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Poseidon Productions

Thoughts

Ruminations subsequent to 'NOTES TO KNILLIS'

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PRO-FOUND

In my dream this man, clearly a Jew and somewhat younger than me (I'm almost 75) but giving the impression of being wiser, was sitting almost diagonally across from me at a table in a well lit room. (I include these details, because in a dream they surely are important even though right now their meaning is unclear, e.g. the colours light blue and white stick in my mind, but why?) I vaguely remember some light banter with others in that room, but suddenly my focus was on him and I felt I had to ask him a, for me, important question that I had been mulling over in the back of my mind. I don't remember the question, but it probably was some imponderable existential question. He looked at me with dismay as if to say 'do I have to go there again?', but then proceeded to answer it in great detail and getting more and more serious and involved as he went along. Thinking about it now, it seemed clear to me that he had thought about this matter intensely for a very long time and found an answer that satisfied him. But as is typical of dreams, that's where it stopped. You glimpse an answer and feel content to have found one, but get lost in words to describe it.

DP

2 June 2016

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HEAD TRANSPLANT

These days there is serious thought about this in surgical circles. Transplants of all sorts of organs are the order of the day. These guys (pardon the recently declared old-fashioned 'sexist' language) think this 'procedure' will be possible in the not too distant future, leading others to suggest that lawyers should have a serious look at the implications of this mind-strangling development before it is too late and the horse has bolted (the hippo has escaped its campus, so to speak). Think about it: your head on me and my head on you! Do I then become you and you me? If so, does that pre-suppose that the rest of the body is basically irrelevant to our sense of self, and, whether or not this is so, how do you even begin to think about the implications? No doubt you have seen 'scientific' news reports or documentaries on your home tele-vision-(fern-sehen in German, distant-vision)screen showing 'graphics' of the inside of a skull where various parts light up in flashing colours as they are 'stimulated' back and forth by electrical impulses via a tangle of wires attached to a real-life person's limbs, especially the skull. [At this stage you may have already noticed my tendency to hyphenate and 'quotation-mark', meaning that some blip in my brain was alerted as to the 'true' meaning or quirkiness of that word; obsessive, I know, and where does it end? But I alert you to query many more of the words I and others use, if you not already do so]. In turn we can 'see' (evidence!) how the severely handicapped kid is able to learn to steer his especially equipped buggy through an obstacle course ostensibly by brain power: the 'mindfulness muscle' as I heard it described. No kidding. The mind boggles, no doubt as evidenced by the brainwave graphics visible on a screen, if it were plugged in to one. Seeing is Believing, No? And by the same 'scientific methods' these 'scientists' can 'prove' that Believing is Seeing: the much maligned placebo effect. But I digress, this science-sceptic hobbyhorse of mine forever wanting to distract me into the never-never.

No, I want to explore the head transplant idea a little further. It would imply that a body without a head cannot be truly dead and vice versa. And also, once again the question arises of where memories and knowledge go if or when for some reason they can no longer be accessed by ..., yes, by what? The brainmuscle? Ah-ha and ha-ha I 'hear' you think. For that I don't need a computer. The (my) thought of hearing you think something in reaction to my question is triggered not by 'technological advances', but wirelessly somehow. Your scientists may even be able to pick-up the brainwave blip as hard evidence on their screens and 'record' it. The stimulus for this blip obviously came from the written words. Hurray for books! But if, say, Einstein's head was to be transplanted onto my body, would I then have access to all his knowledge, given that I remain me? (I catch myself having a real giggle here). A more plausible and less invasive scenario would be (and perhaps will be eventually, and the idea is already well-established in science fiction) that I could plug into Einstein's brain. But what makes me think that I would have then automatic and direct access to all the 'files' stored there? Even if I had the username, I would still require the password so to speak. And that would require, dare I say it, a whole lot of work, at least a PhD in advanced mathematics and physics. No pain no gain, as they say. Anyway, be that as it may, the 'idea' that no memory is ever lost, but

that the info. is still there but for one reason or another can't be accessed, is intriguing. What is meant by forgetting? What is it that is forgotten? We know that memories can be retrieved, but is there an 'irretrievability' point? You would think the answer is obvious: death. But is it? What would those who advocate head transplants think about this? For them the idea of deep freezing a brain is quite acceptable, a deep-frozen brain is not dead as such and all its matter and content can be reactivated without loss, presumably. So the next 'obvious' stage of irretrievability (death if you like) is the complete disintegration of brain matter. But is that so? What is dis-integration, and what is it that disintegrates and into what does it disintegrate, and can that be re-integrated somehow? The intriguing thing is that I can think about this and ask questions about it. And here I come back to a familiar conundrum: if you can think about something it must exist, otherwise you couldn't think of it*. So, asking a question implies that something is retrievable. So, where do thoughts come from? Are they in fact the disintegrated or evaporated contents of brains? And what are the implications of that? This line of thinking is no doubt a bridge too far for believers in 'matter of fact' religions, and many may even feel threatened enough to forcefully protect the borders of their realm of reality, their dogma, fearing insanity and mental disintegration.

And so humanity stumbles on

10/13 June 2016

*Afterthought: if you can't think of something it cannot exist and, *by the same token, this something cannot not exist*. Does this conundrum reflect the realities of childhood and old-age? For Microsoft Word there is not problem, it simply rejects part of the sentence.

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MORE BRAINWORK

Well, it seems my mental excretions¹ on these life-death issues have not yet stopped; my brain-muscle is still contracting with uncontrollable spasms. There is more to come:

The other day, in conversation, a friend of mine remarked on a familiar experience. He had no memory at all of the colonoscopy procedure that had been performed on him. There he was, lying on the operating table talking to the anaesthetist and there he was being offered a choice of sandwich by the nurse. It was as if a bit of his consciousness had been cut midstream by the click of a computer's mouse and was now suspended somewhere in that machine's 'brain', but irretrievable by any means 'known' to him. A certain amount of 'time' had been taken out of his conscious existence and the 'space' that time took up, that gap, appeared to have been occupied by when he became aware of the nurse and her sandwich, rather like a bit of sentence cut from a computer screen where the computer's program instantly replaces the cut bit with what follows: a contiguous event within a continuous process; if process is the right word here. And if you continue this line of thinking then you may wonder whether 'death' is not something similar, a kind of state of suspended animation where time becomes irrelevant; perhaps it continues to exist in some sort of contiguous universe making death no more or no less like a figment of imagination: it does not exist as such. And now I am also thinking of something that has occurred to me from time to time: life-death being like an old-fashioned film-negative where the negative becomes positive depending on the light angle illuminating it. But what is the source of this light? "The light of imagination" instantly flashed through my brain. I almost summarily dismissed it! Why is it that now all of a sudden the immensity of the universe becomes apprehensible, i.e. capable of being comprehended? Perhaps the ancient idea of our spirits being represented in the stars is not as primitive as our educationalists have tried to instil in us.

This morning, as I was putting on my jeans, Katina, having just woken up from a deep sleep, wanted to know if I was going to do any dirty work in them; it was after all my newest pair and she feels not unreasonably, that she has a stake in my attire. That got me thinking. My plan for the day was not to do dirty work in the garden, but rather to finally get back to the 'thoughts' folder on my computer. Writing down those thoughts I get does seem to require the kind of effort that is easily conquered by distractions and so does seem to be like work. The question arose whether brain-work too requires some special kind of uniform to protect against brain dirt, which must exist since, after all, brain-washing is not unheard of. And what would this brain-dirt 'look' like? Previous experience has taught me that taking on the mantle of a Greek god² freed and protected me from 'myself' and made it a great deal easier to say the things I thought without fear of stifling self criticism. So 'myself' is at least partly defined by whatever it is (a heap of shit comes to mind) that aforementioned educationalists have managed to pile onto me:

¹ Excretions are not necessarily useless waste products. They can be fertile and have healing functions. Nothing is wasted in nature or more or less useful per se.

² See 'Notes to Knillis' by Dimitri Poseidon

those things that have to be unlearned to uncover their 'true' value – cleansing the brain-washed brain so to speak.

Late June – early July 2016

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FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH...(Post modern)

From time to time I get these insights. I try to remember them, thinking at the time that I'll never forget this or that particular one, but... For instance this one: 'We go through lifethe future andthe past.' The key words are the lost ones, dots. Some sort of paradox of course. It must have been something like 'remembering' the future and/while 'reinventing' the past. It was a kind of resolution to an impasse arrived at while grappling with such issues within the framework of my knowledge at the time. It made a lot of sense and was emotionally comforting. Even now that comfort is there although the exact logic of it seems to escape me. Perhaps I have the wording wrong. Be that as it may, I am writing this because of a paragraph in the prologue of a recently published book by Tom Griffith: *The Art of Time Travel, Historians and Their Craft* (page 10) where he quotes from Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*, p.17. I'm halfway through that book and am now beginning to realise that I'm nearing the end of my journey to extract myself from the pile of educationalist rubbish I mentioned at the end of page 3. Thanks for that, Tom. I would have enjoyed and benefitted a great deal from going to your and your teachers' classes at Melbourne uni. at the time, but then my understanding of history was hampered by that very pile. I did Psychology and French. But now I'm ready. Below the quote of the paragraph:

Gaddis uses the gravitational phenomenon known as a 'singularity' to understand the flow of time. Singularities exist within black holes and transform everything that passes through them; a singularity was the initial state of the universe before the Big Bang. Gaddis suggests that the present is a singularity through which the future must pass in order to become the past. On the future side of singularity, continuities and contingencies are fluid and indeterminate; however as they pass through it they fuse and cannot be separated. The present locks these swirling possibilities and shifting relationships into place and they can't be unzipped. This compelling image captures the gravitational power of the past and the exhilaration and terror of living. It reminds us that the present, to which we pay so much lip service, snaps into solidity in a moment. The past is our only anchorage and our chief source of meaning.

I'm learning about the epistemology of history. Never knew there was such a thing. There you go.

23 July 2016

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A RELUCTANT GOD OF ATHEISTS

<http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/meet-the-mavericks/AC1419H004S00#playing>

If nothing else, Phillip Adams surely fits this title. I came to this conclusion some time after following the above link to the video clip of an interview conducted by comedian/actor/songwriter Tim Minchin with this ailing custodian of the Australian social conscience. His house in an inner Sydney suburb is filled to the brim with images and relics of any god he could lay his hands on, including a mummy. He is an insatiable collector of gods. He is a practising atheist if ever there was one, in contrast to Gorbachev who, I think, once said he was a non-practising atheist. (All this to be taken with a grain of salt of course as truth is an elusive concept). What 'ensouls' Phillip to pursue such a quest? Would his bust take a major place in the collection when his house is made a museum after his passage through the black hole of history into the realm of the stars?

24 July 2016

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BRUTE FORCE AND SHEER IGNORANCE

There is a lot of talk these days about 'domestic violence' (violence within the confines of the home, including children as well as women). But why should violence tolerate an adjective at all? Doesn't that imply that other forms of violence are tolerable? When is the use of force (*vis* in Latin is force and is incorporated in the word violence; the Latin word *vir*, man, is also related) to be tolerated if not con-doned, par-doned, for-given, justified, and who decides that and by what process? How does violence differ from cruelty (*crudus* is raw, uncultivated, not civilised)? Is it contradictory when law-enforcement is used to prevent or punish violence? Is that a case of the pot calling the kettle black? When does violence become cruel and what makes it cruel? Who decides, judges when it becomes a crime (*crimen* is judgement)? Is it possible for non-violence to be *virtuous* when violence is virtuous by implication, i.e. manly?

This seems to be getting nowhere. Endless questions, each potential answer begging more questions. And it seems never ending. Just the other day we saw video evidence of unspeakable brutality against young 'offenders', predominantly aboriginal, in a detention centre in the Northern Territory. Despite the swift response of our prime minister with a royal commission (I refuse to use capital letters) there is no real reason to be confident that anything will ever change in a significant way. The more enlightened minds amongst us will recognise hard to change cultural factors as the reason for this. I wonder if they recognise that the very languages of 'Western Civilisation' have violence built into them, rooted as many of their words are in Latin and Roman conceptions of the world. Thus violence begets violence as we have no appropriate words to define the essence of the problem making formulations of solutions just about impossible. Are there civilizations that are based on more 'appropriate' (i.e. earth-friendly) conceptual foundations as reflected in their languages? It is tempting to speculate that cultures which see humans as superior to nature and not an integral part of the environment they live in as of necessity competitive and seeking to dominate. Perhaps now we have reached the point where such a view is no longer sustainable if we are to avoid self destruction. But I may have lost you by now?

3 August 2016

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IDEAS

Below are some thoughts I jotted down while visiting relatives and friends in Holland ,Greece and France from August to end October 2016. The intention at the time was to elaborate them further. We'll see...

These are ideas to be further elaborated.

After and during reading '*The Monk and the Philosopher*'; conversations about Buddhism and Western thought, by Jean-François Revel and Matthieu Ricard, I had some thoughts:

- If the aim is to have no feelings or emotions, then what is the point of living?
- What if it turns out that the spirit-matter dichotomy is false, and that properties ascribed to the spirit are found to be within matter, or vice versa? The latter probably being less likely.
- Is there another type of consciousness, independent of time?
- If time is a product of our experience (or perception) of being alive, and eternity exists outside and independent of our experience, then the question of a beginning (or end) of the universe and who or what created it, becomes irrelevant. That includes the question of what there was before the big bang.
- If our consciousness becomes aware of the world, you could say that this world is (being) created by our consciousness, and that includes the "physical" world. This could also imply that we create each other.
- So you could say that our universe, our world, is a product of our combined thoughts and that we all are responsible for how we experience this world, including our planet. Does this imply a moral responsibility to work towards a world which guaranties as much as possible a fair go for all its creators?
- But then, would this universe continue to exist if somehow we managed to destroy ourselves and/or our planet? Can consciousness be destroyed?
- It is very difficult to formulate these thoughts. It would seem that Buddhist ideas about such things have a lot of merit, alongside ideas developed over time in the so-called Western world.
- One difference between Holland and Greece seems to me that in Greece people and things appear diminished, as if you are looking through the wrong end of binoculars, whereas in Holland they somehow appear enlarged, more in your face as it were; more hard-edge. Nature seems to contract things in Holland, in Greece it expands. I prefer the latter perspective. Both languages like the use of diminutives, but the "feel" of their use seems to me quite different.
- Lying awake at night I often have a very clear idea about taking a course of action which in the light of day seems to evaporate as being unpractical or presumptuous, as if it is a bridge too far, a threshold that I can or dare not cross. I justify this by my wish to avoid making a nuisance of myself by prevailing on others to do me a favour, to set time aside for me, presuming that my concerns would be worth their while. Is this a case of false modesty, this reluctance to self-promote? Or is this rather a case of some form of laziness?...I tell myself that the emotional effort is not worth the reward. Self-justification seems universally human.

24 November 2016

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POPULISM AND BEYOND

I am the oceans. In its depths is where I live. They are my responsibility, I am their god. My name is Poseidon. You may call me Dimitri if you like, since we are intimately related. But this relationship is, perhaps more unfortunately for me than it is for you, unbalanced. You need me more than I need you. Your legends, whether religious or scientific or whatever, have it that I was there before you and that I was inexorably involved in your creation. Without me you simply would not exist. Whether I can exist without you is philosophically interesting, but irrelevant to the mess you've got yourself into.

Perhaps I should let you stew in that messy juice of your own creation, so well described by Alexis Wright in her "The Swan Book", but that would be defeatist and a win for those who live by the philosophy of *'après nous le déluge'*. It is true, your history certainly does not suggest that you will ever learn from your mistakes. But does that then mean that this should be accepted as the "reality", the reality of what these days is called "post-reality"? Does this mean that nothing matters and that in the end the rule of the jungle prevails, survival of the fittest, the biggest bully rules? In that scenario cooperation is always subjugated to competition. Winners and losers. Exploitation for profit. Rampant capitalism. Trickle-down economics. Neo-Liberalism. Inevitable never ending wars. *Si volēs pacem, para bellum*, said Julius Caesar, the emperor/dictator. He lived in very similar times. Robert Harris describes very well how that came about via the pen of Tiro, Cicero's devoted private secretary. A reasonably well functioning democratic, although elitist system, destroyed by a few unscrupulous operators who discovered the powers of populism and used it very effectively to their own unsavoury ends. Nothing much has changed in that regard. But an elitist system is not necessarily bad, as the populists will assert, aspiring thereby to become elite themselves: the best qualified to rule; it is in their interest to keep the populace (the plebs) uneducated so they can divide and rule; for this they thrive on half truths and sometimes blatant lies; this rampant and unchecked exploitation of the people, and by implication the environment, inevitably leads to the deluge. Surely "the people" want their "rulers" to be those who are best qualified for their task: to ensure a fair go for the people and the environment they live in. This begs the question of educational qualifications. For the people to elect such elite leaders they must be confident of their qualifications, as in turn these leaders must be reasonably confident their electors are qualified to vote. This of course implies mutual trust and respect, the very thing that seems to be lacking these days. What are the essentials of a curriculum which might ensure such a standard of education, and what are the conditions contributing to its erosion? How can I for instance be sure that people fully understand what I am talking about if I can't be sure that they understand the essential meanings of the words that I have used here? I would submit that at least the apex of the elected elite should have a basic knowledge of Latin and ancient Greek for a start. Many would be surprised by the number of words in this paragraph which are derived from these no longer spoken languages. Knowledge is diminished if not useless without some understanding of its conceptual foundations. Moreover, would you trust a world leader who is unable to name the capital of Australia, or for that matter a doctor who tells you that Amsterdam is the capital of Poland? Minimum levels of general knowledge ought to be prerequisites. Those who argue that is not necessary and a waste of time and effort to understand the etymological similarity of for instance "elite" and "elect" undermine the structure of language and contribute to a breakdown of effective communication by eroding the depth and limits of meaning underlying such concepts. It is like taking all the

violins bar one out of an orchestra or reducing the digital information in an electronic file to its bare minimum; what you are left with is a product of very poor quality. This may be acceptable if the person using this product is aware of its limitations and does not use them as foundations for other complex creations. Bullshit in bullshit out, to put it in plain English. When the Australian "populist" politician, Pauline Hanson, exclaims '*Please explain*' she paradoxically enunciates the very disconnect I have been talking about: it is a cry for help from one who intuitively feels her lack of education, and she speaks for the populace, the people.

Ah Dimitri, I say to myself, if only you could translate this diatribe into plain English. But alas I don't know such language and perhaps there is no such language, notwithstanding Pauline's wishful assertions! Nevertheless it would be worth a try. My tirade would become twice as long I suspect. And now I, elitist by default, also ask myself if 'you people' could live with the uncertainty that true education brings. Moreover I am beginning to think we gods may well be the product of post-truth philosophy. Figure that one out!

I am Poseidon, I am the oceans, my temperature is rising, and you know what that means...

4 December 2016

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ELITISM

Inevitably someone will write a PhD thesis analysing the numerous reactions to and analyses of the 2016 election of the successor of the president of the U.S., “America’s-best-president-ever”; a deliberately ambiguous sentence. The reason for not mentioning their names is a sad enough story in itself, for paranoia is the opposite of trust. One would claim to know he was the best, and would trumpet it loudly; his predecessor would quietly know he tried his darndest to have a go at it. Recorded history will depend on the ‘official’ recorder. Seldom has the meaning of good and evil had a stronger contrast. But that is what America is about, with its history rooted in Dutch-European Protestantism. Emigrants creating their own utopian world, oblivious to their own self-righteous ignorance and the people and their environment’s accumulated wisdoms as they invaded like a malignant cancer of the bowel: colonisation. Despite the undoubtedly good intentions of a handful of legislative founding fathers ‘Might is Right’ triumphed in the end. Brute force and sheer ignorance. It’s been said before.

What would be the contents of such a scholarly thesis? What would be included, what omitted? What lessons would be learned, what predictions made? Would the relevant people take notice? Would it make a difference? Would it contribute to the essential educational requirements of those elected or appointed to lead their people? A new beginning or another failed attempt?

An attempt at what? At creating an ideal world? What would or should such a world look like anyway? The word harmonious comes to mind. What is it that should be well-balanced, in agreement? How much disharmony can a functioning system sustain before it irretrievably breaks down? So if the world and perhaps the whole universe (why not?), at least as I perceived it, is a functioning system in the sense of a dynamic organism (tautology?), then I am part of that system and my observations and actions (are observations also actions?) based thereon can *expect* – an interesting word in this context – a reaction. Is there a difference between a conscious reaction, free will, and an unconscious, pre-determined one? Moreover the system also acts upon me as I react to it. Is it possible or necessary to study such a system objectively?

It seems to me that these are fundamental issues to be studied in considerable depth by those heavily engaged in government. How do these issues affect our understanding of democracy, dictatorship, the free market, socialism, capitalism environmentalism, self-regulation, interventionism, etc. etc.? I would argue for a balanced understanding of what all this is about and against a fundamentalist ‘road-to-Damascus’ conclusion one way or the other, where each side understands from where the other side is coming and neither claims to hold the key to the absolute truth and embarks on a vindictive crusade. All this pre-supposes a thorough knowledge of language and history as well as an understanding of the epistemology of science, a knowledge acknowledging its own limitations. Moreover an ability to communicate this knowledge and understanding clearly and unambiguously

would be most desirable. If this sounds elitist, it is, but humbly, nevertheless unashamedly so.

13 January 2017 (several weeks after writing this piece)

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MÖCHTE ICH IN FRIEDEN ERWACHEN

Je rêve que je dors
Je rêve que je rêve
Et dans mon rêve endormi
Je rêve ma vie
Et dans cette vie, somnambulant,
Ivre de vivre,
Je rêverai revivre une autre vie
Éternellement

14 janvier 2017

PS.

Si nous rêvons nos vies et celles les unes de l'autre...?

Un cauchemar dont l'antonyme joue l'Arlésienne

3 août 2017

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U NAAIT ME STEEDS¹

My brain is empty of things to say. It has been for some time. Yet it feels as if I have to write. There is a feeling of sadness within me. No smile on my face lately. No sign of cheeky or quirky thoughts to lift my spirits, or yours, which is partly behind its motivation it occurs to me now: the lifting of my spirits and hopefully yours, I mean 'Partly': a word often used by those reluctant to be categorical. It leaves the door open to an escape route, just like the word 'arguably'. The ironic thought that these kinds of words are cowardly seems to close that very door, and this in turn prevents the sun from breaking through my cloudy brain. And yet I write in search of that door, a way out of a dark forest or a claustrophobic painting (Velazquez's *Las Meminas*, comes to mind), an anxiety dream, an overwhelming or even the overwhelming reality, which relentlessly tries to impose itself, that all might be, no, is lost, that hope is futile: the triumph of Trump, the impotence of Obama: America.

And then there was last night's A.C.O.² concert with the theme-title Murder and Redemption. No escape route there either: Redemption American style, the word itself even more angst laden than the acts, physical and mental, it seeks to redeem, a mixture of traditional Anglo-American folksongs and John Adam's 'Shaker Loops'; the latter hugely popular according to the concert notes,...Why? Moreover a fiddler's RSI nightmare.

American culture, 'arguably' more 'primitive' than the cultures the religiously persecuted immigrants and other assorted outlaws so very self-righteously and violently eradicated and replaced! But is Tolstoy's 'sympathetic jury' in his novella *The Kreutzer Sonata* any more redeeming of the *crime passionnel*, or less primitive, more 'civilised'? Was the 25 year old Kamila Stosslova worthy of redemption for failing to consummate the 65 year old Leos Janacek's passionate love for her?

Sigmund Freud wrote an essay on '*Civilisation and its Discontents*'.
My father advocated '*sublimation*'.

Donald Trump advocates '*Pussy-Grabbing*'.
If any, what are his views on redemption?
Unarguably '*post truth*'. No doubt!

8 February 2017

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¹ Double Dutch for United States: you always fuck with me, or perhaps better: fuck me around.

² Australian Chamber Orchestra. Adelaide Town Hall, 7 February 2017

WILD ARTICHOKE THISTLE, CYNARA CARDUNCULUS

There are those social occasions, parties if you like, where you don't know many people and you feel somewhat out of your depth, a fish out of water, you know you don't really belong or want to be there and feel it, you don't fit in, it's not your scene, immediate escape is not an option. From past experience you have cobbled together a couple of coping strategies, tried them out with encouraging, success. Your self confidence received a much needed boost. You have nothing to lose.

"Hello, my name is Chanthavy¹", she – petite Asian, young, pretty with regular features and an engaging lively smile – perhaps a little over assertively introduced herself in accent-less English to the small group of to her no doubt elderly wine or beer clutching anglo men that I had somewhat reluctantly joined on the small patch of lawn outside trying to partake in their self-important small-talk, thereby implementing *my* strategy for such I'd-rather-not-be-there-occasions. This one was a once a year event with the familiar crowd whose names I mostly forgot and knew I would not remember on introduction. She held out her hand for them to shake and was not, could not be, refused. How did she come to be here? went through our minds. I have no memory of her handshake, but do recall keeping myself somewhat intuitively aloof. Did I want to avoid the embarrassment of the ensuing conversation? Anyway I slinked off to refill my glass. The wine was as usual a cut above the cheaper brands and worth sampling. After all, the guests belonged to the 'higher echelons of society', to quote the host, old Friday-after-work drinking buddies from the days at the beginning of their professional careers, now top lawyers, doctors, company directors and the like, retired or of retirement age.

With my replenished glass I joined my wife Katina, who was talking with the only other guest of 'Asian appearance' and who was not tatted up like most of the other women there, but rather 'tatted down' like most of the men. Her manner was down to earth, no nonsense. She clearly felt at ease. Later I learned that she was the partner of a celebrated long-time country doctor, also there and herself a doctor as well, who specialised in supporting and mentoring fledgling younger colleagues in her large country town and surrounding district; no easy task I imagine. She was just telling me of her politically centrist position when Chanthavy broke in to join us and changed the topic of conversation to her insights and experiences, bubbly and somewhat opinionated. Once again I slinked off outside, past the groups of men being served finger food on a large platter by one of the women on the aforementioned grass patch, and, glass in hand, took the path through the narrow strip of sand-dunes to the large stretch of beach in front of the apartment. Whenever there I have made a point of doing that to be alone for a while and clear my brain. It was warm and breezy; the light and the low silver and gold-rimmed clouds reminded me of a recent stay in Tasmania: a vague and ancient nostalgia, the existential loneliness of the Friesian Wadden-Seascapes of my youth, a mixed feeling of expectation and alas-ness.

¹ Cambodian for Beautiful Moongirl. I didn't quite catch her real name, and probably would not have remembered it anyway, but it sounded appropriately exotic.

After refilling my glass in the kitchen I looked around before deciding what to do next, and there she was, sitting by herself on one of the comfortable leather chairs in the lounge. All the others were standing in little groups no doubt talking about food, wine, grand children, travel experiences, political gossip, their achievements in life and what have you: all the usual suspects. 'Ah', I thought, 'one of my party tricks: let people come to me.' She had already noticed me with an inviting look. After a moment of hesitation – what am I letting myself in for? – curiosity got the upper hand and I sank down in the leather next to her. One of her little victories? I felt the whole room watching us, females even more aware than their partners. While I asked her if she was having a little time out for herself she continued texting on her mobile amazingly nimble-thumbed and said she often liked to sit by herself on such occasions, tuning into various conversations. "Ah, multi-tasking" I said with mixed feelings and wondered out loud about the dangers of developing RSI where I wanted to complement her on her social interaction strategy, and continued "bullshit, they are mainly talking bullshit". She asked me for my occupation in an alarmingly disarming way, straight to the point, a little too direct, perhaps?

"Okay, I'm retired. In another life I used to be a Psychologist."

"Ah", she said, "I am a Counsellor, I used to have my own private practice. What kind of Psychologist were you?"

I hesitated, from past experience not really wanting to go there, but said I had been a variety of types, but ended up being a Clinical Psychologist.

"Why don't you Psychologists like Counsellors? I had to quit my practice because I couldn't access Medicare."

The implication of course was that she felt we did the same kind of work. Bang, I thought, here we go! How much did this girl know? How old was she anyway? She could be anything between 23 and her mid thirties, I reckoned. I told her that at the time I retired we couldn't get Medicare either and mostly worked for the Government, and that a colleague Psychiatrist had once told me that I should have studied Medicine, in reply to a similar gripe. I could not get myself to tell her that I had my doubts about the counselling skills of many my colleagues, despite their academically higher 'scientific' qualifications and that evidence based therapies were not nearly ready yet to be applied holus bolus. Instead I told her about how much I had learned from the cross-cultural project that was part of my Master's thesis which had put so many of my previous beliefs on loose screws. This struck a chord with her and she told me of her multi-cultural background. She had been adopted at a very early age and had lived in many countries; her English was perfect to the surprise of many people she met; she spoke Arabic and had several passports. I suggested that she should study Psychology, perhaps Management Consulting, that she'd be good at it. Her multi-cultural background would be an asset. She was obviously chuffed and complimented me on my judgement. Was I meant to be flattered by that, another of her ploys? But no, she was considering midwifery and gynaecology. No lack of ambition there. I decided to pulse her views on multi-culturalism and the dilemma I felt when eradicating weeds from my garden with the intent of restoring it to its native origin, and how difficult that was if not impossible without collateral damage to the remaining native plants. She immediately caught on and accused me of the foolishness of my pursuit. After

some quick thumbing on her mobile she showed me a picture of a purple thistle that had been virtually eradicated as a pest from the hills around Adelaide. Didn't I know that was a wild artichoke and that it was edible and a delicacy at that? These introduced species should not be seen as a pest, but as an asset, contributing to variety. She asked Sam, the well-to-do Greek Cypriot middle-aged lawyer who had brought her to the party, to confirm her story, which he duly did.

Later, as we took leave, she embraced me with a warm kiss.

"Well", I said in the car to my wife Katina, who had witnessed all of this, "whoever gets involved with this seductively desirable wild artichoke, beware."

At home I looked it up in Wikipedia:

The wild cardoon is a stout herbaceous perennial plant growing 0.8 to 1.5 m (31 to 59 in) tall, with deeply lobed and heavily spined green to grey-green tomentose (hairy or downy) leaves up to 50 cm (20 in) long, with yellow spines up to 3.5 cm long. The flowers are violet-purple, produced in a large, globose, massively spined capitulum up to 6 cm (2 in) in diameter.

It is adapted to dry climates, native across an area from Morocco and Portugal east to Libya and Greece and north to France and Croatia; it may also be native on Cyprus, the Canary Islands and Madeira. In France, it only occurs wild in the Mediterranean south (Gard, Hérault, Aude, Pyrénées-Orientales, Corsica). It has become an invasive weed in the pampas of Argentina, and is also considered a weed in Australia and California.

At a subsequent occasion, reminiscing about the party, I remarked to Joy, the hostess, that Chanthavy was a bit of a street fighter and pretty direct¹. Joy expressed concern about Sam's gullibility. I told her that Sam was a big boy and could look after himself. Half his luck, I could not help thinking. Joy said she was only 20. We did not believe that.

11 March 2017

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¹ In Dutch: Niet op haar mondje gevallen which may translate as 'having plenty of sass'.

THE WONDERFUL AUSSIE BOOM-BUST MERRI-GO-ROUND

I am looking for a word less value laden than stupid, irrational, unintelligent, crazy, fuckwitted, myopic, to describe some behaviour of otherwise well-intentioned people. Perhaps 'wonderful' comes closest. I once heard that in South Africa this word is used in its true sense, as in 'This morning Jo was accidentally shot dead by the police, isn't that wonderful?'. What is meant is miraculous 'full of wonder'. 'Unbelievable' doesn't quite cut it; after all such behaviour is all too common. And now I will perhaps offend several of my good friends who no doubt will object that I too can be accused of similar inconsistencies, and I'll plead guilty.

Womadelaide is a good example. This world-music festival was set up more than a decade ago to give the good citizens of Adelaide, the 'beautiful, earth-friendly environment-aware people' of the late '60s early '70s and their offspring, access to the folk music and cuisines of other cultures to which they would not normally be exposed, surely a laudable initiative. It was an instant success. Locating the event in Adelaide's magnificent and shady Botanical Gardens greatly contributed to its success as did its timing in March with its consistently warm and sunny days and cool wind still nights. Small, intimate stages under the trees allowed one to wander between the different performances, finding many treasures amongst them. There was no amplification, or if there was it was kept discrete and kept within the intimate limits of the audience. Before and after performances it was possible to meet and talk to the performers. At least, that is how I remember it. Although some of my friends still persist, I have long since stopped going there. With tongue in cheek I dare say that I don't have to since I can hear some of the acts from my balcony in the foothills more than 10 kilometres away, especially the thumb-thumb of basses and drums. If I wasn't going a little deaf I would probably also be able to hear the lead 'artists' encouraging the audience to dance or wave their hands and to engage in other sorts of pseudo-ecstatic mass behaviour, and I imagine pop and rock-stars gyrating and strutting their stuff to overgrown teenyboppers. I could hardly imagine anything more environmentally unfriendly, despite the 'garbage police' volunteers' efforts to direct people where and how to relieve themselves of their waste products.

I fully wonder what the ancient trees and the animals in the Zoo next door think of all this human madness. I do know that if I was a musician asked to perform at this event I would flatly refuse; perhaps I would start a fringe event in an alternative setting. But then again, who is to say that the trees and the animals are not having a ball, like the organisers and commercial profiteers?

15 March 2017

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SUM ERGO COGITO

Belair National Park, primeval and magical, especially when the sun is low, or after a rainstorm. The ancient giant gumtrees demand acknowledgement and respect. You ignore them at your peril. At any time they can drop an enormous branch. Plenty of evidence all around. One death defying, if not denying, life cycle. I wander in it as it wanders in me, participators in and creators of a universe shared with all the other wildlife, animate and inanimate. One liv-dying organism. If I become aware of a tree, is that because the tree has drawn my attention to it, it having become aware of me? I know that the kangaroos have been aware of me long before I became aware of them. Why does that magpie defiantly ignore me? What does that attractive whu-man think when she is about to be passed by a hu-man? What's in the mind of the dog on her leash? No question about the mind-set of the man's unleashed dog. His nose is already up the others rear...

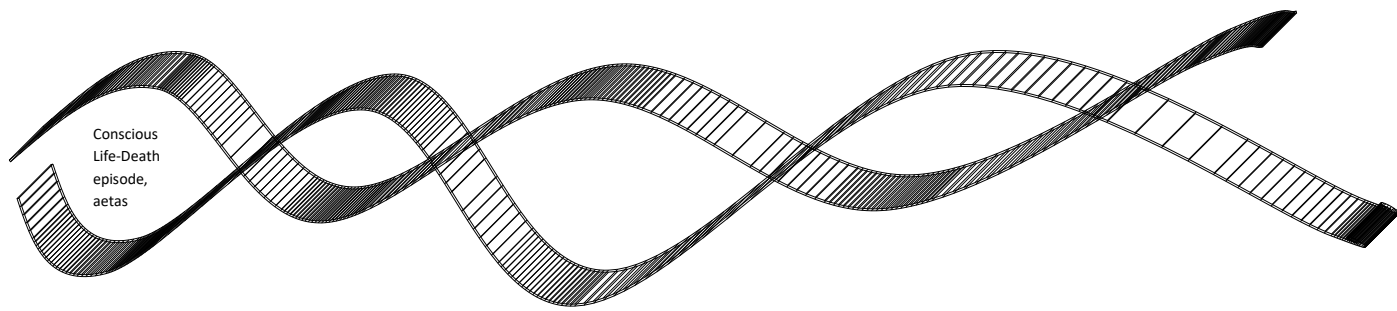
The tree above me does not drop a branch. Should I consider myself lucky?

15 April 2017

Ps: Some of you may wonder if the tree was a whu-tree and that I should have taken her non-action as a good omen, making my non-action another missed opportunity. I considered such musings as irrelevant to the story.

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WORMS, STRINGS AND UNLIMITED PARALLEL UNIVERSES



Infinity, eternity, no beginning, no end, no time, no distance, no continuity, no limits

Pure being, also pure non-being? total awareness, suspended awareness, hibernation?

A probability used as a fact will always remain a hypothesis. Discuss...

Facts are only possible in Mathematics? Are there different classes of facts apart from the currently in vogue “fake facts”?

An aetas contains potentially (?) all of history, all that has ever entered consciousness, all that ever was or will be created by consciousness. The world is my aetas.

There are potentially unlimited aetasses (aetates).

Are you, and is the world, a product of my mind and yours for that matter? What are the implications of this?

Death only exists in (conscious) life.

All (the totality of) experience is potentially within me. Can it exist without me?

Exist is from ex-sitere = to step out. To step out of what?

Why not “I transist”? As in: I transist from one aetas to another. It is different from “transit”, or is it? Are these verbs transitive or intransitive? (somewhat tongue-in-cheek here). What about ‘to transport’?

No doubt it is related to my stage in life, but there is something that won’t leave me (my mind) alone, some sort of half insight, that keeps wanting to be expressed, express itself. You live and then you die, and that’s it, that’s all there is to it, even if you include reincarnation ideas. All those questions, those thoughts, those philosophical deliberations, attempts at integration, understandings, explanations about history, science, religions, all that learning and un-learning.....and then nothing, just God with the capital G or Allah for that matter? It won’t do. I must be missing something. If words are inadequate, is music too? Music speaks to the soul, whatever that is. The God concept is

beyond grasp: therefore it must be all powerful and awe-inspiring: It just won't do.¹ If there is God it must be me, I've thought and said this before and you are it (notice the neuter) in your world. And now Martin Buber's I and Thou (Ich und Du) comes to mind. My father will be pleased.

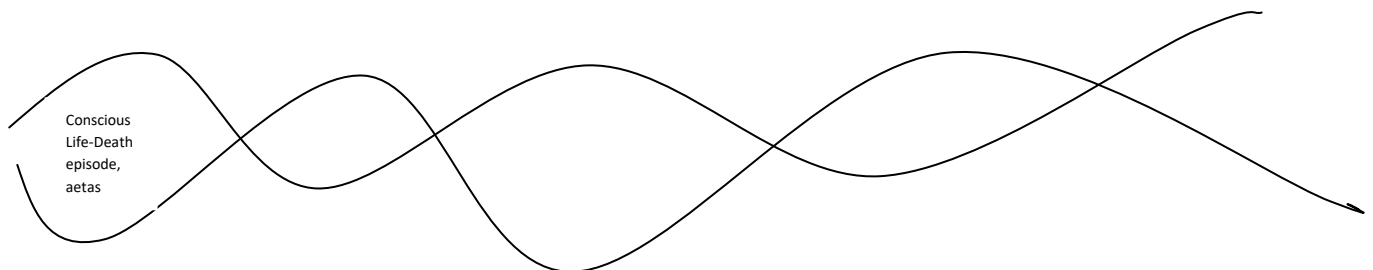
Thus the word 'mystery' enters my mind, itself a 'mysterious' word with Hebrew/Greek/Latin origins. A secret, hidden from the uninitiated and therefore sacred (interesting its closeness to the word scared: dangerous, be careful!) with associations to the occult and allusions to altered states of awareness and ritualistic practices. Altered states of awareness, holy grounds. I remember the experience clearly, the glimpse of a hidden reality, stolen by means of LSD. Now reduced to yet another reality. A vehicle for clever Doctor Who stories.

So this time, once again, unsurprisingly I failed to nail it. Perhaps I had better leave it alone, giving up the ghost at the tropical advice of Henry Miller. He was dead certain.

Never the less a universe filled with the wormlike squiggles above and below seems strangely pleasing.

7 June 2017

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¹ At this point I received miraculously an email from the beergod affirming it was etymologically OK to be "in de war", i.e. at war with myself, confused.

SATISFACTION

To make full, to fulfil. Funny: a bucket can be fully filled. But can it be fulfilled? A person can be full, yet not be fulfilled. Either way, the condition that previous emptiness – or lack of something – is implied, is satisfied. A fully filled bucket can either be satisfactory or not satisfactory, but not to itself, unless it has awareness. The idea that a bucket has awareness is not satisfactory to those who are satisfied that only they have awareness. The possibility of mutual fulfilment is a precondition for love. So for those who think only they have awareness, love for a full bucket is not possible. Love for an empty bucket would be a one-sided affair as it could never be fulfilled, even if it were fully filled. Judging by the expression on his face in the photograph Laszlo loves the taste of his pie. That fills me with a feeling of satisfaction, irrespective of whether the pie loves him or not. I share Laszlo's feeling of satisfaction because I can identify with him. Empathy, sympathy, compassion are words that describe the mechanism by which my feeling of satisfaction is transferred. When these feelings are mutually reinforced a precondition for love is satisfied. Does the degree to which this is possible depend on the similarity between me and the object or subject (stimulus for) of my compassion? What about hate or other feelings?

Can such feelings exist between, say, trees or so-called in-animate stimuli? Are there circumstances under which the pie can be said to love Laszlo? For most of course this is a step too far and they will relegate such a proposition to the realm of insanity. But isn't this also the realm of religion? And if you assume that it is, then can you still be religious? I would suggest that religious experiences emanate from a degree of altered awareness. So that implies different kinds of reality. But from where does awareness originate?

My awareness demands I seek intelligence to cope with my environment, with my existence within it; it wants me to use this intelligence to ask intelligent questions. But I do not find satisfactory answers. Ergo: I ask the wrong questions, my intelligence is inadequate... I can't get no satisfaction...Remember to let her under your skin, then you begin to make it better. Transcendental meditation. And life flows on within you and without you...Martin Buber's "I and Thou"?

24 June 2017

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PERPETUALLY ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY QUESTIONS

When, for you, I cease to exist physically, has the world as I know it also ceased to exist? Or does that world only cease to exist when you cease to exist? In other words, does the world as we think we know it only have existence in our minds? What are the implications of this? How does this relate to the definition of reality? Are these questions as absurd to, say, the “educated” “eastern” mind as they would most likely appear to the contemporary “educated” “western” mind? Would a Zen Buddhist smile benignly at such questions? Would a western philosopher of the “realist school” scoff at them? How would your god, supposing you have one – or if you had one – deal with them? What are the moral implications irrespective of “religion”? Is there a universe in which something can exist and not exist simultaneously? Can we have a foot in both camps? How many of these sorts of questions is it possible to ask, and should we be asking them anyway? Can trying to address them lead to a “better” world? Can I assume that such a “better” world would be one with less wilful and ultimately self-destructive violence? Or is despair and utter resignation the only inevitability?

.....

On revisiting this several weeks later I must have intended to say more, but now I’m quite happy to end it there and leave myself open to Paloma Josse’s rejection of negativism. I refer to her *“Pensée profonde n° 7”: Construire...Tu vis... Tu meurs...Ce sont...Des conséquences. Le futur, ça sert : à construire le présent avec des vrais projets vivants*. Not bad for a pubescent little upstart who intends to suicide on her 13th birthday.¹....

I have finally finished Muriel’s book. It was one of the most difficult ones I have read in French. She must have had great fun writing it as the *mise en scène* allowed her to get away with the exploration of language and thoughts shunned by many an academically educated elitist who might have dismissed her musings as pretentious and rather boring.

Traquer désormais ‘les toujours dans le jamais’: la beauté dans ce monde. The final message of this book.

4 August 2017

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¹ *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Barbery, Translated by Alison Anderson, Gallic Books.

HAS EUROPEAN CULTURE STRANDED ON THE SHORES OF RAMPANT CAPITALISM?

Why do I write in English? I don't even like this language very much, and it is not my first language, which *was* Dutch – to my surprise I noticed my use of the past tense. To many the Dutch language sounds harsh and guttural, and by implication not conducive to expressing emotional subtleties and this would apply to Arabic even more so. When I hear German I have the urge to parody that accent. Yet I will insist that Bach's Matthew Passion should only be sung in German. I have a Russian friend who once remarked that to her Shakespeare sounded much better in Russian. Portuguese seems closer to French than it is to Spanish. e.e. cummings' language could have been French. Flemish, and some would argue Afrikaans, lend itself better to poetry than Dutch. The little poem I wrote a few pages ago could only have been written in French. Scandinavian languages are best for expressing deep primordial fears and emotions. And so on..., a rich ground for stereotyping, sure, but also a rich source for nuancing and enriching subtle meanings and understandings. After all, variety is the spice of life. The French say: 'Vive la différence'. There is a lot to be said for learning different languages. It follows that growing up in a multi-lingual environment is likely to be an advantage in cross-cultural situations. Children seem to learn two languages as if it were just one language...

Of course, writing in English gives you access to a much larger audience. But now I'm inclined to use that dubious if not duplicitous pre-'fixial' phrase: ...'To be honest', or worse, 'to be perfectly honest'... I'm appealing to that section of the English speaking world which considers itself only marginally European, and which sees itself as primarily British or of British-colonial descent, and that of course includes America, Australia, etc. Today we live in a post-colonial world and Britannia no longer rules that world (if it ever did, for better or for worse). But the English language has persisted and, at least for the foreseeable future dominates international communication. Given that language is one of the major determinants of a culture, then the English language is unmistakably European, since that's where its roots lie. This implies that, in terms of identity based on cultural heritage, non-indigenous people educated in countries where the lingua franca is European in origin, share predominantly European values, again for better or for worse. The indigenous populations of those former colonies especially, but certainly not exclusively, those for whom English is their second or third language, have in turn contributed their cultural heritage to the mix, having absorbed that of their intruders. Moreover what is called European is itself the product of conquest and colonization. So it is well to bear in mind that the concept of 'European values' is a slippery one, and any conclusions based thereon should be regarded with a healthy scepticism.

Perhaps at this point I should explore what I mean by 'for better or for worse'. Twice now I have used that phrase. I have implied that language and culture are intimately related and that this relationship is reciprocal. I have also implied (by saying 'to be honest'), a criticism ('for worse') of Brits who are inclined to ethnocentricity (the conviction of one's own cultural superiority). This tendency is likely to be present in many if not all cultural groups. But also likely to be present, although perhaps to a lesser degree, is an inclination

to relativise and be sceptical of such tendencies towards hierarchical evaluation of cultural characteristics. It occurs to me that these conflicting tendencies might be related to one's orientation in evaluating cultures: looking primarily for differences between cultures might lead to a hierarchical evaluation on a better-worse continuum, whereas looking for similarities might lead to an appreciation of equality which includes a positive acknowledgement of differences, if not a celebration of those differences and at the very least a tolerance thereof. This kind of culture would encourage competition within the framework of cooperation. The former would only seek cooperation in pursuit of competition.

It seems to me that the development of our European culture has reached a kind of impasse and that this can be ascribed to an overemphasising of differences at the expense of the exploration of commonalities (the sharing of characteristics or qualities with other individuals¹). How did this come about? What are the consequences? What (if anything) can be done about it? Is the pursuit of answers to such questions worthwhile, or utterly futile?

To answer these kinds of questions you need to become a very cultured person indeed with a deep understanding of the conceptual foundations of language and science. Would you then be able to convince me that the fittest will survive and that competition aided and abetted by ever more self-serving technology ('artificial intelligence' if you please) is the only realistic way to go? Or will you conclude that cooperation and the exploration of commonalities are the way to avoid total self-destruction? Are we up to that task? How robust and resilient is our European, or if you like Western heritage? Has it run its course?

13 August 2017

PS: How relevant are today's Nation-States, our racial and religious affiliations? Would a world order based on regions of broad cultural commonalities be more conducive to effective mutual cooperation in the pursuit of humanity's survival on this planet?

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¹ Encarta Dictionary English (U.K.)

IMAGES OF HEAVEN

On the ninth of January 2018, my friend Felix, amongst other claims-to-fame beergod and zen-art collector sent me an e-mail with a challenge, as he is wont. I translate:

Ha die Daan (not translatable, but you get the idea),

...As fledgling son of a parson you will surely have heard about heaven (me too, but not in detail). Perhaps you will be interested to find out something about three images of heaven which I had the privilege to see or hear about during my lifetime. The first was via the radio in my student digs (in the sixties). It would have been a Sunday, and on the radio I heard a strict (read staunchly) Calvinist preacher describe heaven. I found the topographical precision of his description gobsmacking. First and foremost: definitely not cheerful. More a kind of courtroom with a depressive atmosphere and all things and personages were accurately defined to the centimetre. Afterwards I heard that I could be sent a personal text for free. I did read it, the sermon was stencilled. Alas thrown out with the passage of time, a real shame. From where does such a preacher source his info? Not from the New Testament. The second time was via a brochure that was shoved into my hands by a jehova's witness. Depicted was an excellent line-drawing of a pristine park with benches where upon seated were proper white families; no dog or nigger in sight. The third time was on the TV and more recent. It concerned an educational institution in the north of Pakistan. Probably for potential fighters. On the walls were paintings upon which deliciously green pastures extend across undulating landscapes. A Walhalla for poor peasants in barren regions. I myself do not have an image of heaven. Rather nothing at all...

Joehoe,

Felix

I replied with what I now would like to think of as Taoist-inspired spontaneity:

Hi Felix,

Yes, what does Daontje-van-den-dominie¹ know of heaven? Well, there you have hit upon another source of ins(read: trans)piration, bullseye. "Hemeltje lief" (good heavens above) I hear my grandmother say. So, this heaven is not only small, but also sweet and good. And my mother found herself from time to time in the 'seventh heaven', and she was certainly not a Katteliek (Catholic). So there are at least seven of them. The 'heaven of heavens' where the 'Lord of all heavenly forces'² lives; 'the Kingdom of God', as my father referred to it. And he should know, for he was after all an aspiring 'biblical

¹ Thus was the son of the Dutch-Reformed pastor referred to in the local dialect.

² A military presence!

scholar', right? And his father, the professor-doctor¹, absolutely so. 'My father's House² has many rooms,' said 'the Son of man'. Yes, that goes without saying: you would think at



Johannes 14:2 - In het huis mijns Vaders zijn vele woningen

least half of the 'heengegane' (those passed away) would end up in heaven. A small yet big heaven to be sure! But now, I heard not so long ago that if you stack all of mankind against each other they won't even occupy half of the Netherlands. So, liquid (read treacherous) dimensions as well. A heaven with many mansions, and the King in a palace of course, as befits a paradise, the celestial paradise for sure! But somehow that does not make sense, because Adam and Eve wore no clothes in Paradise and they lived naturally, out in the open, no cloud in the sky, pardon, in the sky heaven³. No cold to be suffered there. Nowadays you need to be confirmed⁴ first; otherwise you have no chance of getting there at all. I managed to avoid that by migrating to Australia. Apparently you need a boat to get to heaven, why else 'Ascension Day'⁵. To hell you also sail on a boat: Patiner painted a very small boat in a very big country/sea-scape on the way to Hades. On the death-bell (the largest of the three hanging there in the steeple of the Protestant Church of Bemmelen) my father had engraved "go in by the narrow gate (Ga in door de enge poort)". 'Eng' can also mean tight and scary, you have to pretty much squeeze yourself through it. And that 'scary' would also imply there is a good chance that you might end up in hell. Later, when I became acquainted with Sigfried⁶ Freud, yet another meaning was added. Yes, that was a heavenly experience! I consider now that Adje Colijn,

¹ <https://www.geni.com/people/prof-dr-Dani%C3%ABl-Plooi/6000000062632535869>

² The Dutch Reformed Manse in Bemmelen. It sadly no longer exists. My room was the one in the attic.

³ In Dutch the sky is also referred to as heaven.

⁴ In Dutch 'geloofsbelijdenis' contains the verb 'lijden', to suffer.

⁵ Hemelvaartsdag, the relevant verb is 'varen': to sail.

⁶ A genuine Freudian slip. Sorry Sigmund, and Richard W. as well! (comment added 21/04/2020)

who lived with his wife in emergency housing behind the Church, and where I often went because he was always fixing all sorts of things in his shed (usually, motorcycles and lawn mowers), but above all because he took pleasure in sexually enlightening me ..., well, this Colijn (no relation of the famous one¹, but nevertheless from a staunchly reformist background, thus with a profound knowledge of everything sinful), had a solution for that scary little passage. He sang with great gusto: "I have the ja-a-r with fat, on the ta-a-ble set... I have the jar the jar the jar with fa-a-a-t on the ta-a-ble set". He also taught me what 'getting out of church before the final hymn' meant. But now back from 'heaven onto earth', because 'down here it is not' ("up with the eye, hoist up the heart"² – my mother substituted 'the washing' –, etc., up into the realm above the clouds (you knew that it was above the clouds because in a thunderstorm carts with potatoes were tipped over when God was wrathful, accompanied by a lot of lightning and thunder (see/listen also to the St. Matthew Passion: "sind blitze und donner"). The painter Tiepolo painted exploding universes up-under the domes of the houses of God. I take my hat off to the guys who dared to undertake that kind of work and subject. And I haven't even mentioned the angels yet (eng-geilen³, free-associates the world in my mind), the sort of transgender creatures that make everything possible at the foot end of your cot; forever watching over you... There are also fallen angels, but they were hardly mentioned in our home. Well, enough for now, I'm going to have a cup of tea, the wine will come later.

Daontje

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¹ Colijn, a famous (read infamous) Dutch Reformed politician of the far religious right.

² A well known hymn in the Dutch Protestant hymn book.

³ Engelen...eng-geilen: scary lechers.

BLOW FLIES AND KILLER DRONES

I found myself looking at a small blowfly on the cutting board on the kitchen bench. Looking at became observing. It was still young because full of energy, and seemingly blissfully unaware of human threat it was busily and very thoroughly cleaning and preening its wings, underneath and up top. Every now and then it would dart around the cutting board, take off to fly a little circle, land almost in the same spot and blissfully put its hind legs to work again. How could a thing like that be harmful and inspire the human killer instinct? Was it aware of the clement conditions inside the house whilst outside humming swarms of its big fat relatives had sought shelter from the scorching elements in the shade and relative coolness of the carport?

Sometime later, as I was vacuuming the house, zealously and full of obsessive purpose, I saw another little fly buzzing against a window pane. Was it the same one I wondered? Before I knew it I had sucked it into the hose as I do with spiders and other vermin that I come across. I didn't get it first go and for a moment thought to let it go, but the deed was already done. As always there came the thoughts of what it would be like to die there in the bowels of the vacuum cleaner. The shiver down my spine...and then on with the job!

Recently I read that drone pilots are prone to post traumatic shock like symptoms as they sit there in their far away control centres observing the distant enemy they are about to kill...

9 February 2018

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SOUL DESTROYING AND SOUL SAVING ACTIVITIES

You may have gathered by now that I am rather obsessed with trying to understand and come to grips with humankind's apparent inability to avoid outright murderous wars as a means of resolving conflicts of interest when all else fails. It seems very similar to a persistent addiction, an addiction to violence, but on a massive collective self-reinforcing and self-destructive scale.

Two recent examples of reasons why this addictive behaviour is so entrenched and hard to modify sparked me to once again tackle this conundrum. An American professor and expert in defence was asked why Kim Jong Un was so keen to protect his nuclear weapons program. Being a "realist" he said that the "reality" was that no state with nuclear weapons was ever likely to give them up because having them ensured protection against attack. No one in their right mind would attack such a state for fear of reprisal. Thus: might is right; si vis pacem, para bellum. The other was the current US president floating the idea that school teachers should be made to carry guns to protect against mass shootings by students. Hence, more weapons, not fewer or no weapons are called for. That these mass shootings predominantly occur in North America, which likes to call itself an advanced and civilised country and the leader and policeman of the "free" world begs the question. Why this obsession with the right to carry arms? As if that is the pinnacle of civilisation. Is this not an admission that, despite all its valiant efforts, mankind is incapable of controlling its basic urges towards dominance, an admission that ultimately mankind cannot be held responsible for its actions? This view has been conveniently but too uncritically backed up by Darwin's "scientific" evidence: his "theory" of the "survival of the fittest", which in turn is used to justify capitalism and economic rationalism and so-called neo-liberalism, i.e. the current version of Western civilisation: Winners and losers, where the winner is the hero and the loser is dependent on the winners' generosity; trickledown economics, if you like. It seems that even those who are less hardline and insist on diplomacy and negotiation are nevertheless captive to this underlying view of human nature in that they insist on negotiating from a position of strength. Once again this begs the question: the argument is circular. "Jobs and Growth": for jobs you need growth, for growth you need jobs. Resources are assumed unlimited and human intelligence capable of solving all problems created by it.

But all of this I've said before in one way or another, and all this leads only to despair, especially when you add the role of organised religions to the mix, and in particular those of the monotheistic kind which encourage authoritarianism and dictatorships, including the benevolent kind and those based on communist principles. I would suggest that even democratic systems of government are prone to hijack by the 'might is right establishment'.

I am more and more attracted to Zen and Taoist solutions arrived at by each individual discovering and following their own way, which is the Way for them.



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The inscription is a verse from the *Shinjinmei* ('Believing in Mind'), an early Zen text. The preceding line states, 'Round and perfect like great space'. This is an example of a 'perfection' ensō. Buddha-nature is complete within itself, just right with nothing lacking and nothing extra.

WHAT MAKES AN AUSTRALIAN?

Here in Australia we are constantly reminded by our leaders that we are one of the most multicultural societies in the world, usually in response to various forms of aberration or violation of this adage. Only yesterday our “Asian looking” racial discrimination commissioner, Dr. Tim Soutphommasane (born in France of Chinese and Lao parents), deplored in perfect English the “fact” that this multi-culturalism was not reflected in the top jobs as these were overwhelmingly filled by Anglo-Celtics and Europeans, thus white-fellows by implication; that these were mostly male went almost without saying. Another obvious implication to me as a Dutch-Australian was that Anglo-Celtics were not European, or somehow not quite European. Furthermore it implied that there was a cohort of people who could do these jobs just as well as the Anglo-Celtic-Europeans. You would surely have to ask: what makes a European? Just because this continent was invaded and settled by people from the British Isles does that Anglo-Celtic-Britishness make them somehow more qualified, or for that matter less qualified than other Europeans or anybody else. Does our commissioner regard himself as an Asian-European or perhaps an Australian-Lao-Chinese-Asian-Anglo-Celtic-European? After all he speaks perfect English. And qualified for what? The point I want to make is that these kinds of categorizations, although interesting cultural phenomena in themselves, can only lead to absurdities and a quagmire of confusion unless, or should I say even if, they are ever further nuanced. Maybe this is the inevitable outcome of the limitations of human thought. We are taught from a very young age to differentiate, to categorise, to discriminate. But, aha, then again, who are we? We are taught this...they on the other hand are taught something else. There you are: us and them! You would think that the closer they are to us, the more acceptable they are to us. But very often the opposite is the case. Look for instance at the Middle East: Are Jews and, dare I say “other Arabs”, not more closely related than Jews and Americans or Europeans? So many wars are fought over trivialities. The concepts of race, religion, nationality, culture, colour, ethnicity, aboriginality, are ill defined and often intertwined and used to justify all sorts of crazy behaviours and institutionalised absurdities. Beware of patriots and people draping themselves in flags or donning uniforms. Beware, but not necessarily reject. It is those who exploit others’ confused identities and loyalties to divide and rule and feed their greed and hunger for power that are the villains. They get you to march in step so they can use you as cannon fodder. In other words: don’t follow leaders blindly.

Recently I found a passage in Alexis Wright’s latest book about Tracker Tilmouth which struck me as very relevant to all of this. It describes one of the many qualities Tracker had that made him such an effective and much loved and respected leader in furthering the cause of Australian Aboriginals. He was talking to newly recruited staff at an orientation session. *Well! You’ve come to work for us here at the Land Council and that’s what we want you to do, we want you to work for us but we don’t want you to die for us because we’re not worth it*¹. There is much wisdom in this book.

ANZAC DAY 2017 (25 April)

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¹ Alexis Wright, *Tracker*, Giramondo, 2017, p188.

QUESTION

Dear Mathematician/Philosopher/Scientist,

How do you cope with “infinity” in a world where time and space are limited by numbers?

To claim that it takes 60 minutes to get from A to B makes sense, but to claim that it takes forever makes no sense unless you mean by forever that it takes a long long time, but that you will get there eventually, it just seems to take forever. If I leave A at ten o'clock and I walk at a speed of 5 kilometres per hour I will get to B at 11 o'clock. But no matter how fast or how slowly I walk I will never get to B unless I walk at 0 kph and B is at 0 kilometres distance from A, which makes no sense.

Mortal earthling (human)

Undated

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LAMENT

The world I see is clearly not the world others see. What I see is put there by people who want me to see either what they think I should see or who put it there because they mistakenly think that it is what I want to see. In both cases the 'there-putters' have commercial gain as a motive. This is what happens when 'civilization' becomes an end in itself: civilization becomes commercialization. At airports and in large shopping centers I am a fish out of water. People have been turned into commodities, something to be bought and sold. Slavery, some sort of fascist capitalist plot. There is something intrinsically obscene about flying in airbuses and the like.

After that second last sentence I read Umberto Ecco's essay on fascism. You have to be careful with words.

I, like many, am concerned about the direction my world is taking after the 2008 financial crisis.

This was supposed to be a somewhat longer diatribe, but after reading the first sentence to Felix his immediate response was that there was nothing original or remarkable in it, thereby resolutely extinguishing a fire that would have most likely not taken off anyway.

Undated

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AUGUST 2018 (Amsterdam)

Egelantierstraat/Cnr Prinsengracht. Yearly visit. Alone for a little while. Katina out buying shoes. I on the loo, door open. The breeze going from back to front through the apartment moves it slightly and is followed by the sound of the bell in the clock tower of the Westerkerk: a coincidence? I wipe my bum and observe the patterns in the brown parquetry in the hallway. The two missing little tiles on the doorstep still not replaced and are not likely to be. Very little changes in this apartment. Yvonne likes it that way.

But there was a new small pile of books on the window sill. Books about sculpture, architecture, the manipulation of space, design; physical, but also psychological. A book by Anna Tilroe exploring contemporary developments in the ideas of art philosophy. Intrigued I started reading. Leafing through it the bits I read increasingly aroused my disturbed interest. A rejection of any kind of moral obligation, back to art for the sake of it. If people want glitter, give it to them. Trump as a work of art. Campbell soup, Andy Warhol and all that. But, yes, the artist reflects the world mirrored through the filter of experience. Perfectly lit.

Perfectly lit. Things are what they are or appear to be. Any ideas of how they should be are inimical, human hubris. Après nous le déluge, who cares? The world dies with us. Do nothing, don't interfere. Just observe, detached.

But no, my world dies with me and that does not necessarily include your world. Do I have some responsibility for the you in my world if the you in your world is nothing but a figment of my imagination and possibly of yours as well?¹ Some people have an unshakeable belief that they know how things should be or should not be. They will do anything to achieve their aim no matter how futile this is in the eyes of others. Also human hubris. Human reasoning, including scientific and religious dogma, inevitably leads to a dead end, a scenario from which there is no escape, a stale mate.

And here I get stuck too....Suicide, like Rothko after his ever blacker canvasses? But no, black, black, black is also the colour of my true love's hair². Can this - the promise of love's consolation - be the window of opportunity to escape the linear, time controlled world into the time-free zone? I just finished reading Joke J. Hermsen's book "Stil de tijd" (Silence/stop time) in which she examines the mostly negative effects the whole-sale adoption clock-time has had on the Western way of life. She advocates a state of mind where time is again seen or experienced as duration without beginning or end as it was before this state-of-being was hijacked by the hunger for and subsequent addiction to materialistic pursuits driven by 'advances' in science and technology where happiness can be bought: I have happiness rather than I am happy. Advances that have separated and alienated mind from body.

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¹ Two days after writing this sentence I read the following: *...Other people make us live in surprising worlds. And we live in them, they go and see us down there, they talk to these doubles who are their own invention. And in reality we do not meet at all in this life.* (Andreï Makime: *The Crime of Olga Arbyelina*, page 40.)

² A nostalgic poetic love song of the 1960's. The timeless experience of love as a possibility to escape from the world of endless doom and gloom which is the inevitable end product of logical reasoning. The kind of love that re-unites mind with body.

FROM AUNT AMALIA'S BALCONY
(Patriarhou Ioakim, Kalipoli, Piraeus)

“Met de taal door de taal heenbreken, is kortom de opgave en de paradox van het schrijverschap.”¹

“Overcoming language with language, is in essence the task and the paradox of the craft of creative writing.”

Language as its own enemy. Well put, Joke. Not everything in your book resonates with me, but many times I was surprised how succinctly you put into words my own attempts to capture with words (or is it in words) thoughts and feelings about time, space and the anomalies that I encounter when trying to come to grips with the world around me. Things happen so fast in my brain and I can only type letter by letter on this i-Pad, and there are so many interruptions, other people's needs....You would think I should have the perfect peace and quiet here on aunt Amalia's shady balcony on Patriarhou Ioakim, Kalipoli, Piraeus. But the concerns of what Joke calls the clock-time-world seem to have invaded all of our lives. While writing this I oscillate constantly from clock-time to time-as-duration. There is of course nothing new about these two ways of experiencing the world. Diderot for instance writes about a continuous and a contiguous universe. The former, as I understood it, is the world of cause and effect where the passage of time is central, the latter is the world of the here-and-now where feelings and emotions are felt with varying degrees of intensity, where experiences stand next to each other, but are discrete as timeless entities. A bit like analogue versus digital. In either of these dimensions there is no beginning or end. They can be represented as orthogonal axes, each meeting in infinity. Since the age of enlightenment in Europe the 'continuous' dimension seems to have gained the upper hand with the invention of ever more sophisticated measuring instruments. Perhaps the current fascination with finding the beginning of time and the origin of the universe is a consequence of this 'rational' thinking.

Anyway, all this sophistication in the scientific world seems to lead to the conclusion that 'the world' is immensely complex. It seems that human curiosity will never be satisfied. Whether this leads to existential despair and nihilism or various religious solutions, or seemingly crazy scientific endeavours such as space travel or to the view that, since there is nothing before and after life, there are no moral imperatives, will remain a rich source of philosophical speculation. But there is an alternative, and that is to live *"As If"*. As I understand it this utopian alternative is advocated by the Australian painter Ken Whisson, about whom I have written before². Amongst all the despair about the current populist/Trumpian/Brexit state of the world it was encouraging to talk last night to a young Greek, recent PhD graduate in politics, who voiced similar sentiments amongst the younger generation. He was optimistic about being able to make a difference. I suggested to him that the word 'hope' might better be replaced by 'faith', i.e. trust, confidence, since 'hope' so often implies anticipated disappointment.

2 Sept. 2018

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¹ Joke J Hermesen "Stil de tijd". Page 90, end of chapter.

² see *Notes to Knillis 24*, page 142.

SIMPLE COMPLEXITY or COMPLEX SIMPLICITY

So many people, so many dreams, ambitions, priorities expectations..., so many worlds and worlds within worlds. Yet these people all share the same world, or think they do. They certainly seem to act as if they do and expect each other to act according to that knowledge. Educational institutions are there to ensure to pass on that knowledge and to adjust and refine it.

For all intents and purposes this world of common, shared knowledge is the “real” world. It is a world of antecedents and consequences. Many of the “realities” of such a world are learned as a result of strongly and/or frequently reinforced responses etc....

You see, here I go again, trapped as I am in this straight jacket called logic.

Undated

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UNSENT CONCERNS

(as they are so Blind-Freddie obvious)

Dear Mr. Shorten,

As you are most likely to become our next Prime Minister (and I certainly hope so) I feel motivated to share with you some of my concerns. What persuaded me to do this is that although the ALP is consistently ahead in the dreaded and far too frequent polls, your personal ratings remain low, even after Morrison became PM. This may be neither here nor there, and perhaps it might even be a good thing, but for me and my like-minded friends your role as a power broker in the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd saga has always given me the feeling that you have 'blood on your hands' as the expression goes. I have never read or heard a clear, rational and creditable explanation for the cause of this feeling, nor a clear and honest mea culpa by any of those involved, call them 'nervous nellys', 'plotters' or 'realists' if you like. If there is one thing people are good at it is self-justification and politicians are masters at it to the point of self-delusion where fake and reality become confounded. This becomes a breeding ground for so-called populism and history shows where that leads.

To us Rudd should have been allowed to sink or swim and Gillard was installed prematurely and she probably would have done very well but for the awkward sacking of Rudd I. Rudd II should never have happened. But it did and thanks to him and the current liberal debacle your position is now quite secure. All this is in hind-sight now and water under the bridge.

However, if you carry that baggage I have alluded to it is likely to be a permanent Achilles heel. Thus it could be in everyone's interest if you found a way to clear the way for another party leader without perceived "baggage". Unlike the libs. there is enough talent in the ALP, particularly amongst female MPs.

On the other hand, if as I suspect you decided to stay it would be great if somehow you could turn the "baggage" disadvantage into an advantage. This I feel would require some statesman-like generosity and insight above and beyond party-political pettiness.

Looking at world trends today it would also seem to be advantageous to adopt more radical climate policies and to wind back the emphasis on growth at all cost, perhaps contemplate negative growth and some of the more human policies of the Greens, while acknowledging yet avoiding blatant left populism. Certainly patriotic nationalism should be avoided at any cost. I think the economic ideas of Yannis Varouvakis and others about the causes of this have a lot of merit and they are well worth considering. At the moment in Australia the Greens are saying more of what I think and I would not at all be opposed to an ALP-Greens coalition if that pulls the ALP further to the left. But the Greens, wanting to have it both ways, are their own worst enemy.

Since few Australians would identify themselves as labourers, thanks to John Howard and co. and previously to Hawke and Keating's run away privatisation initiatives, the term

“Labor” Party seems out-dated. Moreover, the industrial revolution which spawned the party has passed, but exploitation by the business owners has not, it is perhaps worse than it ever was. Regrettably they now appear to be setting the agenda. The “right” until now seems to have successfully managed to attract those voters, and in Australia there does not seem to be an alternative for them. Rupert Murdoch and his ilk are already planning how to get rid of you after your 3 year term has expired. To prevent this there has to be a creditable alternative. This needs to be long term and thus has to take account of inevitable serious climate change events and their social and economic consequences. Certainly the current government seems to be lagging well behind the thinking and planning of the affected industries and the next generation is keen for a new approach. Despite the optimistic words of scientists, many are privately despairing. But even if it is perhaps already too late your prospective government will need to deal with these issues; no mean task. We have seen the collapse of Communism, and now we are seeing the inevitable self-destruction of (rampant) Capitalism. We have also witnessed the frustrating results of Obama’s inspired efforts...

I guess, in summing up, what I/we are looking for is “vision”, an ability to see and communicate the big picture, local as well as global; not quick self-serving short term fixers and fixes. This is the big challenge if our type of democracy is to survive...

Yours sincerely,

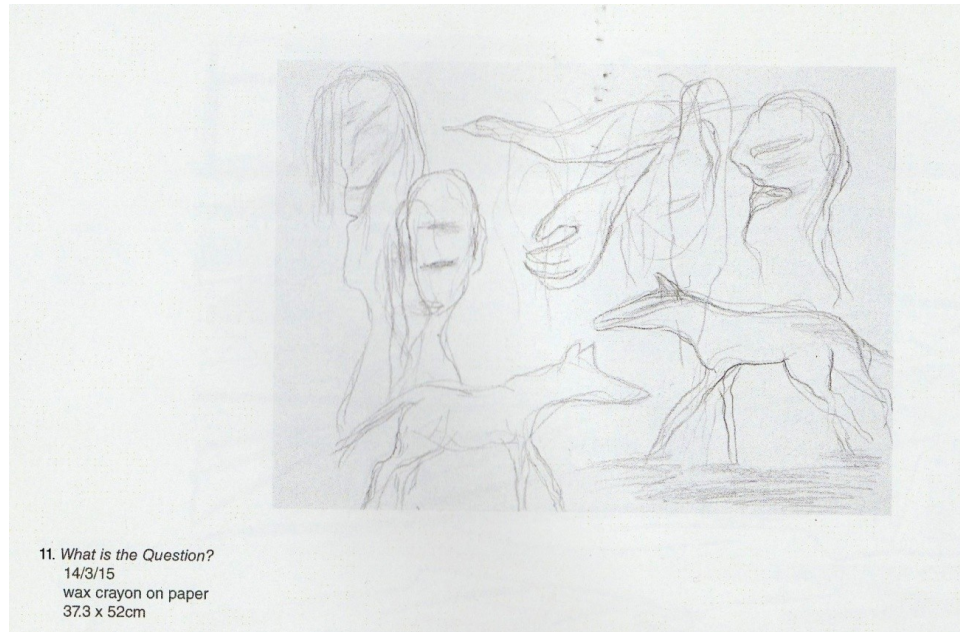
D.P.

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Ô TEMPS SUSPENDS TON VOL

In my apparently unrelenting quest for an answer¹ it now feels as though I have arrived at a point where I seem to be circling the issue: it looks ever more that I am exploring and need to explore different ways in which to approach the question, the familiar and ingrained rational approaches almost inevitably (and in a sense logically) leading into forests of foggy irrationality. I am reminded of a Ken Whisson drawing (yes, him again) reproduced below.



Ken's drawings and paintings have a cartoon-like character and are seriously funny in an uplifting way; just look at those foxes (I see sniffing foxes, not horses), the grasping hand, uncomprehending (?) faces. So, what is the question? If you live inside the shell of an egg then that is the world potentially knowable to you. You might conceive of the possibility or even the probability or perhaps even the certainty of a universe outside of the eggshell. What, if any, is the difference between the inside and the outside? Do different rules apply? Is it possible to ask a question to which there is no answer? How long is a piece of string? What is the sound of one hand clapping? The world of Zen koans². Do answers to seemingly impossible questions lie outside the eggshell?

All this to introduce an insight, revelation, or possible answer that presented itself as I was sitting in the evening shade at the outdoor table on the patio in front of our house. It was one of those quiet wind still moments at the end of a hot day of hard physical yakka with a well-earned beer. Time was suspended as wished for in Lamartine's poem *Le Lac*. Two birds flew past through the trees. "I am those birds", my thoughts said. "I am those trees, those clouds, that sudden gentle breeze". "I am the world I perceive, it is created in me by me and for me, with all that is, was and will be. And so are you". A challenging thought indeed. Here death is irrelevant. A thought well worth further exploration.

Nov. – Dec. 2018

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¹ Note: not *the* answer (or answers), although that is perhaps implied.

² A Zen Buddhist riddle used to focus the mind during meditation and develop intuitive thinking.

LETTER FROM POSEIDON

Dear Danny,

I notice that you and your friend Ron have been translating bits and pieces of Latin off and on over the last few years; Letters by Seneca and Plinius and bits of Vergilius and Catullus, amongst others. But I also am aware that your own writings have slowed down lately. Am I right in detecting that you feel it has all been said before, and so much better? Or is it that your musings seem of no interest to others, that their content must often seem obscure to some or have nothing new to contribute to others? Well, if you – very understandably, some may say naively – shy away from self-promotion, you should not be surprised by that, and least of all deterred. So (or yet) you continue to put your bits out there, albeit buried deep in the bowels of the internet, bits of bait for someone to stumble across and get hooked on. ‘And also to gel into words the shards of ideas that float through your brain’, I hear you think. Is this not the well-worn and treacherous trail of Art for Arts’ sake versus Art as a political tool for the “betterment” of the world you perceive yourself to live in?

Best wishes,

Dimitri

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LIFE INSIDE THE BOX

(is escape possible, even if perhaps desirable?)

Thinking outside the box. Sometimes you hear this phrase when someone, usually a mathematician or a scientist, has found a solution to a problem that has long defied satisfactory answers. What is this box or rather, if you want to avoid the straight-jacket of the active indicative of the verb 'to be', use the subjunctive: what might it be? Because, the way language is used defines and also restricts how things are thought about. This last sentence seems to me to be true, but if I say 'the earth is flat' that sentence is not true. If I say 'the earth is round(ish)' then that sentence is known to be true. At some point in time the earth was certainly thought to be flat and that didn't seem to matter very much until that thought became untenable as it didn't explain certain phenomena that curious people had become aware of. Since the 'Enlightenment' from mainly Christian religious dogmas, 'rational scientific thinking' came to redefine many things that were taken for granted. In 'The West' science sparked the Industrial Revolution and the rapid development of technologies led to the entrenchment of a very particular and peculiar way of thinking about the world. Quantification and the measurement became pivotal. Especially the precise measurement of time seems to have had a profound effect on the way many people conduct their every day existence. It seems to have become the default perspective from which to see and evaluate the world, like a straight-jacket that limits vision and experience of life. This is the box within which many people nowadays have been educated to live and have become enslaved to, and within which they feel as secure as they did previously. The earth, if not the world, is there for us to exploit and develop, and science helps us to do it as effectively as possible.

Here is another example. Recently, in the context of a 'democratic' election a well-educated politician stated that the Murray River was really a terrible river. The issue was that the river and its contributories had been over-exploited by unscrupulous irrigators, aided and abetted by a very poorly implemented regulatory system and corrupt or at the very least short-sighted politics. Even though she (Prue Goward) might not have meant it in that way, she did blame the river for the catastrophic consequences of its mismanagement. Certainly to the aboriginal people who live along the river and regard it as a mother this was an anathema (which means abhorrence and abomination).

Just right now I received the following email from Richard Hopkins¹:

Daan

This is a good summary by the Guardian journo who has been following this and other Murray Darling stories for some years. Barnaby Joyce and Watergate: the water buybacks scandal explained

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/25/barnaby-joyce-and-watergate-the-water-buybacks-scandal-explained?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

26 April 2019

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¹ Retired water expert.

LETTER TO SENATOR KRISTINA KENEALLY

Dear Kristina,

After last night's devastating result for the ALP, I needed to come up with something that could provide a pathway out of the mess and disillusionment. It occurred to me that a thoroughly new approach may be required. I think the reason for the debacle goes beyond the traditional budgets, surpluses, hip-pockets and rational economics (bosses versus workers etc.). It seems that people, esp. the younger generation, have switched off. What will inspire them? Sadly Bill couldn't.

The name Australian Labor Party is outdated. Who these days in Australia sees themselves as a labourer? Who aspires to be a labourer? What does this name "labor" say about what it stands for? Labourers these days are "tradies" who see themselves as small businessmen. Socialism has become a dirty word, rooted in the past. Universities have become degree factories and are supposed to make money. The world has fundamentally changed since the likes of John Howard, Trump, social media etc. etc.

A name change seems a good start. Not something like "New Labor", which has been tried. Why not something that reflects the values that most of us voted for in this election, e.g. the Environment and Social Justice? Thus (or something similar):

PARTY for the ENVIRONMENT and SOCIAL JUSTICE
(formerly Australian Labor Party)

When I tried this out on some "true believer" friends, they immediately canned the idea. It would never work...etc.

So, who could run with this idea and in particular **all that it could and would entail** and sell it to the party and to the public? And that's when I thought of you. You, more than any in the party, have the enthusiasm, experience, credibility, resilience and above all feistiness required. When I ran this past my friends they agreed.

What do you think?

Kind regards,

Dan Plooi
(senior citizen)
Belair SA 5052

Ps. I'm not in the habit of writing to politicians. First time this. I don't do twitter or facebook!

xxx

As expected, there was an automated reply. The issue was not a priority, in fact far from it, or so it seemed. What did I expect? I should have known. Kristina has become a pragmatist. Perhaps the next generation? It had better be!

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EUROPA WHERE WAS I?

Was I on the Super Fast Ferry coming back to Piraeus from the isle of Spetses? Or was I in some sort of hermetically sealed space-time shuttle, glimpsing through doubly glazed distorting portholes what once must have been the wine-dark sea while zooming past little bays and nymph- or demon-inhabited caves that once could have given shelter, succour or grief to Odysseus and his crew as their little vessels plodded their way home to Ithaca? The stuff of time-travel novels.

By what accident or rather deliberate quirk of fate (as fate cannot be accidental) is it that I sit here, again, in Piraeus at the table on the balcony of the hundred year old aunt Amalia trying to capture my rapid thoughts on an I-pad that forces me to slow down and thus to consider every word letter by letter, aware that she is watching me from behind? What are her thoughts?

Things derive their meaning and value from the story attached to them. Without the knowledge of their story things are meaningless and can be discarded as rubbish. This I read in the two very different books which I took with me to read during our two week stay in Greece. Both deal with issues that I keep coming back to: the future of mankind and Europe's role in it, "Sapiens, A Brief History of Humankind" by Yuval Noah Harari, and "Grand Hotel Europe", a novel by Ilja Pfeijffer (not yet translated into English). The former a pretentiously scholarly up-beat populist book for dummies by a Jewish-Israeli historian, the latter a tragic love story about the elitist ex-patriot Dutch-European author's passion for Europa, the nymph once captured, some say raped, by Zeus himself.

Ilja's story, which I read first, has far more depth than Yuval's, the tone of which I find far more irritating and arrogant than that of the narrator in Ilja's story where it has a deliberate function. Already from the first page I found I had to force myself to continue and I have decided to skim read at about page 80. That is not to say that there is not a lot of value in his ideas, but the danger is that his lecturing style will be uncritically accepted as gospel truth. After all it is just another story, an attempt to seek for some coherence in perceived inconsistencies in the stories that have shaped his understanding so far.

The quest for a coherent story is I think at the basis of human contemplation, as expressed in art, science, philosophy, religion, culture. The more internally consistent the story, the more satisfying it is. 'Internally consistent in dealing with external reality', says my mind. And therein lays the conundrum, which is the perceived internal-external dichotomy. If your story accepts the independent existence of an external reality than can that external reality exist independent of the (or indeed 'a') story? Different cultures typically seem to assume the characteristics of external realities which are defined as the absolute truth. Can two or several cultures coexist peacefully? Can Europa's story withstand the challenge, or is all of this wishful thinking?

This is how I twist myself into knots. Is it that each word I use has accumulated too much baggage? Is that what happens when humans like me grow old and full of years? Is it the tristesse after the realisation that the blissful promise of fulfilment of youthful dreams of love and revealed knowledge are shattered by the cruel reality of life and all that will be left is 'la vie immédiate' 'am *ende* des lebens'?

Éluard and Hölderlin in one sentence.

Piraeus
June 2019

p.s. Is it a coincidence that Clio (Κλειώ, the proclaimer, muse of history and epic poetry) features in both Ilja's and Yuval's stories? In Ilja's story she is thoroughly European and unpredictability predictable. In Yuval's story she is blind.

Hölderlin's poem is titled 'Hälfte des Lebens'.

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LOCAL OR TOURIST?

I haven't been able to retrieve the piece that was nearing its end. I was reasonably happy with it because I felt that it had captured one or two insightful thoughts that occurred to me as I was writing. It seems the piece has completely vanished from my I-pad. I was working in the 'notes' app and must have inadvertently touched a key or combination of keys. In my experience nothing just disappears from there, it just migrates to a hidden place and can be retrieved if you hunt around long enough. After all, the thing is supposed to be intuitive and made for youngsters with oodles of time. But not this one. Gone. So what can I track down in my age-challenged memory?

First I thought there might be a clue in another 'note' which I found under 'recently deleted notes': Sapiens page 36. Something about a 'cognitive revolution' and 'imagined reality'. Possibly. There was another deleted note:

Imagine abandoned airports, Amsterdam, Athens, Paris, Europe without tourists. How could this happen? All too easily I fear. Only naive optimists and those who believe in the possibility of human cooperation in the use of science and technology may not share this fear...

But I had abandoned that also probably 'Yuval Harari or Ilya Pfeiffer inspired' line of thinking. Airports and climate change disasters might have been too depressing to contemplate to pursue at the time.

What comes back to me is "Venetië, De Leeuw, de stad en het water", Cees Nooteboom's latest book, lying opened on the windowsill between the also opened windows of our little third floor apartment at the corner of the Egelantiersstraat and the Prinsengracht in the Jordaan quarter of Amsterdam -the evidence of google or whatever app guided mass tourism twelve or so meters below. If it wasn't for the summer leafed trees, 'though not able to quite obscure the view of the leaning steeple of the Westerkerk, the endless queue of people lining up to enter Anne Frank's house would be clearly visible. What would she have thought of this? What, if buildings, streets, canals or statues could think (and even if you find that idea a step too far, you certainly should be able to imagine it) would go through their minds? Would they be any more or any less condemning of or applauding this recent potentially culture- if not planet-wrecking phenomenon as they might have been of nazi raids or slave-trade-financed prosperity, or would they hide behind their mask of stately upper-class, but nevertheless bourgeois smugness? Multatuli's wonderful statue stands not very far away from here, his tears pigeon shit. Would they recognise me as even just a little bit of an Amsterdammer amongst all those tourists? After all, I did go to grammar school here for a year at the very impressionable age of ten or eleven and often stayed with uncles and aunties in what is now Oud Zuid (Old South). I know the smell and the hissing sound of the steam locomotives echoing under the gigantic cap of the Central Station, I know the tram conductors on line 24 as they joked with the girls going to work in the red light district, I know the games the local

boys played to get these girls to lift their scanty skirts just that little bit higher while the man turning the wheel of the street organ on the bridge sang the popular tunes as he played it and his helper rattled the copper money container, I skated on the canals in that rare winter when you could, I feel strangely at home going to a concert in the Concert Gebouw, I am acutely aware of the lost charm of the Waterloo Plein flea market, my heart beats a little faster when I walk past the Tuschinski picture theatre with its Hammond Organ to the Rembrandt Plein where the Carree theatre nearby reminds me of names like Louis Davids, Wim Kan, Wim Sonneveld and Toon Hermans. Oh yes, the tourists bring in lots of money, but did you know that the costs to the city to keep this all going smoothly far outweigh the income generated?

Finished 6 Sept. 2019

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KNOWLEDGE

Today you know that you've got it. Yesterday and quite a few years before that you knew that you might have it. Nothing that you know of has changed between then and now, except that you have been told the outcome of a diagnosis (διά-γνωση = cut-through/thorough knowledge). This means that there is strongly enhanced evidence that you've got it. Ergo: remove the source of the evidence and you know that you've no longer got it.

Can you be confident that this is true? Answer: no, not really.

Scientists are people trained in the pursuit of knowledge. They 'know' how to go about getting to the 'truth'. But they also know that **their methods can only approximate the truth**, and **that** truth is not an approximation. It is truly true.

So there **are** different kinds of knowledge. Or should I say: there **appear to be** different kinds of knowledge. One is conclusive and the other is inconclusive, and different methods or pathways are used to arrive at them. One is based on believe (believing is seeing, as in religious beliefs) and the other on externally established evidence (seeing is believing, as in 'scientifically arrived at understandings', so called, confusingly, 'facts'). One seeks to answer questions as to **why** things happen, the other as to **when** they are **likely** to happen. One implies certainty, the other uncertainty. One is absolute, the other is conditional. Both say something about the wish to predict and control the future. One implies that by taking care of (control of) conditions it is possible influence future outcomes; the other implies that the letting go of the effort to control provides the desired peace of mind. So in practice this means that you do what you think you can and leave the rest alone.

For many this is just not good enough. Perhaps to them the ability to control means power to control. They have learned that knowledge is the key to control. For them knowledge is the key to control. Where there is knowledge there is power (to control). But does that then also mean that where there is perceived to be power that this power necessarily means superior knowledge? These people are in awe of such power and seek favour of the powerful so they will be protected by them and they are prepared to make sacrifices to them and to placate them, to bargain with them, hoping to get a good deal. It gives those with perceived knowledge a lot of power, which they can either exploit for their own betterment (these are despots) or use for the betterment of their underlings (these are benevolent dictators).

It is possible to embrace both religious beliefs and scientific understandings. But these two approaches to understanding should not be mixed up. They are best kept separate and they should not be used to explain one another. When scientific understandings assume the mantle of belief truth suffers. The view that science is the holy grail to knowledge is tantamount to belief (in science) and equates science with religion. Quantum physics has debunked this idea, if I understand its implications correctly: as

participant-observer the scientist influences and thereby alters the observed phenomena. Uncertainty is the consequential truth. (I am given to understand – note: not ‘to believe’ – that advanced science can cope with that and use this – one particle being in two different places at the same time – to explain so far elusive phenomena).

But isn’t the quest for knowledge the quest for certainty, so as to conclusively exorcise misfortune; evil, if you like?

If the true scientist has come to the conclusion (as I think many would) that it is not possible to explain everything because of some intrinsic and seemingly intractable problem with scientific methodology, then it might be concluded that there are powers beyond scientific control. The power of nature would be an obvious example.

I find it interesting that many human beings (including scientists) feel somehow compelled to conclude, or at least to hypothesise that this power assumes god-like status and that by various rituals and incantations this all-mighty power can be influenced for better or for worse. People pray that something they wish for will happen or that something or someone they don’t like will be damned by this power. It is not hard to understand that throughout the ages this power has been identified as divine or devilish; not earthly, in any case. The question now arises whether god and the devil are one and the same entity or whether they are two distinct entities. I suspect that as in quantum physics they can be both at once, the verdict being dependent on the questioner.

In any case, I find such explanations for the existence of ‘god’ or ‘a god’ not very satisfactory. Yet I find myself now asking if the g should be G. I am reminded of the Martin Scorsese movie *Silence* in which in Japan devout converted Christians (I typed a ‘c’, spell-check changed this to ‘C’!) some centuries ago were asked to simply put their foot on any C(c)hristian icon to avoid being tortured to death by the non-christian [B(b)uddhist] Japanese authorities. Many could not bring themselves to do so. Interestingly some Christian missionaries eventually were converted to the local ways of thinking, their arguments for doing this were challenging and compelling. At question was each others’ attitude to pain, suffering and extreme cruelty (physical and mental) and to the possibility of redemption. Christians see pain and suffering and ultimate death as a consequence of sin and human weakness. Their way of dealing with the intrinsic cruelty of life is by believing that their God sent his one and only son to this earth to experience this suffering, taking it all on his own shoulders (the cross) and dying for the collective sins of humanity, paving the way for all to the entrance to heaven, to the *kingdom* of the almighty. Surely this is a beautiful story and an elegant solution to the conundrum of the human condition. It certainly convinced my grandfather, a biblical scholar, to opt for the superiority of Christianity. It has given birth to a lot of exquisite art and music, providing solace to tortured souls. But it has also given birth to much further suffering because of endless wars caused by people with power over others who saw the vulnerability of their underlings as a means to further their own ends, their justification for their actions based on an at best naive and at worst deliberate mix-up of ‘rational-secular’ and ‘revealed-religious’ understandings of their world. Would this be the bane of Western civilization?

Could this 'beautiful' story, aimed at giving meaning to existence, be no more or less than wishful thinking? Would it per se be cruel to deprive people of this story? Or is this in fact what needs to be achieved somehow to save humanity from itself? It is my experience as a psychologist that giving up on, or at least the serious questioning of a deeply held core-belief, can clear the air when people are stuck.

Buddhism, as I understand it, gently mocks all this sort of questioning. It takes an a-moral stance; this does not mean that it is anti-moral or immoral. By taking away the need for meaning, i.e. the story, it seems to embrace emptiness, nothingness, the void. I don't think it takes away from the attempt at meaning. There are many pictures of Zen Buddhist monks contemplating a blank wall for very long periods only to arrive at the abdication of the need for meaning. To arrive at this stage would certainly be a liberating experience. Surrendering your very soul to nothingness: the ultimate leap of faith.

Nov-Dec 2019

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LIFE IN THE AGE OF CORONA

Every now and then in the history of civilizations there seem to appear periods of existential crisis where humankind perceives itself to be facing total annihilation. It could be argued that this threat has been, or, through repetition, has become, programmed in its DNA or indeed in the very building blocks of the (i.e. its/our) universe. So far Armageddon (man-made self-destruction) has not happened, nor have 'natural' disasters so far completely destroyed our world. Perhaps the distinction between man-made and 'natural' disasters is questionable and even irrelevant. But certainly these days man-made catastrophe (as in climate change) as well as the 'natural' type (as in corona virus, quite possibly an epiphenomenon of climate change) has once again become a distinct possibility in peoples' minds. Does this have something to do with the human being's awareness of and preoccupation with beginning and end, life and death, time and space, finite and infinite, pleasure and pain, order and chaos, the duality of the individual being unique within, but at the same time being a part of an environment, like a cog within a wheel, acting and being acted upon? Is awareness uniquely human, as many think it is, or is this sort of human-centric thinking precisely at the root of this preoccupation?

The quest for a productive way to answer these sorts of questions seems like the quest for perpetual motion or the quest for a way to lift oneself up by one's own bootstraps, to escape the pull of gravity, or to create the perfect computer, one that is able to transcend the limits of human intelligence. You might as well 'try and catch the wind'.

How do you, as an individual or as a species, come to terms with this seemingly impossible quest to understand in order to control? What can the study of religions, philosophies politics and the various arts, sciences and humanities – the accumulated knowledge of humankind – tell us about how to come to terms with what 'may be conceived of as', or should I say 'are', the realities of life and how to deal with them? Is this endeavour überhaupt worth the effort? I would argue that this is essential for humankind's survival. What are the processes that help or hinder adaptation to changing circumstances? I would suggest that it is not enough to only understand the mechanics of how we got to the current doomsday scenario so as to find a solution – plenty has been written about that – but that it is also necessary to understand the drivers of human behaviour in the quest for survival of the species.

The need of certainty, i.e. predictability, in an uncertain world (read earth, environment) seems to be one of those drivers. Culture defines the interactive and cumulative process of learning what works and what doesn't in the effort to survive and the practices of passing on of this knowledge. Different environments produce different 'cultures', but they have a similar common basis. Awareness of the environment and the dependence on it has the potential to create conflict within the individual. Who is the boss? I, or It? Or, both I and It?

If you assume that either of these three, the individual, the environment or a combination of these two, is the one with the ultimate power over your survival, what might be the consequences in terms of culture as defined above? Which is the most successful for the survival of the human species?

It seems to me to be strong evidence that since the 'enlightenment' and the ascendance of 'science' that followed the 'darkness' of the Middle Ages, at least in practice, in regions under the influence of our contemporary Western European interpretation of what is important for survival, that 'I', i.e. the individual, reigns supreme. Divine power (i.e. superhuman power) was more and more challenged by an increase in confidence in the ability of science to control nature, despite Pascal's conclusion effectively in favour of the former. It is interesting how the two dominant political movements of our time, Communism and Capitalism, are both based on materialist pragmatism while maintaining an uneasy wrought relationship with the 'supernatural', just in case.

We now live in a world that has to face up to the consequences of the apparent success of the scientific and technological revolution: industrialization, exploitation of natural and human resources, the reliance on growth without limits, the glorification of competition and survival of the fittest adage, the addictive hunger for power and the corruption that goes with that, resulting in an economy (i.e. financial system) that is no longer sustainable. Money has become an end in itself. 'Successful' people are those who can make money work for them, they assume power and control the economy and define its parameters, for them greed is good; the rest has to work for their money while advertising and easy credit by the 'successful' feeds their greed. But in the end money is nothing but a coin or a piece of paper or a figure on a file in a computer and its value is supposed to be determined by the supply and demand of the so-called 'market'. Money is useless if it does not flow; we talk about income "streams". Money is like the water in a river. If the natural eco system (nature) within which the river functions is depleted the river and all that depends on it dries up and ceases to exist. The system maintains itself and remains healthy unless too many demands are made on it. Of course this is an analogy and shouldn't be taken too far. But if the current state of Australian Murray-Darling river system is anything to go by – its mouth frequently has to be kept open by dredges – than too much water is being taken out of it or stored in reservoirs up-stream by unscrupulous and/or greedy users. In the current state of the world economy too much money has been allowed to be accumulated in the pockets (reservoirs) of a handful of users at the top of the system and controlled by them for their own selfish and short-sighted benefit. For the overall and long-term health of the system this money needs to be made available to those who live down-stream. The challenge for governments is to persuade the bosses of those few, but very powerful, mostly multi-national corporations that it is ultimately in their interest to make that "money" accessible to all. I think this is well nigh impossible in the current neo-conservative capitalist climate for as long as still plenty of material and human resources are perceived to be available to be exploited.

History shows that, when the 'Human Resources' (slaves, migrant workers, labourers, what used to be called the lower or working classes) organise themselves to stand up to their exploiters, change can be achieved. But history also shows change brought about by these 'revolutions' to be temporary, merely resulting in a shift in power that proved to be equally prone to corruption. Interesting in this revolutionary process is the role of religion and religious institutions. The belief in supernatural powers was never really challenged neither by the exploited nor by the exploiters, and even when it was, as in the relatively recent Russian revolution, it merely went below the surface, thus putting religious leaders in a very powerful position.

It would be interesting to know if, had other cultures prevailed, there would have been the disastrous onslaught on 'natural resources' that has occurred as a result of western way of life. Whatever the earth could produce was there to be exploited with the end result of climate change. The current corona virus pandemic is more than a wakeup call for change. It provides a window of opportunity for the change in human behaviour. It is nature's response to an attack on its immune system. It will try to heal itself to maintain the status quo, and if it can't it will adapt at our expense. It is nature's way of letting us know that if we go on exploiting the very thing that sustains us we will do so at our peril. We are part of nature and not separate from it. We know we can't do without it, but can it do without us? If we want to survive we know we can't take that risk because survival is part of our nature. So we will respond to the challenge one way or another.

As I said at the beginning of this piece, we now seem to have reached a point which is critical to the survival of the world as we know it.

So, we have the earth as an overarching living self-regulating system of which human beings amongst a multitude of other self-regulating sub-systems are an integral part. Whether this entity of systems has what we humans call 'awareness' of this, i.e. the ability to observe, reason and act, is a point of contention amongst humans. Many think that this ability is uniquely human. Attempts to bridge this gap between the human and super-human beings or gods (whether just one or many) can be seen in religions. In these religions human beings usually see themselves as dependent on the divine and seek to serve it in order to gain favour and thereby control by means of ritualistic behaviour, incantations and prayer.

I would argue that the relationship between human creatures and their environment is crucial to the health of both and that this relationship now needs urgent attention. Human creatures are now no longer in a position to see themselves as separate from their environment and either totally dependent on it or ultimately able to control it. They are interdependent and need to work together. Does nature care? Does it continue to exist when human creatures cease to exist? Does it need human awareness to exist? These sorts of questions arise when we humans regard ourselves as separate and get entangled in a vortex of endless speculation and existential anxiety and fatalistic despair.¹ But they become irrelevant from the perspective of coexistence. It would seem pragmatic to embrace this latter perspective.

So what does this mean in practical terms? Humans have the ability to exploit their environment and each other, but this is not without consequences to the system as a whole. By ignoring these consequences they will inevitably restrict the environments' ability to sustain the system. It seems that at least our 'western' civilization has developed an addiction to greed which has now reached a critical point as evidenced by climate change and the covid-19 virus epidemic associated with it. The question is what to do about this and its consequences once it is established through scientific observation. Is it in our nature to let nature go its course? It is also in our nature to leave it to the gods or to put it 'in God's hand' as my maternal grandfather would maintain. But it is also in our nature to want to intervene somehow and even if our interventions often prove ineffective or counterproductive, we cannot seem to help but try. Can we be pro-active in this, or are we forever doomed to react only to and hopefully survive natural disasters?

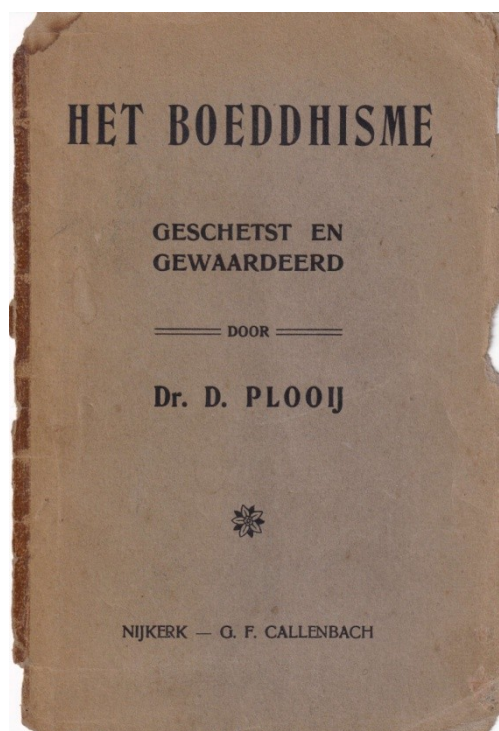
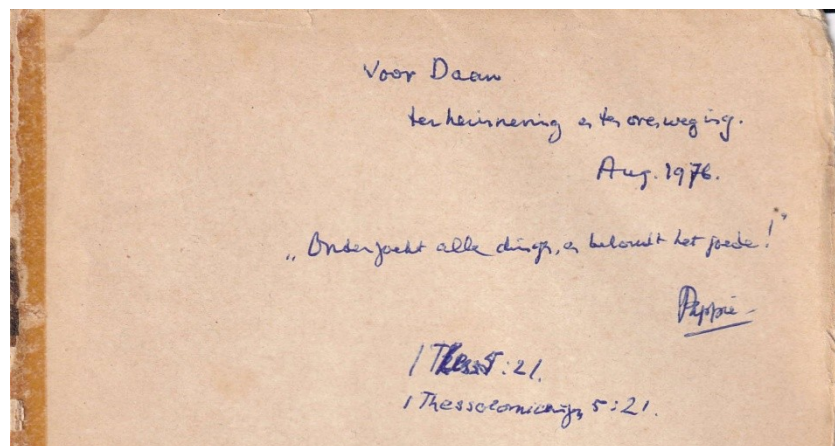
¹ Cicero has written three books about this: [De Natura Deorum](#).

Hopefully our natural environment is as aware of us as we are of it, but I am afraid that this is more in the realm of faith than it is in the realm of hope. It seems however reasonable to suggest that our awareness of nature presupposes nature's awareness of us, otherwise we would not be able to be aware of it. This view could argue for the relevance of prayer as a form of two-way communication rather than a desperate way of seeking favour and redemption. Work that one out! Of course if death is merely a part of life all this agonizing becomes irrelevant. Nevertheless, is it ethical to just be an innocent bystander? I wonder what my paternal grandfather would say about this. He wrote a booklet comparing Buddhism with Christianity in which the former never had any chance as from page one.

At least I have been able to bring this piece to some sort of conclusion, which is somewhat of a relief.

Friday, 10 July 2020

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CAN YOU MAKE AN INSTRUMENT OUT OF SOUNDS?

Jacob wants to contribute something to people, and especially parents and children in Covid-19 lockdown, by encouraging them to collect sounds that can be found in their corona-virus-epidemic restricted environment and send these to him so he can forge these sounds into a composition. He is an accomplished musician (violin), so I assume he means a musical composition. To this end he is making a series of YouTube-videos showing various ways in which this can be done. Above all this should be a fun activity aimed at breaking lock-down boredom while being instructive and stimulating creativity. Pre-lockdown he has run successful workshops in schools and festivals helping participants make musical instruments out of even the most unlikely objects and materials. For instance he has made a playable guitar using a plastic power-drill case as sound box and a remarkably good sounding cello out of two tea chests to which he attached the neck of a collapsed 'proper' cello. His sample videos include his exploration of ways of extracting sounds out of a sneaker or how the spokes of a bicycle wheel can be used to create a simple melody. Of course there is a tradition in this sort of endeavour: Mozart composed a concerto for glass harmonica while Malcolm Arnold wrote an overture for 3 vacuum cleaners, 1 floor polisher and 4 rifles...

At the end of each sample video Jacob explains what he is doing. But when he says he wants to make an instrument out of the collected sounds, this got me thinking. Is that possible? When I pointed this out to him he readily acknowledged that he meant to make a composition out of the sounds. But nevertheless, is it possible to make sounds into an instrument? So for me at least Jacob's project raises other issues, equally interesting and worthy of intellectual and creative pursuit. Is there a difference between noise and sound? When does sound become music? Is a sound-scape something different? What is an instrument? When does an instrument become musical? When does noise become sound and sound become music? When does the sound of music become the noise of music? When does sound cease to be music? I remember the about 4 year old Jacob becoming quite upset and refusing to walk further when he heard a bagpipe for the first time. When does music cease to be music? What is rhythm, what is harmony, what is dissonance? When does the sound of a shoe become music? You can play musical chairs, but can chairs really be musical? Beethoven could write music even after he became deaf. Did he actually hear that music in his head? Can you experience music with sense organs other than auditory? Why do some birds sing and others screech? Farmers play music to cows and even plants. Joshua destroyed the walls of Jericho with the sound of trumpets. There is a song about the sounds of silence. Can random machine generated sounds ever become music? And so the list of questions goes on. Here too there is no lack of tradition in asking such questions.

I suppose if you can use a sound to produce another sound and then arrange these sound-produced-sounds into a structure or composition that is somehow meaningful to a listener then you may lay a claim to have created at least a soundscape. Felix Hess's frog based sound creatures would be an example of this.

So, yes, with music just about anything is possible and Jacob's project has the potential to be a lot of fun and quite instructive at the same time and full of possibilities.

TOO HARD TO GET USED TO

“There is no point trying to understand mathematics. Just get used to it.” This was the advice a world-famous professor of mathematics gave to Nurullah, a not yet world-famous mathematician. It surprised me how quickly I got used to that idea. Not long after it occurred to me this also applied to language. We begin to use it long before we understand it. It being reinforced by the results it gets. Later in life, with growing maturity and experience, we may begin to question these early culturally indoctrinated “truths”. This is not without sometimes profound existential consequences.

Watching rural politician, once deputy prime minister, Barnaby Joyce’s performance on last week’s Q & A television show was, as usual, an uncomfortable experience. What is it about this man that just doesn’t cut it with me? The show’s topic concerned the safety of women in the work place, bullying and general inter-gender related moral issues such as sexual intimidation and intercourse. The other panellists, bar one, were prominent Australian women with varying degrees of stridency on the subject. He was a young Dutch moral philosopher in Utrecht whom I had never heard of and who was supposed to provide some background and moral balance to the views expressed. He did this quite well I thought and I could not help but feel some pride in the Dutch education system which to me was still capable of producing a scholarly perspective based on a deeper understanding of European cultural roots. And that was precisely what Barnaby was lacking. As it was, Barnaby displayed what psychiatrists sometimes refer to as ‘limited insight’. Would he have agreed to go on the show if he had been aware of this, I find myself asking? In desperately trying to present himself as a reasonable open-minded person he achieved the exact opposite. His ‘insight’ lacked depth. Ironically he came across as taking himself too seriously and thus painted himself in a corner as a disgruntled martyr. Despite his perhaps sincerest intentions he just ended up looking foolish. And then I haven’t said anything yet about Barnaby’s short-sighted direct complicity in the stuff-up of the Murray-Darling river system...But I’m told he can cook a good meal.

November 2020

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BUT WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Late last night, about to close You-Tube on the i-Pad where I had been visiting Renbourne-Jansch et al. – interesting old and newer guitar music video-clips now accessible there – I could not resist clicking on a clip with a black and white photograph of an elderly Carl Jung. He might argue that he visited me: There seemed to be a certain inevitability about it. How did You-Tube's internet surveillance algorithms know: an interview with Jung amongst all those music clips, even if it was a calculated guess? I could have ignored it. Why didn't I? This morning I was looking at an agapanthus in our garden and thanks to Jung I concluded that the agapanthus was there because I saw it, ergo it made me see it: we needed each other to exist. In the interview he said something what I took to be about existence beyond time and space. And of course I wondered about the connection between him and Albert Einstein, which Google confirmed. Of course no great surprise. Death then is a concept that can only exist within the time-space dimension: no point getting hung up about it. Jung was repeatedly asked by his interviewer if he could *prove* his ideas regarding these matters and if he believed in them. He thought a little while and a disarming smile appeared on his face and then said: no, I can't prove them nor do I believe in them, I *know* they are true. Do you believe in God? No, I don't believe, I know. Jung was convinced about the importance of the study of history and philosophy of science, the history of knowledge. There are ways of knowing other than the ones we have been brought up with, other than 'our' (westernised) religion and science. These are the great stories that humans have invented to give meaning to their world. Jung 'knows' that we (westerners?) cannot tolerate a meaningless existence.

January 2021

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WHAT WOULD LUCRETIUS HAVE THOUGHT OF CHRISTIANITY?

Titus Lucretius Carus lived from 94 – 55 BC

Humana ante oculos foede cum vita iaceret in terris oppressa gravi sub religione, quae caput a caeli regionibus ostendebat horribili super aspect mortalibus instans.... (De Rerum Natura, I,62)	When human life was brutally thrown to earth burdened down by heavy religion, which was showing her head from the heavens bullying mortals with her hideous face...
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Not much, going by the above quote. Had he been alive now, would he have agreed with the idea that Christianity (not necessarily Jesus) has set back humanity by several centuries? Would he have argued with the so-called *Christian humanists* of the age of enlightenment, like e.g. Erasmus, who valiantly tried to separate Christian dogma from its genuine humanitarian principles, and would he have rejected any idea of a supernatural presence, let alone influence? Would humanism also have a capital H or would christianity not be auto-corrected?

According to google (spell-check wants Christianity with the capital C – it now occurs to me that spell-check could also have corrected what may have been originally been conceived of as godgle, cf. bible) he, Lucretius, did not deny the existence of gods. Seeing that these days google is regarded and consulted as the authority on just about everything the creators of google are like gods. Google too wants to have itself spelled with a capital G, spell-check does not underline bible. I say this in jest as I certainly do not want to be the instigator of conspiracy theories. Maar toch..., which is Dutch for “but all the same...”

Why does Lucretius start his philosophical poem with an ode to Venus, you might ask, if the whole work is a rejection of religion? As said, he did not deny the existence of gods. He did however deny that they had any influence on human affairs. Yet he invokes her goodwill to bring his poem to a satisfactory conclusion. Does he, like the government appointed defenders of communism in Uzbekistan after the fall of the Soviet Union, have a bet each way, just in case? Apparently they were seen to observe common rituals at funerals, just in case. No great surprise really.¹

Clearly there is evidence of a role for divine beings, whether just a single one or many, whether benevolent or malevolent. The practice of praying and swearing is just about universal. These beings or powers may not exist in external reality, but they do certainly exist in people’s minds where they fulfil an important and influential psychological role able to affect a person’s moods or internal reality and their actions in external reality. People typically turn to the powers existing in their internal world when they themselves feel powerless and inadequate. Their need for guidance and support can become so

¹ [\(PDF\) Redefining Religion: Uzbek Atheist Propaganda in Gorbachev-era Uzbekistan | Sarah Kendzior - Academia.edu](#)

overwhelming that they attribute or bestow this “super-natural” power to and onto another human being, especially one who happens to be powerful and charismatic. And this is where religion can become problematic, especially if this human being is on the face of it a psychopathic self-serving, arsehole like Donald Trump. History is full of them. You might argue that such human beings can also be or become and have been a beneficial force for mankind, but I would argue that so far the forces of “good and evil” have muddied the waters to the point where humankind is now facing extinction by self-destruction because of a failure to deal with climate change and surely that is evil.

Last night (by chance?) I stumbled across the concept of “post-humanism”¹. From what I understood this was a challenge to west European developed ideas of humanism and Christianity. Both put the human being at the centre of things. They are human-centric. Science based on enlightened rational thinking and religion based on Christian humanism have failed or at least have been inadequate to deal with current threats to our natural environment. Can post-humanist thinking come to the rescue? As I understand it post-humanism proposes ways of knowing beyond the boundaries of human-centric approaches to understanding our world, while not necessarily rejecting them.

In a previous piece (Life in the Age of Corona) I toyed with the idea that not only human beings have consciousness or awareness and that Nature (the eco-system to which humans belong) also has awareness and thus is concerned with its well-being and survival. Humans may be merely cogs within a bigger structure and this “being” is dependent on us functioning “properly”. It will ultimately reject us if we pose to be too big a threat to its survival. Just as we would like to save our environment it may also consider it a pity to lose us, but it is likely to show no mercy if we make that impossible. If we can recognise the effects of climate change as an attempt by Nature (the living earth if you like) to cope with endless exploitative attacks by humans, that is, if we can become aware of and tune into its awareness and accept our responsibility towards the well-being and survival of the whole system and accept our subordinate but never the less equally important role within this system then perhaps we can still avoid the inevitable. If my sort of thinking is also religious, then so be it!

By all means be curious, explore and question, but know your place and your limits don’t try to colonise and endlessly exploit. Be aware of and respect other awarenesses.

Here ends my sermon. “Gaat thans heen in vrede en ontvangt de zegen des Heeren”, I still hear Danny’s father say.

Dimitri Poseidon

February/March 2021

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¹ <https://posthumanism.in/activities/indian-posthumanism-network-website-launches/>

DEEP LISTENING AND AWARENESS

This morning I woke up with a feeling of relief. In my wake-up dream we, but mainly he had managed to save a middle aged Pitjantjatjara woman of 'aunty status' from succumbing to utterly devastating depression. She was lying on the road in total despair clearly having abandoned all hope of ever recovering from a recent devastating experience. Not only had she once again been bitterly disappointed by yet another instance of entrenched bureaucratic racism involving her remote community, but she had been rejected by her own people for allegedly selling out to that bureaucracy. Her world had come apart, she had nothing left to live for, her support systems had vanished into thin air. It was not clear to me why my presence was of importance, but somehow it must have had some influence on the healer. I did not actually see this man, but certainly felt his presence. Perhaps it was her husband or perhaps an ancestral spirit. My dream also did not specify what he said or did, but I was aware of the woman slowly getting up from the ground and gradually, yet surprisingly quickly regaining her composure, culminating in a presence exuding calm and quiet confidence. Moreover he must have realised my feelings of frustration and impotence in the situation, despite my good intentions to help her because my spirits too were lifted via some kind of spiritual osmosis.

My dream most likely was triggered by some quite confronting news reports the night before. There was the trial of George Floyd who, handcuffed, died pleading for nine whole minutes to the arresting police officer who was kneeling on his neck to let him breathe. There was the ten year old Nicaraguan boy who, abandoned by the group of refugees on their way to America, was found wandering alone along a desert road in near the Us-Mexican border by a patrol car. "Please, can you help me?" he cried in a totally distraught little voice. It was gut wrenching stuff.



And then there was Dr. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann from Daly River (Northern Territory) being presented with the 2021 Senior Australian of the year award for dedicating her life to giving Aboriginal children the skills to navigate Western and traditional culture, saying it's time for non-indigenous Australians to reciprocate. She says "Nature talks to us and we talk to it, when we see certain trees flower, we say, OK, kids, certain things are ready for us to go and collect or hunt and forage for them." She became the first fully qualified Aboriginal teacher in 1975. "Even if you have changed one young person's life around, that's an achievement in itself. I've invited (non-aboriginal) people to come and sit on country and meet us and have some sort of understanding of who we are." At the core of her philosophy is the concept of deep listening and silence. "Deep listening, silence and awareness..."

NULLAM REM E NIHILO GIGNI DIVINITUS UMQUAM¹

Nothing is ever created by the gods from nothing. Thus, Something cannot be created from Nothing. But equally Nothing cannot come from No-thing and vice-versa, so where does it come from as it cannot come from Something? When does something start to exist, or cease to exist for that matter? 'When' implies time, hence before and after: nothing before, something after; or something before nothing after. After what? After the introduction of the concept of time. The observation of time depends on awareness of it. Without awareness no observation. Awareness implies life and vice versa. Hence time cannot exist without awareness (of it) and neither can space. Does this mean that things only exist in the 'mind', its place of residence, its where, its space? Can awareness exist outside the mind? Is existence different from life? A tree lives; does that mean it has awareness? I would argue that it therefore has awareness; you may disagree. A dead tree exists, so you, in your mind, would conclude that it has no awareness and I would be inclined to agree, but I can't. Am I now forced to conclude that my mind exists within a mind outside of me? Franz thinks that there is an external reality within which he exists. I am inclined to think that there is an internal reality within which an outside reality exists within which he and I do or could exist. But wherever and whenever I exist danger to my existence lurks and I had better be aware of that. Should I fear this awareness or embrace it?

If I look at the back of a pencil with the point facing away from me, holding it just in front of my eyes right in the centre between the eyes where my nose meets my forehead, I see a small circle with a symmetrical bit on the left and right of it which my awareness interprets as a pencil. If I close my right eye the circle appears to move to the left and to the right if I close my left eye. If I move my eye or the pencil directly in line with either eye I just see a small circle. If I want to know more about that circle I either need two eyes or move the position of the circle or the position of my eye. What possibilities (e.g. scientific) would open up if I had another two eyes, say perpendicular and equidistant, above and below that middle point at the top of my nose? Or a circle of eyes around that middle point...?

The first paragraph smacks of circular or self-referencing arguments. Have I found a way around that in the second paragraph?

28 April 2021

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¹ Lucretius, De Rerum Natura.

NINCOMPOOPS¹

VVD: Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie. But is *Vrijheid Voor Democratie* implied? Is there a subtle distinction to be made here?

In any case, surely a duplicitous name for a Dutch political party. Freedom For, but also Before, Democracy; to be precise, the party for the Liberalen, the Liberals, a conservative right-wing party similar to the Liberal Party in Australia for whom it seems that freedom is more important than democracy. The adjective 'liberalis' in Latin means gentlemanly, well-bred; liberal; open-handed; generous; lavish. Libertas means freedom. All quite desirable. So, Democracy requires freedom and not the other way around. Democracy is not possible without freedom. Or is it? Could not it be argued that you need Democracy in order to be truly free? Free from what? Free from coercion, including government coercion, I guess. Freedom of choice. But what about the consequences and what about responsibilities? Democracy requires at least three people to reach a majority decision and a few basic rules based on the realization that, for survival on this earth, the group is more important than the individual². One would reasonably expect those who advocate for a particular form of government and aspire to take leadership positions in that system of government to have a thorough knowledge of its history and philosophical foundations, its strengths and weaknesses, triumphs and failures, advantages and limitation, thus many years of a broad and advanced education. This would include the knowledge and appreciation of other systems of government. It may very well be that the effectiveness of a government system is dependent on differing environmental and cultural circumstances. Thus, to proclaim categorically that democracy is superior to and somehow more 'civilised' than any other system smacks of its opposite. Even Plato himself and Aristotle too, I think, doubted that mankind was capable of the required level of civilization and emancipation.

Today (8 May 20210) the front page headline of our Saturday Paper, a leftish-leaning weekly for those wanting an alternative to the mostly Murdoch owned populist-conservative tabloids, alarmingly read:

**Hugh White³ on China:
'It would probably be
the biggest war since
1945... And it would
very likely become
a nuclear war.'**

¹ From the Latin non compos mentis.

² I am inclined to argue that, for those who believe in an afterlife in 'Paradise', the group (i.e. organised religion) is a definite impediment, this being entirely an individual issue.

³ Hugh White is emeritus professor of strategic studies at the Australian National University. He is a former deputy secretary of the Department of Defence and wrote Australia's Defence White Paper 2000.

Hugh is no light-weight. He starts off by saying that:

‘As the Morrison Government attempts a policy of containment against China, it risks the real prospect of war and one of the biggest failures of statecraft in Australia’s history.’

The implication is that as far as he is concerned the people currently in charge of our foreign policy are either not very bright, poorly informed (i.e. lacking adequate education) and/or they take a myopic and self-serving politically motivated short-term and what they think is an election winning view of the current world situation. Are average Australian politicians and voters really that thick and incapable of nuanced thinking? Is this a worldwide phenomenon?

Having arrived at this point I happened (accidentally?) to come across an analysis piece by Stan Grant¹ via today’s ABC’s News App. Stan too is no light-weight. He too suggests a deep contextual perspective within which to view the current conflict with China. I wonder what Xi Jinping’s thinking is on all of this. I hope I’m wrong, but to judge by his portrayal on our western television screens at the head of rigid rows upon rows of soldiers and war machines, he would clearly believe that without military brute force his country could not survive, despite his kindly paternalistic facial expression. Is the West, which certainly and unashamedly relies on military might, similarly portrayed on Chinese TV screens? Would Plato see our western democracies as how he envisaged them? I doubt it. Is humanity doomed to the “dog eats dog” mentality, the survival of the fittest, the inevitability of war and self-destruction?

Humans need a healthy earth to survive. Human societies based on greed, exploitation, rivalry and suppression without due respect for what sustains them and allows them to live in the first place, i.e. the earth and its resources, will force the earth to react in self defence through natural disasters including pandemics as has become all too obvious in recent times. Humans are capable of creating incredible life affirming experiences. Why is it that so many leaders of this world these days are such incredible nincompoops?

Monday, 17 May 2021

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<https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwje0q6f1bvAhVOH7cAHWFJDysQxfQBMA16BAgiEAM&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.net.au%2Fnews%2F2021-05-09%2Fasier-oppose-erasing-of-history-when-history-hasnt-erased-you%2F100123280&usg=AOvVaw3OWIEG64FQG013f1OLF3gY>

BUT PAPA, WHO IN THE END DOES ALL THE WORK?

Think about it, my son... Rather, on reflection, il Papa should go for:

Your mother, child, the earth. People work the earth to make it work for us and to take out and use what it already has made for us. The earth provides the food and materials for shelter and tools. People too are a product of the earth. People need the earth, but you might well ask: does the earth need people?

People work for and with each other. Many hands make light work. People are quite happy to work in teams and they enjoy sharing the fruits of their labour with celebrations. They enjoy living and learning and, as their knowledge of their environment grows and develops they learn to *respect* that environment and how to care for it.

The environment is there for us to use. But what if we abuse it? What is it that encourages abuse and how can it be curbed or prevented? *Greed* seems to be the basic motive, and it is self-reinforcing. However, greed ultimately leads to self-destruction and the compromising of the earth's ability to produce. It is the ability to produce natural disasters, whether or not man-made, that gives Mother Nature her dominant role.

Because people are a product of the earth, the earth cares for its people as it cares for all her products, like a mother cares for her children. However it is presumptuous to assume she cares more for humans. To presume that is another manifestation of greediness.

Humans can observe nature and learn how it works and so are able to turn that knowledge to their advantage. However greed has resulted in making the earth work too hard and if humans want to survive it is in their interest to learn to see and heed the signs of this.

Of course there are other factors affecting natural disasters, but is that a reason for them to conclude that all their efforts will ultimately be in vain and to use this conclusion as an excuse to justify their greed? Is this abdication of responsibility not a sign of disrespect?

To answer these questions it is necessary to investigate in some detail what the words *greed* and *respect* are all about.

To be continued.

2 June 2021

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GREED, LOVE AND RESPECT

Once an attractive earthy young Jewish woman told me that she was good at lusting, but that she was not yet ready for loving. With my puritanical Dutch Reformed upbringing that distinction had not occurred to me and it left me with no alternative but to respect her honesty. The implicit warning was: do not fall in love with me.

Lust and love, two aspects of greed, related but nevertheless separate concepts and not to be confused. Life without either would be boring and not really worth living. Racine, the 17th century French playwright, thought that love was akin to a physical illness and concluded that respect should take precedence over love; without respect love would not last. It seems that lust is essential for procreation and thus survival of the species.

It so happens that recently, at a Greek Rembetica music concert, I came across the Greek word “Meraki” which means:

meraki¹ [may-rah-kee] (adjective) This is a word that modern Greeks often use to describe doing something with soul, creativity, or love -- when you put "something of yourself" into what you're doing, whatever it may be. *Meraki* is often used to describe cooking or preparing a meal, but it can also mean arranging a room, choosing decorations, or setting an elegant table.

If you look up the etymology of this word you will find references in several languages to the word “merak” or “mrak” meaning “peacock”, which makes sense. In Serbo-Croatian it means “desire, yearning, and enjoyment thereof”, and “enjoyment of the simple things in life”. So, nothing sinful or immoral, rather the opposite is implied. In the Christianised world the word respect so often seems to refer to absolute obedience to superior powers. You pay respect to lords and kings whom you must beg on your knees for favours and forgiveness and to whom you have to make sacrifices, and for whom you must be willing to die swearing absolute allegiance lest you be severely punished. It is interesting that as far as love is concerned, in our culture one *falls* rather than *rises* into it and thus you become prone to become its slave. Falling in love implies greed and a desire to possess and thus to control and to dominate. It can lead to not only domestic violence, but even bloody wars. In other words: “If you truly love me, as you say you do, you must behave according to my expectations, because if you don’t then I’ll have to hate you and I won’t be able to control my reactions and lose my self-respect for which you are responsible”. The parallel with religious issues is for you to work out.

As for genuine *respect*, I guess this concerns the acknowledgement of someone’s or one’s own inner struggles, successes and failures, to come to terms with life’s challenges and the fragility thereof, stripped off all hubris, false bravado and bullshit. A *genuine* zeibekiko dance. I prefer this explanation: [The History and Tradition of the Greek Dance Zeibekiko \(greekreporter.com\)](http://greekreporter.com), rather than <http://sites.utoronto.ca/acdclab/pubs/other-articles/zeibekiko>.

I’m also thinking of St. Louis Blues with Bessie and Louis (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rd9IaA_uJI) and Bach’s St. Matthew Passion.

30 June 2021

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¹Translating the Untranslatable.

<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4457805>

EIGEN-WIJS

Not so long ago I was contacted, somewhat to my surprise, by an old school friend from the Municipal Gymnasium, Nijmegen, Cox Terhorst. We knew each other in year five. He said he was retiring and wanted to revisit his earlier life experiences so he could, as I understood it, recount them to his grand children in a series of anecdotal vignettes. He sought to do this by approaching a few selected friends and acquaintances from those early days and sharing reminiscences with them via Skype while sipping from a glass of classy Beaujolais before going to bed late at night. Quite a reasonable approach I thought. A good night's sleep was after all hard to come by in view of his self-confessed chronic sleep apnoea. Far was it from me to lecture a Harvard professor of immunology... Anyway, having established somewhat gingerly that he didn't own a gun and wasn't a Trump supporter and anti-vaxxer¹ (which he verified by showing me his 'Team Fauci' coffee mug), I was relieved to find that he was still the Pallieter² with which my memory associated him. He seemed pleased with my observation that in all those years he had not acquired a strong American accent despite having taken on American citizenship, saying that was deliberate, and that not all Americans were philistines and red-necks. This of course was true and equally applied to Australia.

With our high school education and emigration experiences in mind I was curious to find out in what ways that had affected our worldview, our understanding of issues affecting the current state of the world. Of course one has to be extremely careful when trying to explain a person's behaviour or way of thinking by referring to national characteristics and stereotypes. But when I asked him if he thought that there was something typically Dutch that was worth preserving and celebrating as a contribution relevant to mankind today, he immediately understood what I meant and referred me to Baruch Spinoza, the 17th century Portuguese born Jewish (ex-communicated) Dutch philosopher who lived a modest and frugal life as a lens polisher and who used his considerable talents to study and analyse his religious education by applying the 'enlightening' principles of logic and reason. Of course I knew about Spinoza, as there was a Spinoza Lyceum in Amsterdam, but he was seldom or never referred to and had remained until now a fringe figure in my educational background. So I set about to fill this gap by perusing his Ethics and Theologico-Political Treatises and inevitably others' interpretations and clarifications thereof.

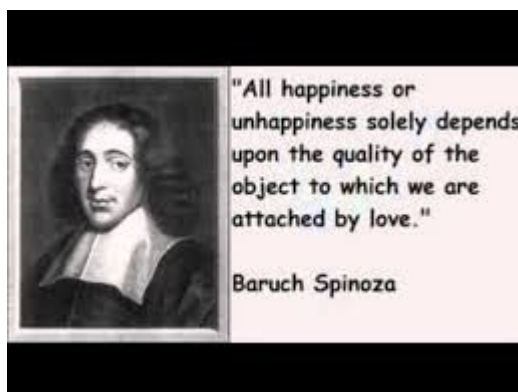
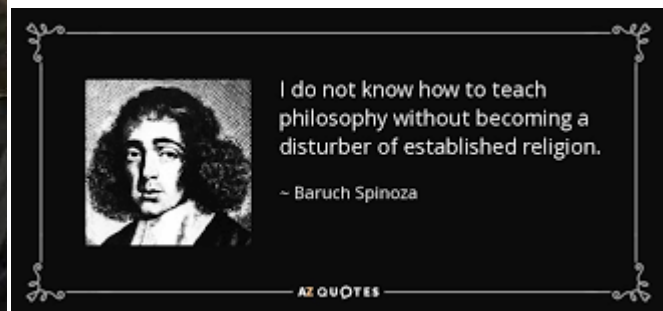
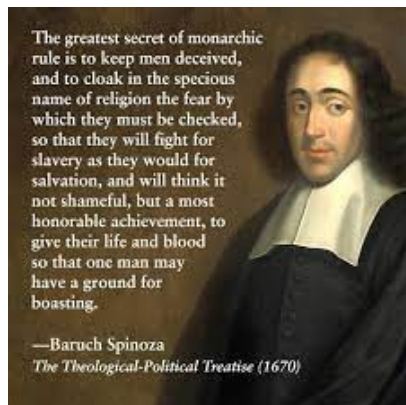
The conclusion I came to was that Spinoza was 'eigenwijs', but in the original sense of the word, so not in the now pejoratively used sense of 'conceited' or 'stubborn' etc. He had cultivated his 'wisdom (wijsheid)' by investigating the physical and mental world arriving at his own conclusions following the path of reason and logic, and making them 'eigen', inherent and set in concrete. Each conclusion he follows with QED, quod erat demonstrandum: "...in as far as x, y and z..., it follows that...qed". But 'eigenwijsheid' is of course not peculiar only to the Dutch. Perhaps what is peculiar to the Dutch is that Spinoza did not brag about his philosophical discoveries yet was not shy about them either, nor did he denigrate people holding different persuasions. He embodied that quiet inner confidence that seemed to be characteristic of the cultured elite especially in Amsterdam during the Golden Age and which is reflected in its artistic and scientific

¹ Why the double x escapes me, but there you are...

² The Belgian version of an Epicurean, created by the Flemish author Felix Timmermans whom we were encouraged to read for Dutch literature.

endeavours and achievements. I like to think that this characteristic has persisted and will endure the test of time. The word 'tolerance' is often referred to as a defining characteristic, but perhaps the word 'inclusiveness' is more accurate, a kind of willingness or even eagerness to understand and embrace and celebrate the unknown and unfamiliar. But this might well be wishful thinking on my part. Like democracy, multiculturalism is a fragile concept requiring considerable depth of education for it to remain viable, the kind of education to which Spinoza was privileged to have had access, the kind of education that was championed at the Gymnasium where Cox and I became friends ("Nos iungit amicitia" was the school song), the kind of education which had the potential to nurture true 'eigenwijsheid' without hubris. These days this kind of education seems to be under serious threat from that other kind of eigenwijsheid.

15/10/2021



WHAT ARE HUMAN BEINGS GOOD FOR?

Worms are good for the earth. Trees are good for the earth. Coral reefs are good for the earth. But, in as far as human beings are earth-creatures, what function, if any, do they have with regard to the planet as a living organism? Earth creatures need the earth's eco-system to survive; they are part and parcel of it. Ask Lucretius or Spinoza or quite a few other thinkers. All that lives on the earth is dependent on it for survival; but is our planet dependent on all that lives on it, on all that participates in its existence, for it to continue to exist? Are there limits to symbiosis?

This raises the question of the possibility of total extinction: can something be turned into nothing? Apart from a semantic conundrum, is this also an existential problem? Is it possible for life not to exist? A stone is said to be dead: it is stone-dead. But is it? Why then are people (scientists are people) so interested in exploring asteroids, said to be mere rocks floating about in (empty?)space? So, what is life anyway and what is death for that matter? Does it matter to know what matter is? To Spinoza the quest for knowledge is all important. His argument for this is elegant and convincing.

But this is not really where I wanted to go when starting this story a few days ago. Once again my mind raced ahead following an irresistible tangent. I wanted to suggest that the earth has an immune system whose function it is to keep it/her/him as healthy as possible, and to explore the implications of this for human action now that climate change is squarely on the agenda.

In humans the immune system is self-regulating. Years ago I had some thoughts about this: [Bio-Psycho-Social Model for the Development of \(Mental\) Health and Illness](#). I remember that at the time I was grappling with the role of free will in a basically deterministic paradigm. If humans are participants in a larger living system such as the earth, it seems not unreasonable to assume that the earth too has volition. Although I admit this sounds far-fetched, I wonder what Spinoza would have thought of it....

Thinking about the word evolution this morning I began to wonder if there was such a word as *evolition*. Interestingly my spell-check doesn't recognise this word. Admittedly somewhat to my disappointment—why?—Google's search engine did. There were several references to it and it appeared to mean what I thought it might. Daniel Evergreen (surely a pseudonym) wrote a book called "Evolition, a theory of everything". In the description it claimed:

So if you are wondering how everything can connect without the need for reductionism, dichotomies, randomness, or supernatural causes, "Evolition" provides some noteworthy answers, answers that can be adapted to other philosophies pragmatically, no matter one's belief or disbelief in God.

Well, what do you know? (Toe maar...in Dutch). A theory of everything! Surely too good to be true! Had I not abandoned my bio-psycho-social model when I realised that it was heading in a similar direction?

So, anyway, what are human beings good for and will the earth have pity on us?

CLARIFICATION OR OBFUSCATION? YOUR CALL

When I suggested in the previous piece that the earth was a living being and implied that therefore it had volition, that it could think and act, I felt that I was crossing a credibility line, entering a dangerous and forbidden foreign territory akin to the world of the occult, a world that some if not most would surely dismiss as cloud cuckoo land and that others might regard as heresy. I wonder if this has something to do with the idea that thought can exist without or outside of matter, independent of matter.

This leads to question if there are pre-conditions for thoughts to be able to occur. But if matter is a pre-condition for thought, is not thought a pre-condition for matter? Our traditional “scientific” “thinking” (reasoning, rational thinking) would seem to preclude this: thought does not need matter to exist. This does not make sense; ergo, if thought and matter are symbiotic, our reasoning is wonky and needs revision to deal with the idea of volition.

As I understand it Spinoza substitutes the traditional idea of God with nature, but unlike the conventional gods, Spinoza’ god (nature) does not interfere in human affairs. Is that because she/he/it cannot, or chooses not to interfere? In other words, interventions are at her/his/its discretion, i.e. will. And so we are back to traditional ways of religious thinking about the relationship between humans and the environment on which they, and their interactions with it, are dependent, including prayer and the observance of environmentally responsible practices—however excluding the irrational rituals and superstitions based on magical thinking to appease the gods, the Fates. Prayer here is rather to be understood as a kind of meditational state where communication can take place between the volitions of the human being with Mother-Earth—is the gender issue here a red herring?—where listening to (awareness of) each other’s concerns is the main objective. Martin Buber would probably like this idea and perhaps Baruch Spinoza would as well even though the latter had no time for prayer in the sense of asking for the biblical God’s intervention in human affairs.

What could be the implications of this kind of thinking for our dealings with such issues as climate change and indeed that previously raised question about what human beings are good for?

Back home
14 November 2021

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GODDELOOS¹

The somewhat disturbing, if not outright devilish, idea occurred to me that belief in a god – and by that I mean an all-powerful being with volition who actively intervenes in human affairs, as described and rejected by Baruch Spinoza² – is probably not much, if at all, different from belief in money – and by that I mean a generally recognised medium of exchange by people and global economies, which they are willing to accept as payment for current or future transactions. Crypto-currencies are the latest manifestations of this.

These mediums of exchange can be traded by people in the market place. This seems to work as long as the belief lasts. It is like a house built on drift-sand. The belief is built on foundations the properties of which are either unknown, neglected or taken for granted by most people. If you understand (are aware of) the properties of these foundations, their strengths and their weaknesses, that awareness enables you to be in a position to deal with them more effectively than others would. This understanding can be used to influence people's behaviour by manipulating their belief systems. Ignorance makes one vulnerable to exploitation.

This seems to me to define the world that we live in, a world under the spell of gods and devils, controlled and manipulated by humans dressed as devils and devils in the guise of humans. Our political systems are a reflection of this: a world where evil seems to rule the roost as evidenced by the almost universal acceptance of the need for a military, an acceptance of the inevitability of war. This was Thrasymachus's argument in Plato's Republic, that justice is in the interest of the strongest.

In a previous piece I mused about the word [eigen-wijs](#) and suggested there was merit in eigenwijsheid. I now think that the word "goddeloos" is not as devilish as its translation suggests. Imagine³ a "goddeloze" world where God – the one rejected by Spinoza – (and by implication the Devil) cannot be used as a scape-goat or some kind of benevolent bribable sugar-daddy, a world bereft of deity, i.e. the common perception thereof. What would this mean for the individual and his relationship to the society s/he lives in?

Of course many famous philosophers have had a go at these issues, and several of their suggestions have been tried, but it seems so far with limited or ultimately often disastrous consequences, as can be seen in our current world situation where climate change and overpopulation pose real and urgent challenges.

Whatever one's ideas of the divine might be, it seems Spinoza's conclusion that Nature is the boss is a realistic point of departure at least as far as this earth is concerned. It will reward or punish us according to the respect we pay it.

We had better believe that, believe me.

9 June 2022

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¹Dutch-English dictionaries: Godless, wicked ungodly, impious, profane, unholy, reprobate, atheistic, forsaken, unhallowed, etc.

² <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/spinoza/#TheoPoliTrea>

³ Inspired by a slogan on a shopping bag: *Imagine war breaks out and nobody goes to it...*

POST-MORTEM ART EVENT

Last Friday, 27 May 2022, about three month after Ken's death, we took Joe Frost to John and Mel Foubister's place in Goolwa. Joe had become a close friend of Ken since Ken's return to Australia from Perugia some 20 years ago. When Ken did not open his door Joe had become suspicious. The next day they found Ken dead on the floor of his kitchen in his small apartment just off Kings Cross in Sydney. He had been painting right up to the very end. He was 95.

Both Joe and John are great admirers of Ken Whisson's work and it is not hard to see his influence in their paintings. Joe, who also lectures at the National Art School in Darlinghurst and writes for an art magazine, was keen to find out more about the early days of his friend and mentor, hence his visit to us in Adelaide. I had met John via Ken some years ago. John and Joe were at Ken's memorial service. We attended the on-line streaming.

Inevitably we ended up in John's studio, a medium-sized corrugated iron shed behind his house. John had obviously been painting a lot and was prepared for our visit. Thinking about it now, what struck me most was how both John and Joe were prepared to work on a painting over extended periods of time, revisiting and changing them, agonizing over composition and patches of colour. I am wondering how that fits in with Ken's insistence on spontaneity and faith in the primacy of gut-feeling. How do you reconcile what you want to say with the most effective way of saying it? I am having this problem right now, and it has stopped me from writing for quite some time now (twice the word 'now'? I agonise, and the flow stops...you see the point?). So, push on, come back to the 'now' later, if at all¹. Let your hand do the painting, writing, playing, cooking; don't allow the constantly scrutinising intellect to interfere. Trust your intuition, let it flow. The work is done when your hand walks away from the creative bubble you were in. You stand back, look at it, taste it, read it, listen to it, and if your product takes you by a satisfying surprise ('did I just do that!') you know you have been successful even if in the process, and perhaps especially if you realise that your major achievement was that you have developed, have had to develop, a fresh and new perspective, ready for future use. So over time and many of such realisations you develop your own unique language, your own unique way of saying things and of understanding the world and of coping with its baffling contradictions and cruelty – beauty can be cruel and so painful. Ken's paintings and drawings are outwardly confronting but radiate an inner beauty, the beauty of truth – did I just write that? That's what prompted me all those years ago to buy that 'dancing girl' painting, my first, which Ken said was Kay Binns², but which could easily have been Lesley, or me or you for that matter. Each painting and drawing is a step on the way, each exhibition a chapter.

Looking at John's work my gut feeling told me that he was ready for a major exhibition. If he sold a few that would be a bonus. Ken had several exhibitions with very few sales. When he finally found wider recognition, he fled the country!

3 June 2022

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¹ Ken started doing that later in his career, but always made sure he dated the changes or adjustments. He also modified his initially dismissive stance on art teaching.

² Not sure of spelling

ART AS A VACCINE AGAINST CULTURAL ROT
(PERHAPS AS CLOSE TO THE IDEA OF GOD AS YOU CAN GET)

Where do you start a painting, a work of “art”, where why and when? When is it most likely to be “successful” and how do you evaluate that success?

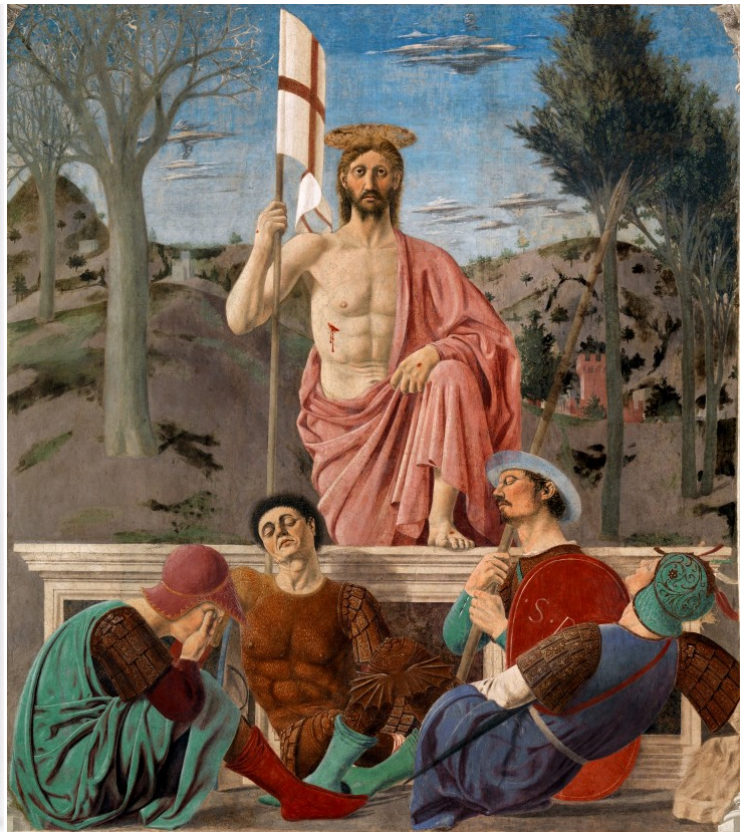
These questions were explored in an interview by Barbara Blackman with Ken Whisson midway through his career. I think that if you knew the answer to these questions you would probably never be successful in creating anything “original”, and I think that is what Ken meant when in another interview he is quoted to have said that ‘art is a means of creating new healthy cultural tissue’. A lot of thinking would have gone into that statement. Google has a lot to say about ‘culture tissue’, a well-known bio-medical term, but to evolve that term into the idea of ‘cultural tissue’ is innovative and creative. So art has something to do with cultural healing. Something is perceived as culturally amiss. By exposing and clearly formulating the wound, the artist implies in which direction the answer is to be found. The creative act becomes a dialogue between intellect and intuition. One of Ken’s drawings has the title of *What is the Question*.

Yesterday, when I began this thought experiment, I asked myself if I were to start upon a painting: where would I start? I would place a dot somewhere mid-right-off-centre on the bottom half of the portrait oriented canvass. No rational reason for this but pure gut-inspired. Somewhat more deliberate was the idea that this is where I would place myself in the universe I was about to create and explore, to experience. I, the person in the painting would communicate my experiences to me, the painter (the creator) who would record what I saw and experienced on the canvass. I surmise that this would create a sort of trancelike state where the painter is being completely absorbed in the story that is being told, like a child that is listening to or reading a story, no doubt projecting his own experiences in its creation. Finally, when the story is finished, the spell dissolves and the painting is completed and ready to communicate its message. The paintings of Joachim Patinir, but also John Foubister come to mind, but many others as well.

When reminiscing about Ken Whisson’s work with Joe Frost I came across a newspaper article by Sonia Harford in The Age (wed. 26 Oct. 1994) with a photograph by Tina Haynes, where Ken, in a deep state of meditation, is sitting on the floor underneath one of his paintings. I immediately thought of Piero della Francesca’s *Resurrection of Christ*, where Piero paints himself in a deep state of meditation underneath the resurrected Christ rising up out of some weird surrealist landscape below a blue sky with weird shaped flying saucer-like clouds. Ken is sitting somewhat similarly beneath his painting of a, to me, post-apocalyptic landscape, the title of which I have been unable to locate amongst the many catalogues I have. I photo-shopped the two pictures next to each other, and to me that ‘worked’ despite or perhaps also a little because of the effects of the folds in the newspaper. Have I thereby ‘successfully’ created a new work of art? Was Tina’s picture intentional?

I would argue that in our post-covid capitalism induced climate-change affected world the creation of new healthy cultural tissue is as imperative as it always was.

Thursday, 30 June 2022



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Приветствую Вас г-н Путин,

My name is Dan. I am a naturalised Australian and migrated from the Netherlands in 1959, aged 18. The so-called 'Cold War' was in full swing and, with fascism defeated and World War 2 still freshly in mind, many people were afraid of nuclear warfare. My secondary education was at a Gymnasium and thus thoroughly classical and humanist-European. Russia was absolutely part of Europe and thus Russian history was also European history. Marx was as European as Adam Smith was. Australia, being a migrant country – though with a very problematic colonial history – provided the opportunity to meet with people from many different cultural and national backgrounds. Many migrants seemed to be refugees from East European Communist countries and many West European migrants were suspicious of the eastern ones because they were regarded as collaborators with the Germans and thus Nazis. Many were highly educated and often fiercely anti-communist and anti-socialist, understandably so. Being 'white' was an advantage.

I certainly do not claim to be an expert in these matters, far from it, but I often think that, after the demise of the Soviet Union as a result of the unfortunate – but, given human nature, perhaps predictable – derailment of the Communist experiment, the European 'West' has missed a great opportunity to seek rapprochement with the 'East'. The West, naively in my opinion, assumed that their Capitalist approach was the correct one and that Capitalism and Democracy were inseparable. Given that Capitalism is based on exploitation of available human and material resources, it must inevitably self-destruct when there is no further opportunity for exploitation. I mean, if indeed it is in human nature to exploit then the exploiter will want to protect and expand their empire and he or she will use their authority by means of intimidation and brute force if all else fails, using their underlings as cannon fodder. Both the current Capitalist and Communist systems of government are prone to authoritarianism, be they West, East, Middle- or Far East.

Your country has been accused by the West of being run by Oligarchs, but the same 'criticism' can be applied to so-called Western Democracies which seem to be under the spell of 'Neo-Liberalism'. It seems to me that you, as well as the leaders of the USA and China are prone to be victims of this kind of situation. As you know, Western European democracies are quite vulnerable and fragile and cannot afford to be complacent if they truly believe in what democracy stands for and want to avoid being hijacked by narrow capitalist self-interests. Although you may accurately perceive weaknesses in the West that can now be usefully exploited to your advantage, in the longer term the consequences of military confrontation would surely be self-destructive to those who participate in it, where even the winners would set the clock back to medieval times, quite probably also for themselves. It could be argued that the USA narrowly avoided this scenario with the sidelining of Trump, at least for now.

Perhaps this unintended epiphenomenon of self-destruction is what the earth needs in terms of recovery from the effects of inevitable climate change, which is largely the result of rampant capitalism and which certainly does not need the help of a world war as well. Surely past experience and reason suggest avoiding such a catastrophe.

Historically (perhaps arguably, but nevertheless, when all is said and done...) Russia belongs to the European family and has been and still is a great contributor to its economy and 'culture', inclusive its internal conflicts. It would make sense to foster harmonious mutual relationships within the European community, rather than fan the cinders of past conflicts and grievances and lost glory. England's Brexit is just as regrettable from this perspective as is the current 'war' in the Ukraine. Despite its colonizing and imperialist past – and perhaps even because of it, if lessons have been learned – a United European block would provide a positive counter balance to the super-powers east and west of it. Would it not be in Russia's interest and thus yours, and indeed in Australia's interest, to avoid being drawn into the current tendency to see world politics in

terms of a 'single theatre'¹ dominated by the rivalry between the US and China, where Russia is seen as being in China's camp (autocratic) and Europe (and Australia) on the American (democratic) side. This binary view of Autocracy versus Democracy surely is simplistic and divisive and potentially quite dangerous. Imagine if in this kind of scenario the Chinese camp prevails, would this not sooner or later lead to tensions and conflict between Russian and Chinese value systems despite their 'autocratic' similarities? Similarly, within the western block, America should not rely on absolute European (and Australian) support despite their 'democratic' similarities and vice versa. Anyway irrespective of speculations about the outcome of various scenarios, would not resolutions of conflicts by negotiation and diplomacy be better for all parties than those achieved by military might? Resolution of conflicts by war in our time ends up having global implications and inevitably forces the non-aligned so-called 'strategically neutral' countries to compromise their fence-sitting positions. Perhaps Napoleon still got away with it, but Hitler did not. More recent examples are Vietnam, Afghanistan and the Middle East amongst others. Anyway, you know all of that as you too have been at the receiving end of this vicious cycle. But naked ambition, brute force, sheer ignorance and hubris are of course not exclusively the 'American way'. I remember these being the kind of tactics from my primary school playground.

I would argue that your current attempt at 'conflict resolution' in the Ukraine is based on this 'dog-eats dog' philosophy, and that this approach now surely is out-dated if only in view of the global warming issues which involve all of us. At the least it is inadequate as it involves fouling one's own nest. My understanding of history as it was taught to me is that the Ukraine is as part of Russia as Russia is part of Europe, warts and all. And warts there are many, mostly associated with the remnants and aftermath of European imperialism and colonialism of which racism is a persistent and festering example (see for instance the writings of the Kenyan Patrick Gathara² with reference to the Ukrainian refugees).

Although it is certainly appropriate to criticise the influence Europe has had in the making of the modern world in the wake of the 'Enlightenment', it would be regrettable to throw out the baby with the bathwater. The emergence of 'reason and evidence-based science' over 'superstition-based religion' especially in the 17th and 18th century did not only accelerate the materialistic worldview (communism, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism), it also spawned philosophical debate about the nature of the relationship between humans and their environment in view of their dependence on it. It is with some pride that I can refer to the Dutch contribution in this, e.g. Baruch Spinoza and later Multatuli amongst others. Of course other European countries, including yours, have made their great contributions.

Although there is of course still a lot that could be said about all of this, I want to finish this letter here, as I am convinced that I have made my intentions clear: conflict resolution by peaceful means...a path worth pursuing and an opportunity for greatness for the leaders engaged in its pursuit. Greatness achieved as a consequence of military might can only be Pyrrhic, making the ordeal to win not worth the cost.

Гласность and перестройка, two words that were all the rage late last century. I guess that sums up what I wanted to say. Am I dreaming...? Many of my friends would say so.

С уважением,
Дэнни Плой
1 August 2022

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¹ <https://johnmenadue.com/nato-hasnt-got-our-back/>

² https://www.aljazeera.com/author/patrick_gathara_20141863917323977

AT THE AGE WHEN FRIENDS AND FAMILY ARE DYING

An experienced poet would have no difficulty painting in words the multitude of feelings and emotions associated with family, friends and places visited and now revisited, perhaps for the last time.

As I don't consider myself an experienced poet instead I get excessively angry at things like password requirements by digital media and the stupid rigmarole associated with that. Mobile phones are fucking pests, causing pointless arguments. Some might accuse me of mental laziness...I blame my aching feet and the pain in my but, long airport queues caused by border force security, terrorist attacks, Putin's war, Covid... yet everyone wants to travel, me included because of that window of opportunity...the climate is changing...yesterday queen Elizabeth died...

Aunt Amalia is no longer here. She died a couple of years ago aged 101. But again I'm sitting on her balcony above Patriarhou Ioakim, Kalipoli, Pireaus. It all feels a bit empty, full of emptiness and uncertainty, forebodings of death, the elusiveness of things, that's what it feels like. The Covid epidemic has subsided, or perhaps rather politically downgraded, but the feelings associated with it persist. You see more mask wearing people here than in the Netherlands. Graphs on Google show a lull. In both countries no deaths recorded, but some 6000 new cases in Greece as against 600 in the Netherlands. What to make of it? What to expect in Doha next month when we have to overnight there on the way back to Australia? Disaster, never far away in my mind.

And here I sit again, hoping like those other times, to drag something positive out of all of this, something that is inspiring, something that cuts through the crap and rises above the despair and the existential anxiety of mortals.

Et voilà

The other day I thought of death as the ultimate orgasmic experience: la grande mort. Which raises the question of why la petite mort is said to be exclusive to women?



Apollo's wet ascension dream
(Detail of rather mediocre mural to be found in the Apollo theatre at Syros)

Pireaus, 17 September 2022

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I AM VLADIMIR PUTIN. I AM BORED

I am Vladimir Putin. I am bored. Everything in my life has gone my way. From humble beginnings I just floated to the top. I grabbed opportunities as they came my way. Somehow I always was at the right time and at the right place. I stepped in and took control when others were indecisive amidst chaos. Power was handed to me on a silver platter. I was fearless and was rewarded for my ruthlessness. I have profited from people's weaknesses. And so I came to be in my current position, Tsar of Russia for all intents and purposes. People fear me and revere me. I am bored. I need a project...

And so I look around me and see a world in chaos, not unlike the state my country was in at the fall of the Soviet experiment, chaos as evidenced by the cry to "make America great again", or the attempt to restore Great Britain's greatness, the panic caused by climate change and the Covid pandemic, the rise of China, the threat (or perhaps rather promise) of the demise of democracies from rampant capitalism.

And so, another opportunity presents itself. I might as well take it. What have I got to lose? I am not getting any younger. My country has been humiliated and most of its people, supported by their church, are quite happy with my strong leadership. Right now I consider my chances of success to make Russia great again to be far better than were those of my rivals mentioned before. Moreover I may not have any choice because I am told (and I agree) that without me the country is likely to disintegrate and of course I can't allow that to happen.

And so, really, I am destined to act now. But anyway, such justifications I consider unnecessary and irrelevant. I cannot fail to go down in history, one way or another. Après nous le déluge I think Napoleon once said. Moreover, *morituri me salutant*, for now. The weapon industry and its investors certainly won't object. It's now or never, so let's go and have some fun. At least I won't be bored...



Ave Caesar! Morituri te salutant, by [Jean-Léon Gérôme](#) (1859), inaccurately depicting gladiators greeting [Vitellius](#)

DP

17 September 2022

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QATAR WORLD-CUP SOCCER ON TELEVISION

Watching the world-cup soccer I became aware that something was irking me. Flying back from Europe to Australia we had recently spent a twenty-four hour stop-over in Qatar, staying at the old market precinct. This was a strangely unsettling, but not altogether unpleasant experience. Why would watching the soccer and the Doha stop-over experience create such similar feelings?

I will try to explain how, by some strange serendipitous coincidence, it was Desiderius Erasmus who came to the rescue.

In my continued, but perhaps ill considered, quest to identify a uniquely Dutch contribution to the development of European culture I at long last had decided to tackle Erasmus. As was the case with Baruch Spinoza and Eduard Douwes Dekker, I was of course aware of his importance from my school days, but had never really focussed on him. They belonged to the ranks of luminaries that were often referred to and quoted, but rarely read and studied in the original. I had realised this regrettable phenomenon many years ago when studying Psychology. Freud and his disciples (but also B.F. Skinner et al.) were referred to and quoted, but usually as a kind of secondary source in books and papers about them. This was confirmed by my charming guide with recent PhD in art history (if I remember correctly) on a recent visit to the Multatuli (Douwes Dekker's nom de plume) Museum in the Amsterdam Jordaan district. She thought that high school teachers assumed that their students were not mature enough to be confronted with his subject matter. But now I must confess to being guilty of the very thing I was berating: my current knowledge of Erasmus does not go further than Wikipedia. That Stultitia herself would be proud of me is dubious consolation! However, I have suggested to a friend (Ron Shapiro) to tackle translating the introduction to *Stultitiae Laus* or *Moriae Encomium* (*In Praise of Folly*, or in Dutch *De Lof der Zotheid*, as well as being an ode to his friend Thomas More). I would think the Dutch word *zot* is no doubt related to the English *besotted*. Both Ron (perhaps) and I are of course foolish (but hopefully not stupid) old men...who nevertheless think there is some value to be found in our knowledge of Latin.

Stultitia(Folly), daughter of Plutus and, of course, a youthful nymph, Neotes¹. Wikipedia says that "in *Stultitiae Laus* Erasmus has Stultitia parade as a goddess, offspring of Plutus, the god of wealth and a nymph, Youth. She was nursed by two other nymphs, [Inebriation](#) and [Ignorance](#). Her faithful companions include [Philautia](#) (self-love), [Kolakia](#) (flattery), [Lethe](#) (forgetfulness), [Misoponia](#) (laziness), [Hedone](#) (pleasure), [Anoia](#) (dementia), [Tryphe](#) (wantonness), and two gods, [Komos](#) (intemperance) and Nigretos [Hypnos](#) (heavy sleep). Folly praises herself endlessly, arguing that life would be dull and distasteful without her. Of earthly existence, Folly pompously states, "you'll find nothing frolic or fortunate that it owes not to me."



Ja, Verjüngung ist machbar. <https://neotes.com/>

¹ Youth. Google brings up a German Beauty site for Neotes. Yet another example of stultitia.

Fair enough I suppose for Wikipedia, but Gerrit Gerritsen (alias D. Erasmus – he was Gerrit's illegitimate son who later changed his name!) describes her origins as follows:

Plutus... "Op het bezit van zulk een vader beroem ik mij! En hij heeft mij niet uit zijn **hersenpan** doen voortkomen, zooals Jupiter die norsche en **kribbebijtrige** Pallas, maar hij verwekte mij bij een **alleraardigste en allergeestigste** Nymf, **Jonkheid** genaamd, en hij had zich aan haar niet verbonden door **een vervelenden huwelijksband**—ge weet, dat zoo die manke smid (Vulcanus) geboren werd—maar, wat wel zoo aangenaam is, hij was **met haar in liefde vereenigd, zooals onze Homerus zegt**. Maar gij moet niet denken, dat ik het leven te danken heb aan dien **afgeleefden** en blinden Plutus van Aristophanes, neen, hij werd mijn vader, toen hij nog in de kracht van 't leven was en **gloeide niet alleen van het vuur der jeugd, maar nog veel meer van den nectar**, dien hij op een godenmaal **wat al te ruim** en al te sterk gedronken had."

Plutus..."This is my father and in him I glory. Nor did he produce me from his brain, as Jupiter that sour and ill-looking Pallas; but of that lovely nymph called Youth, the most beautiful and galliard of all the rest. Not was I, like that limping blacksmith, begot in the sad and irksome bonds of matrimony. Yet, mistake me not, 'twas not that blind and decrepit Plutus in Aristophanes that got me, but such as he was in his full strength and pride of youth; and not that only, but at such a time when he had been well heated with nectar, of which he had, at one of the banquets of the gods, taken a dose extraordinary."

possit. (c) Τὰς πατρὸς εὐχομαι εἶναι. Atque hic quidem me progenit non è cerebro suo, quemadmodum tetricam illam ac torvam Palladem Jupiter: verum (d) ex Neotete, nympha multo omnium venustissima, pariter ac festivissima. neque rursus id tristi illi illigatus conjugio, quomodo (e) faber ille claudus natus est: verum quod non paulo suavius (f) ἐν φιλοτητι¹ μυχθεῖς, quemadmodum noster ait Homerus.

(c) Id est: *Hujus patris gloriæ esse*. Hemistichium est solenne apud Homer. L.

(d) Id est: *Ex juventute*, id enim sonat Græce *Neotes*. Innuit autem ex divitiis & juventute nasci potissimum stultitiam. L.

(e) Vulcanum significat ridiculum, & tamen ex matrimonio natus, puta Jovis & Junonis. L.

(f) Id est: *In amore mixtus*. Est autem hemistichium solenne apud Homerum, quoties significat furtivum concubitum, extra matrimonium. L.

B 2

Genuit autem, ne quid erretis, non Aristophanicus ille Plutus, (g) jam capularis, jam oculis captus, sed quondam integer adhuc calidusque juvenis, neque juvenis solus, verum multo magis nectare, quod tum forte in deorum convivio largius ac meracius hauserat (h).

Quod si locum quoque natalem requiritis, quandoquidem id hodie vel inprimis ad nobilitatem interesse putant, quo loco primos edideris vagitus, ego nec in erratica Delo, (i) nec in undoso mari, nec (k) ἐν σπεισι γλαφυροῖσι sum (g) Capulares dicuntur fenes decrepiti. Talis autem induitur Plutus apud Aristophanem. L.

(h) Hic natus fuit Apollo cum sua sorore, quorum beneficio insula prius fluitans cepit immobilis esse. L.

(i) Nam hinc fingitur nata Venus. L.

(k) Id est: *In specubus cavis*. Est hoc carmen in primo *Odysseæ* libro, tum alias crebrum apud Homerum. L.

Mihi vero neque Chaos, neque Saturnus, neque Japetus, aut alius id genus obsoletorum, ac putrium Deorum quispiam pater fuit. Sed πλεῖστον ἑνός unus, vel invitis (γ) Hesiodo & ...

Πλутων (Pluto)...Hujus patris gloriæ esse...etc. I love the old-Dutch translation. The English leaves out our Homer's ἐν φιλοτητι μυχθεῖς, furtivum concubitum, extra matrimonium.

My soccer-in-Doha malaise experience begins to make more sense when seen through the eyes of Stultitia and her companions. How else would a world soccer carnival in one of the hottest and inclement places on earth make sense? In the comfort of my living room I marvelled at the skills of the soccer players and applauded the winning team despite their somewhat inferior but nevertheless considerable skills. And all of this taking place in real time in several especially built air-conditioned yet open-air stadiums of elegant state-of-the-art architectural design all paid for

by a small barren nation with a small population with the profits from their fossil fuel resources and cheap and expendable imported labour, a Muslim nation risking to compromise their fundamentalist religious values of sobriety and female “modesty” by hosting soccer besotted fans from all over the world prepared to compromise *their* values and pay huge sums of money to watch and be part of this extravagant spectacle. Besotted, zotheid, folly, folie.

Gerrit makes his goddess create a very compelling argument for the benefits of her existence to mankind. She makes life tolerable if not enjoyable. Not an ill-considered contribution in our times of fake-news and narcissistic big egos?



8/12/2022

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¹ By Erasmus, Desiderius, d. 1536 - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14782268725/Source>
book page: <https://archive.org/stream/lelogedelafoliec00eras/lelogedelafoliec00eras#page/n5/mode/1up>, No
restrictions, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=42736131>

OP EEN MOOIE WARME DAG IN DECEMBER¹

While I was writing or rather perhaps composing the previous piece sitting out on the patio I made years ago behind our house amongst the gum trees – it was, as it is today, one of those beautiful quiet and peacefully pleasant sunny afternoons you can get here in December despite noticeable climate change induced weather events – I became aware of a wattle-bird, a tiny blow-fly, and two small white butter-flies all going about their business, as were the nesting kookaburras next door.

The wattle-bird – perhaps there were two, to my untrained mind they all look alike – was time and again repeating similar flight paths approaching from two or three different angles as it disappeared into a hole in a thick bush about six or seven meters to the right of me. By the movement from the leaves on the branches it would sit for a while at the same spot near the top of the bush and then fly out on the other side into the neighbour's yard. When I took a closer look into that bush, sure enough there was something that looked like the beginnings of a nest. I could not detect any signs of life in it, nor ascertain that it was still being constructed... That was yesterday. This morning I saw it chasing away an Eastern Rosella and I also thought I saw it carrying some food in its beak. But now later in the afternoon I could not resist the temptation to have a closer look, and there it was, sitting very still on that tiny nest. There is no doubt that it has been aware of me right from the beginning and that it now knows I have discovered its secret nesting place. Well, right from the beginning? Would it have chosen that spot if it had not trusted me?²

Anyway, despite their rather unremarkable plumage and their not very attractive call, wattle birds are fun to watch. They are fantastic aerialists. This one can count on my discretion.

The blowfly kept landing on my right hand and was very persistent no matter how many times I shooed it away. As I had a little wound on the back of my hand it was of course attracted to the blood. So I covered the wound with my sleeve. I would try to get under the sleeve, but could not. So it went to the spot under the sleeve where the wound was, time and again, undeterred by my futile efforts to kill it. I went away for a little while. When I came back there was a repeat performance. There are a number of questions I could ask about this, none of which are probably very intelligent and as futile as my efforts at insecticide. However, I would be very surprised if that fly engaged in these kinds of futile ruminations.

But what about those white butterflies fluttering seemingly erratically in the breeze through the airspace in front of me? From time to time one, sometimes two, would meet up and perform a kind of dance together. Then one would land on a flower or a leaf and off they went on their own again. They must have been aware of each other as a species, even over a considerable distance, but they ignored other types of butterfly as they ignored me. We were just irrelevant to them I guess.

I have learned since – while observing them from my hammock on the balcony – that dragon flies are perhaps the most accomplished aerial acrobats of all. Moreover, they love eating mosquitoes!

End December 2022

¹ This heading was inspired by a Dutch children's song about three toddlers sitting on a gate on a warm day in September.

² As it turned out, this one abandoned its project after all.



Ken Whisson's Birds and Trees



Ken Whisson's Real Birds Imagined

COORDINATES

Where am I at?

Why should you be interested in that, and for whom, if not for myself, am I writing this anyway? So, before continuing, ask what it is that makes you read on. And remember: curiosity killed the cat.

When travelling, and especially when exploring new places, it is important to know where you are. It is not only physically important, but also mentally. If you lose your sense of physical direction you will be more likely to lose your sense of mental direction, to lose your mind, as they say. Often the first test given by a Psychiatrist is one of mental orientation, to see if you are oriented in time and space. Time and space, here we go again...

Just before I started to write this I was at my brother in law's place on Queensland's Gold Coast. I had picked up a mobile telephone which had slipped from my hands onto the floor. This caused some dizziness. The enormous, constantly-on, television screen tried to lure me in with yet another story about the beginnings of World War 2. No no, not my scene, been there, done that...My bearings were intact; I knew where I was "at".

Because of Covid it had been quite a number of years since our last visit, this time to celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. Outside not much had changed - the moving, yet stationary wind-ripples on the lake below the veranda of their large comfortable home, where I had fled to escape the tv, are timeless, as are the stately black swans floating past - but physically and mentally their challenges of ageing were confronting. Macular degeneration, back problems, dementia...you name it. Heading, though brave-faced, inescapably towards, or should I say into, timeless infinity: potentially a profoundly disorienting and dizzying experience...That's where they were and we will be "at".

Not long after I had a dream that started off quite pleasantly but ended rather abruptly in a quickly unfolding nightmare...Travelling through and enjoying the vast distances of outback Australia we stopped on the highest point of an endless plain. The view was immense. There was a cross road with a few buildings, ruins and corrugated iron sheds. Although there was no sign of life I felt we were being watched. I started to feel a bit disoriented. Were we heading in the right direction? Suddenly a woman appeared. She seemed friendly enough. I asked her which way we should go. She didn't know and heading down the hill she said she would ask. She never came back. I felt totally lost and abandoned. I had no idea where I was at...

I Know a Man

As I sd to my
friend, because I am
always talking,—John, I

sd, which was not his
name, the darkness sur-
rounds us, what

can we do against
it, or else, shall we &
why not, buy a goddamn big car,

drive, he sd, for
christ's sake, look
out where yr going.

This poem by [Rober Creeley](#) was once given to me many years ago by a friend, the photographer Don Whyte. It hit home then as it does now, and has on several occasions in between.

DP

June 2023



Don Whyte, photographer



REFLECTIONS FROM MY THRONE
(The Americans in my life)

This morning, on my throne, where I'm always prone to lapse into a dreamlike state, it occurred to me what it would be like if you cut up your lifetime into those kind of activities, such as standing under the shower, making the daily cappuccino, brushing your teeth, waiting for something or someone, situations where you are basically idling along and not thinking about anything in particular, and then pasting them contiguously next to each other, so not on a continuous timeline. Most of those activities are pretty routine and recur almost daily, but others happen only every now and then, such as sailing on the Coorong past the Murray-Mouth or travelling over the Afsluitdijk in the Netherlands or stepping on to an aeroplane...

Those three dots represent an interruption of several days. When I finished there, it was because I could not decide how to continue that line of thought. And now, again, indecision threatens to stifle progress. Perhaps I should just write about another topic that I had been considering. I have been wanting (spell-check wants 'have wanted', but for me the 'been' adds something extra) to write about the Americans in my life, and now it occurs to me that this is actually quite a good example of the less frequent type of contiguity I was trying to describe in the previous paragraph. First there was "uncle" Alan Alberty, then Ron Martin, then Don Sharpe, then Ed and Marilyn Peay and now also Cox Terhorst.

Uncle Alan.

Not long after the end of World war 2, when I was about seven or eight years old, Uncle Alan came to stay with us in [the manse in Bommel](#), then still a small rural village between Arnhem and Nijmegen, not far from where the Waal branches off from the Rhine. He was an American war



veteran who, like many others, had come back to Europe to revisit after the famous landing at Normandy where he had been wounded. He walked with a limp because of a piece of shrapnel in his thigh. The Dutch Reformed (Presbyterian) manse in Bommel was a large mansion with a very large fertile garden, and occupied a prominent spot in the centre of the village opposite a severely

war-damaged castle called the Kinkelenburg¹. It had four levels. The cellar had some five separate compartments and was raised above ground level so coal could be loaded in through openings in the wall above the ground. The first floor had a grand entrance up some steps into an L-shaped corridor off which were two large living rooms, separated by sliding doors, a large dining room a large kitchen, a toilet and a grand staircase taking you up to the second floor which had a landing off which three large bedrooms and my father's study, a toilet/bathroom and the entrance to a steep narrow staircase leading to the attic, where my mother used to hang out the washing on rainy days and which contained two smaller bedrooms, one of which was uncle Alan's room. The other one, which looked out on to the Kinkelenburg, was mine.

Somehow the manse had escaped damage despite the fierce fighting which had just about destroyed the whole village and its surrounding hamlets. The maintenance of the manse and its garden was beyond my father's income as a vicar and depended on a kind of medieval arrangement of more or less obligatory contributions by the parishioners – a well-to-do farmer

¹ If you type this into your search engine you are likely to see several pictures of war damage and subsequent restoration.

would bring the occasional pheasant or hare he had shot, or a tip cart of fresh manure which his servant would help us spade into the vegetable garden. But this feudal practice did not last very long after the end of the war. So any additional income from boarders was extremely welcome.

Sometimes Uncle Alan was joined by his war veteran friends, Uncle Stanley and Uncle Gerry. For us these Americans were very rich indeed. This was evidenced by their, in our eyes, lavish generosity and extravagant eating habits. For us ice-cream was a very rare treat and I'm sure my parents warned them not to spoil us so much. Uncle Alan was not as gung-ho and brash as his friends. He was an artist who would go on long walks with his sketchbook, using his sketches as the basis for watercolours. I have a vague memory of him apologizing to my parents for his friends' brashness and I now think that this had something to do with him being a Democrat and they being Republicans, which at the time of course meant nothing to me. All I knew about America and Americans was from the now discredited Karl May books which my father had given me. They were all about cowboys and Indians (coyboys and Indianen as we called them), Winnetou and the Apaches, Old Shatterhand and Old Shudderhand, the Wild West. That's also where I gathered Uncle Alan came from: Albury in Washington State, right in the North-West corner of the USA. I would sometimes accompany him on his walks. I would point to various things, tell him the word in Dutch and he would tell me the English word and in that way I learned quite a bit of English which was of course quite useful later on at High School as I had lost my fear of that language.

I remember that once he came home very late from one of his walks. Apparently he had been arrested and questioned by the police when he was busy doing one of his sketches of the landscape. At that time the government had undertaken an enormous defence project to thwart off the Russians in case of a feared war with the Soviet Union. The idea was to build defence dikes so that whole areas of the district could be flooded. This was supposed to be secret of course and certain areas were forbidden territory where trespassers would be prosecuted. Uncle Alan had no idea, the signs were in Dutch! Apparently the dust settled fairly quickly and I think he got away with it with a warning. The remnants of that defence project are still there. Quite a bit of money was wasted on it. The irony of this was not lost on us. Wars are so stupid.

Ron Martin.

I met Ron Martin in the winter of 1964 on the Greek island of Mykonos, which was then still unspoiled by mass tourism. I have only vague memories of that time. For instance I can't recall how I got to the island, but I remember very well the endless night-trip on the ferry back to Piraeus. It was a small vessel, nothing like the huge fast and slow ferries of today. It was bitterly cold and very windy with rough seas. We, Ron and two sisters (also Americans) and someone called David Boyd (an Australian guy who Ron said was related to the famous Australian painter's family) were outside on the top deck huddled around the stack as the atmosphere inside was stifling. I must have been wearing the very thick and oversize jumper that Ron had given me. That was a very welcome gift as I was ill prepared for the freezing European winter that year, with snow in the Mediterranean. I kept that jumper for many years.

Back on Mykonos I remember a long night in the only taverna that was open at that time of the year. I think it was called Jim's taverna. As you entered it you were handed a half litre tin jug that you could fill up with retsina as often as you wished from a barrel at the back. They trusted you to tell how many jugs you had had. Pretty rough stuff, but it went very well with the Calamari rings and chips we had for dinner. Later, after midnight someone tried to order some chicken. There

wasn't any left, but oh wait...sometime later Jim came back with a live chicken and proceeded to amazingly prepare that one for us to eat. That night we were also treated to an impromptu concert by a guitarist and a seventeen year young female singer singing mainly the songs by Theodorakis, which were banned at the time by the right wing Junta government. But everybody knew those songs anyway. Ron told us that this singer would become famous. Her name was Maria Farantouri!

Ron was a big tall guy with an enormous walrus moustache who had a lot of presence. We were all somewhat fascinated by the hippie movement at the time. Ron said he came from San Francisco (Height Ashbury and Sausalito) and had been intimately involved with the culture there. What more could I ask for? He had worked at various American embassies around the world but was now a free agent travelling around Europe. He called himself a 'hustler'. He explained that by saying that he made himself available to people, especially American ex-pats who had to live abroad for their jobs, but who were lonely and at a loss to understand and get involved in the cultures in which they had been posted. In his previous job he had met many such people. They had plenty of money but lacked the ability and confidence to break away from their limited American backgrounds and felt like fish out of water in their foreign environment. They were only too happy to pay for Ron showing them what was on offer, where and what to eat, see, experience and enjoy. This put quite a different slant on the word hustle, as I knew it. When I told him we in Australia were impressed by the American author Henry Miller, most of whose books were banned in our country at the time, he told me I should read Kazantzakis instead.

Don Sharpe

My first professional job was as a teacher at a Church of England Grammar boys' School in one of Melbourne's inner South East suburbs. Don Sharpe also taught there. I had just completed a 3 year Bachelor of Arts degree at Melbourne University and needed a job. I had absolutely no teacher training but they needed an extra French teacher and since I told them I had done a few years of Latin at my Dutch High School I was also given a Latin class. A condition for getting the job was that I would have to also take on duties as a House Master at their boarding school. This was okay with me as it solved my accommodation problems.

However, I soon found out that I was like a fish out of water in that environment.

I remember the interview with the Head Master, John, of the boarding house quite well. He was a rather jovial fellow. He had a comfortable large office with a fireplace. As he explained the house rules, he casually mentioned the use of "the cane", pointing to a bamboo stick next to the fireplace. Now, I did know about "the cane" from my fourth year English class at high school in Holland. I think we were reading Joseph Conrad's *Almayer's Folly* and our teacher explaining that the use of "the cane" was quite common and normal in English boarding schools; it was a quaint old British habit, intimating that it was rather uncivilised and quite out of date in the Netherlands. I expressed my surprise to John, who seemed quite bemused by my response, and asked him if he would demonstrate the use of this cane as I wanted to experience it if I ever needed to resort to this disciplinary method. He obliged with three firm whacks. Not for me, I decided, but didn't tell him that...I think I was supposed to say thank you afterwards.

My first classroom experience at the beginning of the school year was one I won't ever forget. It was first-year Latin class. I had no idea where the classroom was. Nobody bothered to show me. As I wandered around somewhat bewildered I asked someone who looked like another teacher who was about to enter his classroom. He seemed preoccupied and pointing he said it was

somewhere “over there”. He wished me luck and said:

“Well, here we go, it’s either them or me and it had better be me...!”

He was prepared for battle. It was the second bit of advice I got. The first bit was by the Principal, who had told me that if I had any problems to send the boy to him, which I was pretty sure would mean the cane. This was not a path I was prepared to take. Needless to say that I had a rough time in that class. What I didn’t know, in contrast to my own school experience, was that this last lesson on a Friday was considered to be the least important of the curriculum and that I therefore need not have worried that what I knew to be my very limited knowledge of the Latin language would be discovered. Moreover I had no idea how to pronounce Latin words in English. About half way through first term one of the kids asked why I never talked about the football like the teacher who ran the other parallel Latin class. That’s when I found out that I was way ahead of the other class with the curriculum. Ironically I knew less about football than about Latin, but that is by the way. Towards the end of term I eventually really lost my cool and sent a loud-mouth to the Principal. The class fell silent. I had gained their respect and lost my self-respect. In a flash I saw how easy it would be to become the very sort of cynical teacher I despised.

At about the same time I witnessed three sheepish young boys coming out of John’s office, followed by John himself who gleefully let it be known to me that he had caned the those boys on their bare bottom. Later during lunch at “high table” I overheard John in conversation with a previous boarding house headmaster who happened to be visiting. They were gloating over the fact that they didn’t have a paedophilia problem at the school. Meanwhile I knew that another housemaster had been quietly transferred to another Anglican school as he had been found out to have been with one of the boys in his room.

All of this and more was enough to make me reconsider my future at the school. I decided to resign and not to wait another term, as I did not think this was fair to the boys in my French matriculation class. And this is where Don Sharpe comes in. Soon after my resignation he approached me. He said he had also resigned as had a number of other teachers, apparently following my example. We stayed in touch with each other for some time after that. I don’t remember much of that time, but we must have talked about American authors that fascinated me at the time, Henry Miller, J.D. Salinger, Anaïs Nin. I do remember that he drew my attention to what I thought was a book *I’m Curious Yellow*, which I only now discovered was an at the time somewhat risqué Swedish cult movie.¹

I eventually lost touch with him. Like my other ex-pat Americans friends, he was very keen for me to visit the USA, but I never did.

Ed and Marilyn Peay,

Ed and Marilyn came into our lives in the early seventies when, fairly recently employed as his Research Assistant, I was doing my M.A. in Psychology with Gordon O’Brien² at the fledgling Flinders University of South Australia. Many of the academic staff at the uni were young and at the early stages of their careers, full of ambition and bravura. There were several Americans employed in the School of Social Sciences, amongst whom Art and Kathy Shurcliff and Don DeBats³. It was an exciting time. We had come to SA from Townsville in North Queensland as a

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_Curious_\(Yellow\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Am_Curious_(Yellow)). See also Youtube.

² See Dear Knillis 22, Tjitji Nyanga Pikatjara in [Notes to Knillis](#).

³ Don is now Emeritus Professor and Head of American Studies and Director of the Jeff Bleich Center for the US Alliance in Digital Technology, Security, and Governance.

recently married couple and like many others had found it somewhat difficult to break into the local social network, so we were keen to make newcomers feel welcome. We made several life-long friends that way, amongst whom Ed and Marilyn. Both had PhDs in Psychology, I think from the University of Michigan. Several of the academic staff in the Psychology department had done post-doctoral stints at various American universities working with famous luminaries who were regarded as gods in their fields of study. Some of these gods came to Flinders as visiting professors. Quite a number of these people have passed away by now, including Ed. Leon Lack, a survivor and expert in sleep disorders, has written a history of the department in those days.¹

Ed was appointed at Flinders in the Psychology Department, while Marilyn taught Psychology to Psychiatry students at the Medical School of the well established Adelaide University. Ed called himself a 'mathematical psychologist', evidence that the Psych. department took itself to be serious scientists within the School of Social Sciences even though that school was classed within the Humanities and not within Sciences and Engineering. Marilyn was assumed to hail from the American establishment since her father was buried at Arlington national cemetery.

Friday afternoons were the times to unwind and relax and that included lunch at the staff club or trips to the nearby wineries and/or sessions at a choice of a number of pubs. This was where socialization and acculturation took place. It included an introduction to 'ockerism'², the cutting down of 'tall poppies' and much 'piss taking'. Tony Cleland was a great master of this (a phd was not yet necessary in those days, and like several others he did not have one). Tony called one of those pubs 'poofter's paradise', while he referred to Americans as 'septics' (short for septic-tanks which rhymes with yanks). Gordon (Gordy) referred to Ed as 'pisspot-peay'. Ed was rather bemused by all of this and actively participated. These days they probably wouldn't have got away with some of this sort of stuff, even if it were meant to be good natured.

We shared the 1971 Christmas Eve cyclone Althea³ experience with Ed and Marilyn when they came up to Townsville in the summer holidays. They stayed in the Strand Motel which was owned and run by Katina's family next door. We had come home around midnight after an aborted dinner party with friends as the wind was picking up, just in case. But no one was too worried. It soon became apparent that the situation could and would become quite serious and that there was no way we would be able to move to safer ground. I will never forget the howling of the wind, a kind of loud screeching sound. Sheets of roof iron flying past, the rain and trees horizontal, the carpet in the living room lifting off the floorboards, pushed up by the wind through the cracks between the planks, the dog hiding in bewildered panic, all contact with the world outside lost, no power, no way of knowing how bad it would get or how long it would take and if we would experience the eye of the storm and what that would mean. When the roof had come off the garage I decided, perhaps foolishly, to move the car in the narrow passage between the house and the motel. My Renault 16TS stood there steady as a rock facing the wind howling at over a hundred miles per hour, proving the brilliance of its aerodynamic design. It survived unscathed. Meanwhile we were of course concerned with the well-being of the motel guests. In between wind gusts I ran across and found some guests wanted to leave as they didn't feel safe with the sea so close by. I had to convince them that the motel was really the safest place. But Ed

¹ A History of the Psychology Schools at Adelaide's Universities. By T. Winefield, 2016. Chapter 5.

² The rough, [uncultivated](#) behaviour of the [stereotypical](#) Australian man, a contemporary masculine archetype devoted to beer, sex and swearing. See also wikipedia.

³ Google it for more information and pictures.

and Marilyn were calm and stoic. They appreciated the beer that I managed to shuttle across. Toward mid-morning the category 4 storm had subsided and it seemed that we had avoided going through the eye. The roof of the garage had landed in the swimming pool where it could do no further damage, being kept down by the water. The house, being old Queensland style on stilts with wooden louvers, and the relatively new motel were remarkably intact especially compared to a lot of the rest of the town. But the Strand was a mess. The distance between the house and the edge of the sea had just about halved and it would have been a lot worse if the storm had coincided with a king tide.

I think Ed and Marilyn really liked Australia and allowed themselves to become attached to it. Even though they eventually moved back to America (New England), they did become naturalised Australians – we were guests at that ceremony – and they bought two large natural bush properties, one near Adelaide in the hills and one on Kangaroo Island off the coast of South Australia. That KI property has become a place of special significance in our lives. I can't remember when, but at some stage staff at Flinders Uni. were given the opportunity to cash in their superannuation. Many did and invested that money in property. Ed and Marilyn bought some 30 acres of coastal bush land on Kangaroo Island, just east of Pennington Bay, near the turn-off to the settlement of American River, would you believe! It is the narrowest part of the island and was a bit of waste land that no one was interested in. Some donkeys and goats grazed there and the local yahoos used it to hoon around on their trail bikes and buggies – many country towns had areas like that on their outskirts; beer bottles everywhere and dilapidated fences. Their nearest neighbours were a family that had moved there because of the clean air; they said they were allergic to the 21st century and led a hippy lifestyle.

They built a simple little shack there in the sand-dunes facing the southern ocean and somewhat protected by them, but not enough to stop the corrosion of the aluminium frames around the sliding doors and windows. It was spartan but comfortable. They had the electricity and landline for the phone connected at great expense. The tank water was not drinkable because of the salt from the sea spray off the rocks and the bird shit on the roof, so you had to bring your own drinking water in 20 litre cartons. There was only one picture on the wall featuring a frozen arctic landscape in Alaska.



Marilyn had the place thoroughly surveyed for what local flora and fauna there was to be found there and proceeded to clean up and rehabilitate the land. Initially they put a lock on the gate in the driveway with a private property sign on it, but soon realised that the locals did not appreciate that as that road gave access to a surfing beach and also a popular rock fishing spot, which were of course on crown land and not part of the property. Realising this Marilyn made

sure that she got to know all who entered the property explaining her rehabilitation project. That did the trick and she got their full support.



They very generously let us make use of the place for several years and we have spent many wonderful holidays there with our children and selected friends and family. Especially in springtime when all the wildflowers are out it looks stunning. Marilyn showed us an ancient aboriginal midden close to the rocky edge of the southern ocean that she was very secretive about. I spent several of my after-lunch naps on the edge of it opening myself to dreamtime. I hope I did not disturb the spirit ancestors there; probably not, as they left me alone and very much at peace.

Cox Terhorst

You may already have made acquaintance with Cox if you have read [EIGEN-WIJS](#) on page 68 of this bundle of Thoughts. So here I will attempt to share a thought with you that has recently once again been on my mind, perhaps even, no, really, pestering me. How do you deal with a fundamental difference of opinion between family members, friends or (soul-) brothers? An archetypal issue and conundrum you might say, but nevertheless fundamental to human coexistence. Books, some holy, some not so holy have been written about it, but time and again history is littered with failure. Okay, it is all very well to say that we can agree to disagree and still have a beer together afterwards, but what if these soul-brothers are forced to take sides in a war situation? As a 'civilised' human being are you prepared to, or indeed should you be prepared to kill for and die for your beliefs (your god, king and/or country), knowing the attackers were prepared to do so, and moreover, would you perhaps even be prepared to sympathise with their plight? Yesterday there was a news report where a young Israeli woman in a kibbutz near the Gaza strip, realizing they were under attack by invading Hamas fighters, grabbed seven guns out of the cupboard and gave them to those nearby, knowing what was in store. They killed several of those fighters. What would you have done? What alternatives were there for you? None? Sit down and offer them a beer and extend a brotherly or sisterly hand? Shoot yourself? Even shoot your compatriots if they could not do it themselves?

And now, a week or so later – the Hamas fighters having succeeded in taking many women and children as hostages – this situation is threatening to develop into yet another global war on a planet that is seriously in danger of man-made climate disasters. Are our world's leaders (the

permanent members of the UN Security council – the US, UK, France, Russia and China) up to their task? And, anyway, what is their task? Is their choice between fratricide and suicide, when suicide may very well be the outcome of fratricide, or will they be able to opt for restraint and compromise?¹ A further two weeks have passed and it seems like Israel's leaders have decided to follow through, despite the pleas for restraint by the world's leaders, to eliminate Hamas and thereby sacrifice the lives of many of the hostages and severely increase the risk of widening the conflict with potentially catastrophic consequences. The plight of the Palestinians – read Philistines (yes, very likely the same word!) – is conveniently ignored as is the Israeli's leader's hubris and motivation to take the focus off the corruption charges he faces at home. Nobody is innocent here. Recently Australia along with America and a few others voted 'no' to a cease fire, so innocent people in the cross-fire, mainly women and children, could escape. The reason given was that this would give Hamas an opportunity to regroup. So much for 'the rules of war'...as if this contradiction in terms means anything anyway. The thing is that, once the revenge killing has started, the genie is out of the bottle and so history is set to repeat itself. I was reminded of this upon reading an opinion piece² in The Guardian by Kenan Malik: "In the Middle East, as in Greek tragedy, justice must prevail over moral absolutism". Thus I was prompted to take another look at the trilogy *Oresteia*³ by Aeschylus, written in the fifth century BC. It seems today we still live in a morally primitive world, dominated by hubris and revenge where human life and cultural achievements, such as democracy, are used and sacrificed as currency and bargaining chips by those who want to intimidate by the display of brute force, and not just in the Middle East. Essentially this seems to be not much different from the primary school yard politics used by bullies. Those who want to support the underdog are dismissed as weak sissies and bleeding hearts, and those, often highly educated people, who feel the need to expose injustices, are regarded as whistle-blowers and treated as dangerous criminals who are harshly punished to deter others. Is this really "la Condition Humaine", and is collective, perhaps even individual escape, escape from this fate ultimately impossible?

What has all of this got to do with the Americans in my life, and how does Cox fit into this? Well, what all of us have in common is the challenge of the "ex-pat experience", i.e. the experience of being a foreigner. And this will have affected our sense of identity which has a bearing on, if not determines, our evaluation of the world around us. But what we also have in common is our fundamentally European cultural roots. How you deal with conflict in a mutually respectful and civilised way is one aspect of this. At this junction in my thinking it occurred to me to ask google if it could find anything about Dutch values. This sure enough produced a government document titled "Kernwaarden van de Nederlandse samenleving, 20 Februari 2014". Lovely stuff of course! Then I expanded that to "Core values of Australian society", followed by American and (Communist) Chinese etc. core values; I found all really wonderful stuff, all variations on the same theme, all with the best of utopian intentions and certainly enough common ground for successful negotiations of disagreements and conflict resolution. And yet, here we are, apparently still unable to put all this wisdom into practice. Why?

To answer this question I have decided to consult the 'furies' that still live within me and with whom I have a love-hate relationship. They stir me up every time I see and hear certain politicians

¹ <https://johnmenadue.com/saving-israel-and-palestine-through-the-un/>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/nov/05/in-middle-east-as-in-greek-tragedy-justice-must-prevail-over-moral-absolutism>

³ <https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0700021h.html>

and commentators on TV. You can probably guess many of those I am referring to. I can't seem to stop myself from yelling abuse at them and giving them the finger(s). It is a gut reaction to what I perceive as hubris and disingenuousness, exploitative populism, smug narrow-mindedness and demagoguery. I full well realise that for many their reactions are also rooted in their gut. In that sense we are all reactionaries. On the one hand I want to trust the correctness of my gut feelings and want to encourage others to do so, and on the other hand I know I should be suspicious of them, wanting others to follow suit.

At this point I feel again inclined to tell you that I have looked up the meaning(s) of several of the words I have been using, such as populism, core values, democracy, communism, capitalism, reactionary, demagoguery etc., as I know I cannot be sure that I fully understand them in the way others might. This I found a very worthwhile exercise, but one that considerably slows you down...Fortunately a lot is at your fingertips via the internet if you use it judiciously. Similarly you can find articles about how to deal with sensitive and reactive people. Remember though, it ain't necessarily so...

But back to Cox and our classical "elite" Dutch educational background, which inter alia – am I elitist by using this Latin phrase instead of among other things? – encouraged us to critically examine the concept of "elitism", in fact, come to think of it, probably all concepts of words ending with -ism. Our school had some 110 pupils, almost all teachers had PhD's, there were 3 full-time Classics teachers, and some 15 subjects were compulsory. We were well aware of our status as not belonging to "the" οἱ πολλοί (hoi polloi) "the" 'the many', meant in the pejorative sense: the masses, the riffraff, the bourgeoisie, the deplorables, the Bogans, the 'wannebees', the aspirational (a meliorative and less derogatory word). In other words, we were educated to be the elite and thus to think and behave like the elite 'should'. This is tricky territory. As soon as you label the other a 'snob' you risk being one yourself. It is like walking a tight-rope while being fully aware that from time to time you are going to fall off, but not being deterred by that, and being prepared to learn and have another go; something like that. I cannot be sure that you know what I mean. Yet I trust, or want to trust, that some, no, many, if not all of you do know or may find a clearer way to pin-point it.

I really don't know where to take this and how to draw some sensible or practical conclusions. The more I think about it the more I get bogged down and lost in a kind of brain-fog. What is it that is essentially American, Australian, Dutch, Israeli, Palestinian, Arab, or whatever? Yet we use these words every day as if everyone understands what is meant and it is even seen as praiseworthy to be prepared to commit all sorts of atrocities in the name of, and even to die for many of the things these words stand for.

I now think not much will ever change as long as people are prepared to fight and die for their god, king or country. I consider myself to be predominantly European, warts and all. I can only hope that we will never be in a position where we are forced to die for this or to commit soul destroying atrocities. I would like to think that this hope is not uniquely European.

DP

3 Dec. 2023

SALTATORY

Cox described my previous, rather lengthy piece as ‘saltatory’: 1. **of, characterised by, or adapted for leaping or dancing.** 2. proceeding by abrupt movements or changing by sudden variation. That is an accurate description and one entirely consistent with the way my thoughts behave themselves, or rather I let them behave and even encourage them to behave. Saltare means to jump or skip in Latin. I named a little Heron class sailing dingy I once owned “*Saltato*” – a “dropping” of the bow, almost always on a down bow, allowing the bow to continue to bounce as more notes are played; this may be on just one string or a run across several strings – at the time Jacob at the age of about seven or eight was learning this violinist technique and I was trying to teach him how to sail off Adelaide’s Brighton Beach, where the water was salty and could be quite choppy. I still wonder if anyone would have made that connection...

Now I think about it, this word could well describe my quirky writing style which may not suit a lot of people. But isn’t that the nature of thoughts? They can travel backwards and forwards, up down and sideways at a speed far greater than light, capable of breaking (through?) the continuous-time barrier into infinity, eternity and immortality, so to speak. Nice idea that: *continuity barrier*: the closer you get, the further away it seems (cf. fractals) Saltatory stuff indeed.

You may have noticed that I often ask myself questions to which there does not seem to be an answer, where **reason and logic** only seems to end up in a world of fog and despair. The approach to problem solving we were taught could perhaps be, if not must be, inadequate? That there are other ways of knowing and understanding is of course not new, but except, unfortunately¹, for in Judeo-Christian-Islamic “revealed” religious belief systems, this seems to be a road less travelled, at least in our western anthropocentric cultures since the enlightenment.

Recently I came across one article² amongst several now being written about the writings of my favourite indigenous Australian writer Alexis Wright. In it there is a quote from another indigenous Australian writer, Ambelin Kwaymullina: “Life doesn’t move through time / Time moves through life”. Similarly he (Tony H-d’A) asserts that in Alexis’ writings “we don’t move through country, country moves through us”. Country has a voice that can and should be listened to. If “country” is taken as “nature” (the natural environment, but also nature as in “human nature”) than we are not far from Spinoza’s “*deus sive natura*” (god or nature) where Baruch would assert that god is nature. He **thought / felt / reasoned** that there were three kinds of knowledge: **imagination, intuition, and the exercise of the intellect**.

I would have liked to run these ideas past Ken Whisson³ and Felix Hess⁴, whom I have mentioned several times before, but both these dear friends and mentors are no longer available in the way they used to be. So be it.

DP

22 Dec. 2023

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¹ I think, or at least hope, that Spinoza (and you) would agree with this ‘saltation’.

² The voice of Alexis Wright, by Tony Hughes-d’aeth, 11Oct. 2023, insidestory.org.au

³ <https://www.mup.com.au/books/ken-whisson-hardback>

⁴ https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Hess