sought the comprehensive vision,
The *Ubersicht* that is its own reward,
So why should you not look down with derision
From where you'd soared?

You met the world with torment in your head
With inwardness some claimed that you denied
'Tell them I've had a wonderful life' you said,
And then you died.

Edward Greenwood

Written in Entropy: Cinema and Physics of Closed Time-like Loops

DR. ALAN XUEREB

In a universe where the past resists and time remembers, the intricate dance of self-healing timelines unfolds with breathtaking complexity. Inspired by the sweeping, time-spanning saga of *Outlander* and the gritty, dystopian future of *Twelve Monkeys*, this exploration delves into the mesmerizing physics of closed time-like curves as theorized by Lorenzo Gavassino.

Picture a backdrop of swirling clockwork gears and circular timelines, evoking the essence of closed time-like loops, interwoven with subtle Scottish elements and a futuristic urban ambience. The visual tapestry is further enriched with delicate, semi-transparent equations representing entropy and thermodynamics, all set against a palette of warm sepia and bronze hues, balanced by deep blues and greys. As Gavassino eloquently states, 'In a universe with closed time-like curves, the laws of quantum mechanics would inherently erase many time travel paradoxes, ensuring that causality remains intact and preventing contradictions like the grandfather paradox from arising'. This blend of academic complexity, cinematic drama, and abstract scientific visualization invites readers to journey through the labyrinthine complexities of time travel and the profound implications of a universe where every moment is written in entropy.

In *Outlander*, Claire and Jamie Fraser's desperate efforts to stop the massacre at Culloden are driven by love, knowledge, and the aching weight of foresight. Armed with a sense of what is to come, they attempt to bend history. Yet their struggle, however heroic, seems destined to fail. The past resists. Events conspire. History, it seems, is written not in ink but in something far more stubborn: entropy. Their failure is not just a narrative device but an expression of a deeper intuition: that time might possess a kind of memory, or even a will, which pushes back against efforts to change it. This intuition has now found an unexpected ally in theoretical physics.

Entropy as Time's Immune System

In his 2024 paper *The Thermodynamics of Time Travel: How Chronology Can Repair Causality*, physicist Lorenzo Gavassino provides a compelling and mathematically grounded account of time travel that avoids the traditional pitfalls of paradox. Using the

framework of general relativity and thermodynamics, Gavassino examines closed time-like curves (CTCs), hypothetical loops in spacetime where a system can return to its own past.

What sets Gavassino's theory apart is its thermodynamic elegance. He argues that any physical system traveling around a CTC must obey the second law of thermodynamics. That is, entropy, the measure of disorder, must increase over time. But in a loop, this rule means that entropy must return to exactly the same state it started from by the time the system completes the circuit. The loop heals itself. This condition has far-reaching implications:

- Paradoxes are forbidden: Any change that could introduce contradiction, like killing one's own grandfather, would necessarily violate the entropy loop and is thus physically excluded.
- Memory is erased: A time traveller cannot bring future information into the past and retain it; memory must be lost by the loop's end.
- Biology obeys physics: Even a human traveling a CTC would need to reverse aging along the way to return to their original state.

Gavassino's model does not just prevent paradoxes, it renders them thermodynamically impossible. The past cannot be changed because the universe will not let it. The laws of physics conspire to keep the timeline whole.

The Tragedy of the Loop

This vision of a self-consistent, self-repairing timeline echoes powerfully in *Twelve Monkeys* (1995). In the film, James Cole is sent back from a post-apocalyptic future to stop a viral outbreak. But as events unfold, it becomes clear: Cole was always part of the timeline. His actions in the past do not prevent the future, they guarantee it.

What Gavassino shows through equations, *Twelve Monkeys* dramatizes through tragedy. Cole's memories, his dreams, his mission, all fall into place as predetermined features of an unalterable loop. His



AI generated image by Fotor

agency is not denied, but it is circumscribed. He is not a disruptor of time, but its instrument.

Just like the Frasers in *Outlander*, Cole learns that knowledge of the future is not a key to freedom, but a burden to be carried. The timeline bends under the weight of intervention, but does not break.

Ethics, Emotions and Meaning

These stories raise a haunting ethical question: If time cannot be changed, what does responsibility mean? If Claire and Jamie were always meant to fail, or Cole always meant to die, what value does effort hold?

Gavassino's physics offers one possible answer: even in a fixed timeline, the universe preserves the experience of freedom. Entropy loops may close with mathematical precision, but the path within them can still be rich with emotion, intent, and meaning. We are, perhaps, like actors on a stage we cannot leave, improvising freely within a script that must always return to page one.

The Loop and Free Will

If Gavassino is right, and time enforces its own consistency through entropy, then what becomes of free will? More provocatively, what happens when conscious agents - human or artificial - become aware that they are inside a temporal loop? Does the awareness of inevitability change the experience of choice?

One could imagine a future AI trained in causal logic but constrained within a looped architecture. Would such a being come to see its own decisions as pre-scripted echoes of entropy's demand? Or could it find, like Cole or Claire, a kind of existential dignity in choosing the necessary, in saying 'yes' to what must be?

Time, in Gavassino's view, does not offer escape. But it does offer continuity and perhaps, within that continuity, the strange, aching beauty of lives lived fully even when they cannot be changed.

The Wednesday

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Isness Waves



**Language lignifies.
Sound forms, forms sound
Poetry is -
unearthing things
with their own sound sounding
against the eardrum of life.
Things reverberate,
orchestrating the world -
alternating the silence
with sound behind appearance,
sounding appearance with names;
names leading
to war and peace,
to shattering and quaking,
and to home.**

William Bishop



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