

# The Continental Community Of Inquiry



**Edited and Introduced  
by  
Matthew Del Nevo**

*Everyone has fingers and can take a brush and paint, but that does not make him a painter. It is precisely the same with thinking.*

**Hegel *Philosophy of Right***

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## PREFACE

*It's a pleasure to discover a high school philosophy text as thoughtfully designed and evenly balanced as Mr. Del Nevo's. The balance is between pedagogy and content. Instead of a collection of lurid writings on topics of dubious merit, Mr. Del Nevo has chosen to strike an equilibrium between very short but intense selections from Continental philosophy and the pedagogical method of the community of inquiry. In this manner, the book promises to enlist the intellectual energies of the students and the teacher alike. I would be very surprised to hear a teacher's report that this text was used but found unsuccessful.*

Matthew Lipman

## THE BOOK IN BRIEF

Preparations: Students are in possession of the following Handouts, which the facilitator has read through with them and clarified where necessary: a) **Why Study Philosophy?** and b) **The Logic of Conversation in a Community of Inquiry** or c) **Conversation in Community**. Participants may or may not have been given the **Information Sheet** beforehand and facilitators may or may not prefer to work with the **Conversation with a Text** approach. For this participants prepare written work for class.

The class: Students are given a copy of philosophical text supplied by this book, which they read together, perhaps more than once.

The class follows the normal pattern for a Community of Inquiry. The Continental Community of Inquiry keeps the protocols of **Conversation in Community** and the facilitator keeps the **Procedural Questions for CCOI Facilitators** in mind. The facilitator scribes the path of inquiry on a white-board and details the highlights where possible.

The manner of conducting a Community of Inquiry (COI) and *Continental* Community of Inquiry (CCOI) are described in the **Introduction** to this book. Briefly it is this:

Students raise questions from the text. Facilitators need to read the sections of the **Introduction** entitled **Getting Started**, **Keeping Going** and **Rounding Off** to understand how the strategy of the CCOI facilitator is different from normal. In a CCOI raising questions from the text will take at least an entire session. Questions are written up on the white-board. A question is chosen (usually the question which it is considered has the best reasons for choosing it). The Community set about 'answering' it. The facilitator follows the strategies for facilitators of CCOIs given in my **Introduction** and the general **Procedural Questions for CCOI Facilitators**.

If the group starts floundering and not moving forward or becomes generally disoriented and 'all-over-the-place', it is the facilitator's job to get the inquiry back on track. There are two ways to do this: (i) the substance and accidents technique and (ii) the textual reasoning technique. These two ways of reorienting dialogue are described in the **Keeping Going** section of the **Introduction**.

Normally students have a number of questions about any text. In that case, group the questions if possible. You may want to answer all the questions or only the 'main' ones or one. Emphasis may be on covering as many texts as possible in the time, or in the thinking involved with the issues of any one text. It is probably wise to strike a balance. Pushing the participants toward an answer is more a matter of intensifying the thinking and the dynamic within the group than it is really about finding answers as such.

## WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

The study of philosophy is really only the recognition and placing on a formal and justified footing of what everyone always already does. Because all of us act and think in terms of some 'philosophy' that guides, steers or orients us. We perceive things in terms of our 'philosophy'. How many people are victims of the philosophy of others? The answer is probably, most people. And how much of other people's philosophy has been neither examined or only ill examined by them? The answer, again, is probably, most of it. That is a scary thought. Another example of our pre-existing relationship with philosophy that all of us always already has, is relationships, and love in particular. Our ideas about relationships and other people guide our behaviour. The way we react to other people's behaviour toward our self in relationships affects our self-regard. We form habits from our beliefs that have arisen out of our patterns of thought, which have become ingrained. In short, the way we think is of the essence of the way we are.

If, then, we turn our thinking upon itself, if we decide to improve this area of our being, we will need to study philosophy. Of course there are different methods of study and different areas of philosophy that we might take up. The point here is that we are already caught up in philosophy whether we like it or not. The choice to take up philosophy in this or that way, or to take up this or that kind of philosophy is itself philosophical. I am not taking you round in circular arguments here: the fact is that philosophy is embracing. A human being cannot step outside its embrace without ceasing to be human.

So, philosophy is for people who want a life that is more worth living and to live in a world which is a better place. This "more" and this "better" depend on philosophy, no matter what the circumstances.

The following passage comes from Jostein Gaarder's book, *Sophie's World*, which is a good introduction to philosophical ideas and which I would recommend for the beginner, even if you don't read it all at once.

The best way of approaching philosophy is to ask a few philosophical questions:

How was the world created? Is there any will or meaning behind what happens? Is there a life after death? How can we answer these questions? And most important, how ought we to live? People have been asking these questions throughout the ages. We know of no culture which has not concerned itself with what man is and where the world came from.

Basically there are not many philosophical questions to ask. We have already asked some of the most important ones. But history presents us with many different answers to each question. So it is easier to ask philosophical questions than to answer them.

Today as well each individual has to discover her own answer to these same questions. You cannot find out whether there is a God or whether there is life after death by looking in an

encyclopedia. Nor does the encyclopedia tell us how we ought to live. However, reading what other people have believed can help us formulate our own view on life.

The writer on world myth, Joseph Campbell reminds us: People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life... I think that what we're really seeking is an experience of being alive." *Sophie's World* again,

A Greek philosopher who lived more than two thousand years ago believed that philosophy had its origin in man's sense of wonder. Man thought it was so astonishing to be alive that philosophical questions arose of their own accord.

It is like watching a magic trick. We cannot understand how it is done. So we ask: how can the magician change a couple of white silk scarves into a live rabbit?

A lot of people experience the world with the same incredulity as when a magician suddenly pulls a rabbit out of a hat which has just been shown to them empty.

In the case of the rabbit, we know the magician has tricked us. What we would like to know is just how he did it. But when it comes to the world it's somewhat different. We now that the world is not all sleight of hand and deception because we are in it, we are part of it. Actually, we *are* the white rabbit being pulled out of the hat. The only difference between us and the white rabbit is that the rabbit does not realise it is taking part in a magic trick. Unlike us. We feel we are part of something mysterious and we would like to know how it works.

P.S. As far as the white rabbit is concerned, it might be better to compare it with the whole universe. We who live here are microscopic insects existing deep down in the rabbit's fur. But philosophers are always trying to climb up the fine hairs of the fur in order to star right into the magician's eyes...

This fairly explains what philosophy is. Why study it, is up to you to decide. Whatever you do decide, however, will be a philosophical decision, the consequences of which you will have to bear. These consequences, of course, will not just be consequences for you, for like any of our deeds, they will also be consequences for the world and in however minuscule a way, for the future of humanity.

If this sounds a little bit too much, there are side-benefits to studying philosophy that are so worthwhile that they take on importance in themselves. Geoffrey Klempner, who directs Philosophy Pathways and the International Society for Philosophy, advises as follows:

While one is being entertained by the thoughts of philosophers, one can take additional comfort in the thought that one's mental powers are being steadily improved. Philosophy teaches us to argue a case more forcefully, to express our thoughts better, and also to be

more flexible and creative in our approach to the problems that face us in our work or our daily lives. Recently, much has been made of the contrast between logical and creative approaches to problem solving, between 'vertical' and 'lateral' thinking. One of the most significant features of philosophical problem solving is the way that both approaches are closely integrated. To make headway in philosophy one needs to see round problems, to treat with suspicion any starting points or assumptions; in other words, to think laterally as well as vertically. The philosopher prizes equally the faculties of logic and vision, yet also learns to appreciate the completely unexpected move, the gift of serendipity.



## PHILOSOPHY FOR TEENS?

I am always wary of the so-called 'expert' in philosophy. Some are experts *on* philosophy, on *other people's* ideas. Some are experts in logical thinking or in some other area of philosophy or 'expertise'. There are experts in philosophy for children. If expertise means experience, rather than some technical ability or training it makes more sense. Because thinking is hardly reducible to technical training. On the other hand, it would hardly be philosophical to suppose that experience may be the only or even the best yardstick, philosophy is not reducible to experience either.

Is philosophy for children? There is a deep-rooted prejudice that says not. In the last century the influential psychologist Carl Jung reiterated it, but it goes back to Plato. Plato did not think philosophy was for children. They thought one should not embark on philosophy before middle age. Certainly, Plato and Aristotle are more than merely philosophers to reckon with. Their thought brought philosophy to birth. Even so, it is peculiar how this prejudice has held sway when we do not endorse Plato's views on democracy or poetry.

This book is for Senior High School students. It is also for adults. I have used the texts with young and old. I believe the true philosopher is always a beginner, in the sense that thought puffed up with pride in itself is thought which is an obstacle to itself. The beginner is open, wondrous and ready. The beginner has a sense of spontaneity and a strong sense of what they don't know. All these beginners' qualities are things not to lose along the way. They are philosophical virtues and are to be found in children. George Ter Wal who does Philosophy with High School boys in NZ, with whom I often share notes, sends me this advice:

Philosophy with children and youth involves a completely new pedagogical method but doing philosophy with children is so much more than merely a method. When we discuss with children difficult concepts like justice, knowledge, truth, responsibility, suffering, identity and freedom, the distinction is no longer between the tutor and the tutored, but rather between the one who does realise his own ignorance and the one who does not.

Doing philosophy with children and youth presupposes first and foremost a deep-rooted humility on the part of the adult, next it presupposes the adult's ability to make critical examination of viewpoints and attitudes no matter how revolting the viewpoints or strange the person who proposes them. In return philosophical conversations provide us with a true opportunity to see the children, to truly listen to what they tell us and to join them on the narrow path towards self-knowledge.

## ABOUT THE READINGS IN THIS BOOK

The readings in this book have not been chosen arbitrarily, there is an inner coherence to Continental philosophy which pertains to the ancient and abiding sense of the unity of knowledge and the unity of being, or else of 'substance' in terms of which the 'parts' or qualities of things are to be distinguished; in short, a sense of the Absolute. As René Char said, "How can we live without the unknown before us?"

There is a short passage from that most philosophical of poets, Mallarmé, which captures the spirit of the readings in this book:

An undeniable desire of my time is the separation, with a view to differentiation, of the double nature of the word, rudimentary on one hand, essential on the other.<sup>1</sup>

It is with the latter, with the essential, that the readings in this book are concerned, because this is what philosophy has traditionally been concerned with, rather than the inconsequential and ephemeral.

The context of Mallarmé's quotation above is important as well. He is talking about the *crisis* in language and thought, which means a crisis in culture, that are integral to modernity and postmodernity. The readings in this book provide a classic enunciation and expression of that crisis through texts by key modern thinkers.

Philosophy has, as the Greek etymology of the word suggests, always been about wisdom, in particular the love of wisdom. The texts in this book do not reduce the love of wisdom to any kind of formal technique, such as logic, or a method of 'looking at things', rather, the texts are engaging. They engage us with life. They are themselves engagements with it.

Doing philosophy, therefore, means engaging our love and our wisdom at the level of our thought in such a way that all three are increased in us. To begin, we can assume nothing, and assert nothing dogmatically; nor accept the assertions and assumptions of others. – And yet we must make a beginning. This requires knowledge of our views – our beliefs and attitudes about ourselves and the world.

Some teachers have said to me that the readings in this book are too difficult *for them*, let alone for their students. My reply is that the problem is not the texts but the teacher's expectations. Teachers expect to understand a philosophy text in much the same way that they would a newspaper or a book that they happen to be reading at the time. But reading *continental* philosophy is different. It requires another attitude. Hopefully the instructions to follow in **How to Conduct Communities of Inquiry** will help these teachers.

The texts are not too difficult for students who are properly oriented according to the instructions in **How to Conduct Communities of Inquiry**. And yet they will be found too difficult if the student's attitude is half-hearted or actively disinterested. Philosophy is not something one can do half-heartedly. Inquiry needs an inquiring mind. Students need to be reasonably enthusiastic

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<sup>1</sup> Mallarmé, *Crise de vers* in *Igitur, Divagations, Un coup de dés*, Gallimard, 1976, p.251.

and motivated and there are no special instructions in this book as to how to go about that. I leave it to the teacher's discretion and whatever the particular situation calls for. One of the most difficult texts in this book is Sartre's **Negations**. I can happily use this in a CCOI with my Junior Extension students although I would hesitate to use the text with my Seniors, who do not share the same feeling for collaborative inquiry.

Working on student's attitudes must be part and parcel of philosophy in a COI with Senior students anyhow. We all have students who it is difficult to get to sit in a circle or listen to anything at all. The texts in this book are the real thing, not 'kid's stuff', and feedback I've had suggests that students recognise and appreciate this.

I tap into my senior student's motivation by playing up the *method* side of what philosophy is about, rather than the content. They will learn skills of analysis and judgement that will help them across the curriculum, in both humanities and sciences and continue to help them outside school. The content of the texts in this book belong to the beautiful face of Philosophy Herself, faces are not fixed, nor are they simply to be understood. They are to be read, their moods discovered, their character captured in reflection.

## LEARNING PHILOSOPHY

To become philosophers we need to learn to state, as clearly and convincingly as possible, what we believe and what we believe in. To do this we must first learn how to examine what we believe and believe in. Such examination will take the form of philosophical investigations. These investigations are attempts to work out our ideas against those of others and to see and understand all their implications and complications. There are two prongs to such investigations. On the one hand, we test our ideas against those of our contemporaries, and on the other hand, we measure them against the classic statements of the great philosophers of the past.

It is the effort to appreciate the differences between one's own views and other's views, to be able to argue with someone who disagrees and resolve difficulties that may light our path.

Working with the texts in this book students will not only have the opportunity to read real philosophers, they will encounter established and honoured philosophical ideas. In the Continental Community of Inquiry students will be able to test their ideas against those of their contemporaries and also against some of the decisive ideas of the recent past.

The Continental Community of Inquiry, which is the way philosophy is best taught in schools, prevents

dialogue from being a theoretical and dogmatic account and forces it to be a concrete and practical exercise, because, to be precise, it is not concerned with the exposition of doctrine, but with guiding an interlocutor [or interlocutors guiding each other] to a certain settled mental attitude: it is a combat, amicable, but real. We should note that this is what takes place in every spiritual exercise; it is necessary to make oneself change one's point of view, attitude, set of convictions, therefore to dialogue with oneself, therefore to struggle with oneself.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, in a Continental Community of Inquiry the *text* remains a basic object and reference point. It is as if it symbolises a commonality, a *locus*, by which a culture or tradition identifies itself, and which it preserves and reveres for this reason.

If a lot of modern philosophy easily degenerates into reflective abstract understanding and its derivative, formal logic, then Continental philosophy aims to revive philosophy herself. As Hegel and every prominent philosopher reminds us, real philosophy, since its commencement in Greece, aimed at transforming one's vision of the world and thereby the world. The goal of philosophy was the art of living. The texts chosen for this book face us toward that goal.

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy As A Way Of Life*, Blackwell, Oxford, p.20.

## MODELS OF INQUIRY

The concept of 'inquiry' is not self evident and is understood differently in a Continental Community of Inquiry than in a Community of Inquiry.

First, a bit of background: The philosophical Community of Inquiry pioneered by Mat Lipman and others is based on a certain view of philosophy that has prevailed in English-speaking countries in the modern era, which, perhaps, can be traced as far back as Bacon. This approach to philosophy is characterised by an analytical emphasis on semantics and linguistic elements of meaning. 'Philosophy for Children' (p4c) and 'Philosophy in Schools' use what is called 'a Community of Inquiry' as a method by which participants – that is, students – can learn to think by the actual practice of it. It is a great idea that works well with all age groups, from Primary School children through to Adult Education.

The way in which the philosophical Community of Inquiry is facilitated, however, is in accordance with the protocols of a certain style of logic. This is the style of a standard logic text-book used in English-speaking countries.

Yet these English language logicians do not represent the mainstream history of philosophy. This is philosophy as practised in continental Europe, particularly in France and Germany. From a more European perspective, it seems as if English-language philosophy is characterised by a literalism with respect to language – so prominent in its Philosophy of Religion – and, furthermore, is contaminated by an empiricist and positivist ethos, which manifests itself in a categorical pragmatism, utilitarianism and rationalism. While English-language philosophy frequently invokes the name of Kant, from a more European perspective it seems as if "Kant" is a cipher for the collapsing of ontology into epistemology, so that any question about the *nature* of things automatically becomes a question about how we can *know*. Then, with empiricist presuppositions the question of knowledge is judged in terms of so-called "cognitive processes". This is hardly philosophy any more.

Philosophy demands breadth and freedom, but some ways of doing philosophy restrict what is meant by "reason" and stifle true freedom of thought and speech.

If one is running philosophy as a Community of Inquiry, it is crucial that what one is facilitating is genuinely *philosophical* and not anything less, let alone anything else.

As a rule, Anglo-American philosophy believes in the "laws of thought" and reasons accordingly, not so the Continental philosopher. The laws of thought, for those unfamiliar with them, may be stated as follows and restated algebraically:

1. "The Law of Identity":  $A$  is  $A$  (where  $A$  stands for anything whatsoever)
2. "The Law of Non-contradiction": nothing can be both  $A$  and not- $A$ .
3. "The Law of Excluded Middle": Everything is either  $A$  or not- $A$ .

In short:

If  $p$ , then  $p$ .  
Not both  $p$  and non- $p$ .  
Either  $p$  or non- $p$ .

$p \rightarrow p$   
 $\sim (p \ \& \ \sim p)$   
 $p \vee \sim p$

And yet, writing as long ago as 1827 the great German philosopher, Hegel, had this to say of the “laws of thought”:

It is asserted that the Law of Identity, though it cannot be proved, regulates the procedure of every consciousness, and that experience shows it to be accepted as soon as its terms are apprehended. *To this alleged experience of the logic-books may be opposed the universal experience that no mind thinks or forms conceptions or speaks, in accordance with this law, and that no existence of any kind whatever conforms to it.* Utterances after the fashion of this pretended law (A planet is – a planet; Magnetism is – magnetism; Mind is – mind) are, as they deserve to be, reputed silly. That is certainly matter of general experience. The logic which seriously propounds such laws *and the scholastic world in which alone they are valid* have long been discredited with practical common sense as well as with the philosophy of reason.<sup>3</sup>

*This book aims to redress the balance and bring Continental philosophy to the Community of Inquiry. It aims to bring a different ethos to the Community of Inquiry and to present a new way of conducting such a Community.*

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<sup>3</sup> Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn, tr. W. Wallace. 1932, Oxford University Press, pp.213-4 [my italics].

## COMMUNITY OF THE QUESTION

Some of the texts to follow may appear sophisticated to some facilitators of COIs, too difficult for my students, they may think. Part of the facilitation process and part of thinking in community, in that case, will be the formulation and specification *of* questions. None of the texts to follow are artificial. None have questions deliberately buried in them. Yet every text is eminently thought-worthy. The texts are all part of an interpretative tradition which is ongoing. No-one has ever spoken the last word on any of the texts, no matter what their expertise.

The community should spend time on the texts, reading them over, at least twice, more if needs be. The **Conversation with a Text** Help-Sheet will assist students to deal with texts which even after several readings remain enigmatic. Alternatively, the community can be facilitated as a community of the question. In this case the inquiry revolves around trying to find suitable questions which meet with the substance of the text. There is nothing wrong with spending considerable time finding questions, or a question, as a community.

The process of finding a question, of thinking about questions and asking preliminary questions (that is, questions *about* questions) should not be foreshortened, it is an important aspect of a Continental Community of Inquiry.

## THE CONTINENTAL COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

I have said that there are two basic models of a Community of Inquiry. The Anglo-American model is explained below. It is rational and logical in the accepted sense of these words. The Continental Community of Inquiry (CCOI) is the other model. Continental philosophy requires some adjustments to the conventional COI. Reason and logic in mainstream philosophical thought, which is European, not Anglo-American, mean something slightly different than in the English-speaking world. With Continental philosophy reason and logic are more *speculative*. The two basic models of a COI are not mutually exclusive in theory. They are mutually embracing and mutually supporting. While between the two models there can be a tension, this tension may be productive.

In practice, a participant of a CCOI, will find the whole culture is different to a COI. The questions are different, the relation to the starter is different, the facilitation is different. For someone who has been accustomed to a conventional COI it may be as if the entire *logic* were different. I have already explained the procedural differences in the preceding sections. Here I want to say a word about the general distinguishing character of the CCOI.

The facilitator of a CCOI needs, as in the ordinary Community of Inquiry, to uphold the community. *The community must remain sovereign*. The purpose of the community is the community, bound by inquiry as a community. But what 'inquiry' means in the context of Continental philosophy must be more broadly understood.

A CCOI is *speculative*. Its reason is speculative. Its logic is speculative. The facilitator will have to make this clear and be at ease in her role. In a CCOI getting group *to think speculatively* is more important than getting the community to conform to the prescriptive protocols of analytical reason, although this is not unimportant.

In English the word 'speculative' with respect to philosophy has a ring like 'mystical'. 'Mystical' means mysterious or incomprehensible to our ear, rather than intimate and experiential, the connotation it has among mystics. 'Speculation' has about it the sense of something not self-evident or not a matter of sense certainty. It sounds vague and wishy-washy.

But we need to hear 'speculative' as Continental philosophy has done. It is not strange. We speak of a matrimonial or a commercial speculation. By this, what we mean is twofold: first, that we *go beyond* our current state. Second, the new state is translated into *objective* terms or reality. A speculation is a *transcending* thing and an *objective* thing. This is so in philosophy as well as in common speech.

A Community of Continental Inquiry will ask more imaginative questions or question more imaginatively. Its 'starters' will be more poetic and may require



more poetic and spontaneous responses, rather than simply responses that can be reducible to the prescriptions of analytical rational logic.

Part of the joy of this collection for participants is that they realise they are reading and working with *planetary* thinkers. For instance, Descartes, his notion of a methodical thought that would give us “clear and distinct ideas” has been foundational for modern Science and improved the state of reason at the end of the Medieval period. It is strange that, nowadays, the preference for clear and distinct knowledge rather than murky and mystical ideas seems itself so clear that it is hard to believe it was only recently discovered, and was bitterly opposed for a long time.

## WHAT A CCOI FACILITATOR SHOULD CONSIDER

1. A CCOI distinguishes the *personal* from the *personable*. Being personal in conversation is psychological. The interlocutor is therefore confessional and ventilates his emotions. Being personable is political, in the philosophical sense of *politikos*, in which as far as *thought* is concerned, the whole, the community, is greater than the sum of its parts (the individual). The person in community does not relate primarily as an “individual” but as a “citizen of the world.” And what really matters is this latter, rather than the former. The *personal* makes us subjective, which means it subjects us to our self. The *personable* civilizes us and raises us beyond our self.
2. The CCOI needs to come under the spell of the matter *toward which* its philosophical gaze is fixed. For a CCOI it will not be the criteria of judgements (the subjective operations of reason) so much as *the matters themselves* that guide the discussion – the givens of the text to begin with. “To the matters themselves” was the catch-cry of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology in the twentieth century, although it goes right back through the history of Western philosophy. Letting *the matters* decide how they are best to be thought about is a different emphasis because it is not directly abstractive or reflective, let alone merely semantic. It is investigative rather than analytical, gnoseological rather than abstract. Analytic judgement tacitly knows what faces it, investigative judgement has always yet to find out.
3. Wittgenstein said of that about which we cannot speak, that we should pass over it in silence. But for a CCOI this is the *very point at which philosophy begins*, rather than the point where it ends. A CCOI therefore values *analysis* for the purpose of *investigation* rather than for its own sake. And this is *not* an investigation of semantics, word use, or the “knots” in language or logic, but the way by which it keeps the *unknown* before it. That which is unknown always has an *appearance* of some kind, it is phenomenal, but it does not necessarily start from self-evidence or sense certainty.
4. The text will be more of an *object* for a CCOI than for a COI. It will be the way by which the matter of discussion is brought into view for us. The participant will face the text not as a series of propositions with more or less validity, but as a movement of something revealed to the imagination as well as to reason. The text brings something to visibility and it is this *something* which is up for discussion. A CCOI may need to keep referring back to the text. While the COI may leave it behind and ‘get on’ with philosophy, the CCOI will tend to want *more* text.
5. A CCOI tends toward revolution rather than conformity. A COI is fundamentally conformist, because it is based on techniques of reasoning which are preordained for it, and mastery is a mastery of these criteria or operations. Because of this a COI can attain a sort of expertise over time with the same participants.

Continental philosophy values revolution, by which is meant, thought that overturns what had previously been upheld or held sacrosanct. Its

watchwords are *reason* and *freedom*. Philosophers understand that reason *without* freedom becomes mere rationality. What is valued is by the CCOI is not expertise so much as *insight*. The participant does not just switch from one opinion to a new one while remaining unchanged. The participant engages in the CCOI as in a process of self-transformation. A CCOI aims to be controversial.

6. The *questions* that the facilitator will use for a CCOI will differ from a COI. Either the facilitator can use the **Conversation with a Text** handout provided below or the facilitator may use *procedural questions* such as those in **Help-Sheet 3: Procedural Questions for CCOI Facilitators**. *Substantive questions* in a CCOI will be the same as a COI. These, in any case, rely on the facilitator's philosophical knowledge.
7. The *conversation* that the facilitator will foster for a CCOI will differ from a COI. The German philosopher Jurgen Habermas says that true conversation requires at least four commitments of participants:
  - (i) to pursue the truth
  - (ii) to be honest in what they share
  - (iii) to avoid attempts to manipulate, dominate, or control the outcome
  - (iv) never to force agreement other than by genuine persuasionThese conditions may never be realised but they are the ideal.<sup>4</sup> Again, the **Conversation with a Text** Handout may be used as may **Help Sheet 4: Conversation in Community**.

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<sup>4</sup> J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1984, Vol.1., p.285ff. Cited by Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life*, Thomas More, Allen, Texas, 1998, p.198.

## THE GREATEST DANGER

The greatest danger is for a COI to turn into a forum for swapping ignorance. Too easily the exchange of tittle-tattle within the Community may pass for 'doing Philosophy'. How you tell the difference is itself a philosophical issue and the subject of Plato's *Sophist*.

How does the beginning facilitator avoid this danger? Firstly, by being aware of the existence of it. Secondly, by adhering as strictly as possible to procedures. This may at times mean being highly interventionist. Thirdly, the facilitator needs to have sufficient wherewithal and discernment to be able to answer the question that they can put to themselves: *is there thinking going on here?* If the answer is in the affirmative, then all is well.

## HOW TO CONDUCT COMMUNITIES OF INQUIRY

In many ways the Continental Community of Inquiry (CCOI) is conducted in the same way as the Anglo-American-style Community of Inquiry (COI).

The purpose of this section is to give new facilitators an idea of how to conduct a COI in the latter style, then we shall explain how to rework this to make a CCOI. Where I sound prescriptive, note that it is merely for the sake of brevity, my only prescription in fact is to do what suits you and your community. *The community is sovereign.* That's the only rule.

I find sixteen is an ideal number of participants although I am personally willing to have a go with any number.

Never forget, you are not a teacher, you are a facilitator. Facilitating requires more than teachers removing their eponymous 'teacher's hat'. These tend not to be 'hats' but deeply entrenched characteristics of personality. In a COI setting it is fatal if teachers continue to teach without realising they are doing it. It destroys the sovereignty of the Community. Facilitating requires becoming philosophical, at least to some degree. Experience of facilitation can induct one into philosophy, and if this induction is paralleled by one's reading the early dialogues of Plato and the logical, ethical and political treatises of Aristotle, then one may in some measure count oneself a philosopher. These writings are not specialist works but classics that used to be part of every general education, and (dare I say it) ought to be read anyway.

Participants, including the facilitator, sit in a circle to formalise the 'round table' nature of the Community. It may be more suitable for the facilitator may act as a 'scribe', placing key thought-moves of the Community up on the board where they can have objectivity and be referred back to if necessary. In any case, it is usually worthwhile to have a record of the discussion. It may help with any assessment.

At the outset the facilitator will need to brief the Community about how they are to work. I give out **Why Study Philosophy?** and **Help-Sheet 1 or Help-Sheet 4** and go through it with a new COI. This sets expectations and is useful to refer back to. Participants should be willing to work towards these criteria. These Help-sheets are also useful as a guide for facilitators, as they indicate the way in which the community needs to be shaped in order to achieve the best level of inquiry.

A Community of Inquiry is different from a debate, discussion or post-graduate seminar. It is different from a debate because debates are about 'for' and 'against', while a COI is about the deployment of complex thinking. It is different from a discussion because a COI strives for rigour and to extend itself beyond what it already knows and thinks. It is different from a post-graduate seminar because it is group-directed, not directed by the lecturer or leader or by extraneous expectations.

## GETTING STARTED

The first step is to have a 'starter', which is some stimulus material, perhaps a text, which can be read round the group, a game or a video-clip. There are lots of materials available and it is as well for a facilitator to familiarise him or herself with them.

From the starter participants need to develop questions and then select one as the basis of their inquiry. The starter may be provided by the facilitator, but the questions which arise out of it will be decided by the Community.

The facilitator needs to select a starter that suits the make-up of the Community, for instance it is age-appropriate. The materials in this book are starters for a CCOI. The texts are appropriate for Senior School students, tertiary students or for use in Adult Education. It is preferable (but not necessary) to use the texts in this book with Senior School students if they have some background in philosophy.

Normally, the way to conduct a Community of Inquiry with a short story or part of a story as a starter text might be as follows:

The facilitator starts with participants reading the text by turns. Student A first sentence or paragraph, Student B the following and so on, ensuring that everyone has read something.

When finished, and it is important that they have the text still in front of them, the facilitator asks if the story raised any questions for them. The circle divide into pairs or small groups and come up with the main question raised by the text for them.

*Getting a CCOI started from the texts in this book will be different.*

First of all, the texts are, to put it bluntly, anti-positivist and anti-empirical. Questions are therefore not just going to stick themselves out at readers as if they had been planted there beforehand. Continental philosophy is not logical and positivist, it is evocative, elusive and textual.

If the new facilitator feels as blank before these texts as the students, not to worry. Experience will carry you into their sense and sensibility. But here we are talking about Getting Started, what then to do? Take the second most difficult text in the book, Heidegger on **Provocative Thinking** or Sartre on **Negations**. Either, the facilitator may hand out a copy of the text prior to the session and have the participants read it in advance, or the facilitator may get the participants to follow the preparation format outlined in **Conversation with A Text Handout**. If the text is suitable you may just read it once or twice (I advice twice) in community and take it from there, without any preparation.

How then to proceed? If the group is new to this kind of work the easiest way to start may be to *use the title of the text* as your question, and the text as your guide

to discussion. So, for instance, What is the death of God? What is provocative thinking? What is thinking for oneself? What is the question of society? – and so on. "What is..." in the sense of "what does this *mean*?"

Alternatively, if the group is more accustomed to the practice of a CCOI and the facilitator wants to avoid a preset question, one of the following questions might get proceedings under-way:

1. What does this text tell us about *x* (e.g. about violence, education, culture)? Compile a list of what the text tells the group about *x*. From this derive questions. Or ask the opposite question and compile a second list:
2. What does the text *not* tell us about *x*?
3. What words are difficult here (e.g. "nihilations") ? Judging from the context (and citing the context), what do these words mean?
4. What is the central point the text is making? (Compile a list and derive questions therefrom.)
5. What phrases do we use in ordinary life which suggest this same difficulty? (e.g. in **Negations**, "he wasn't there", "I haven't seen him.")
6. To understand this text, what do we need to know? (List questions and comments.)
7. What puzzles us here? (List questions and comments.) Why are we puzzled?
8. What is this text questioning? (e.g. with the de Beauvoir texts). Is this a valid question? (Yes, No, Why?) What other questions does this raise?
9. What are the main points in this text and what are the minor points? Why?
10. Is there a message here? What is it telling us? How does it communicate this?

The procedure with all these questions is the same. Make a list and from it derive the questions to be answered. Facilitators need to make sure that students cite the text. A citation is a short reference that ties back the interpretation to the text, or places it there. Students should know the difference between citation and quotation (although they can be synonymous). What these questions lead us to talk about is the text itself. This is different from the normal COI situation in which questions are talked about in abstraction from the text. Moreover, they are questions of the reflective understanding. Here the facilitator needs to tie the thinking back into the text. As well as giving reasons for thinking this or that, participants ought to be able to *cite the text*.

*As a general rule, the text must be necessary and bound up with the question.* By contrast, in a normal COI it is allowable for a question to have little or nothing to do with the starter, so long as someone is asking it.

It may be that before the group gets on to formulating questions from the list that has been compiled, some dichotomy of opinion emerges from within the group. The facilitator should remain flexible. In this case it may be better to work on whether or not the dichotomy can be reconciled and if not, why not?

Once discussion is under way the facilitator may ask: What questions may lead us further along the path of what we've just been saying?

OR: Do other parts of this text support this view?

OR (based on the outcome of the above): What other questions begin to arise at this point? How do we group them?

The procedural questions for CCOI facilitators given in **Help-Sheet 3** will come into play once the conversation about the text has got under-way. If one is using the title as the initiating question, as advised above for inexperienced groups, the principle of citation is the same.

Another good procedural question to ask with regularity is: What are the practical consequences of x (for the individual and / or society)?

In this way discussion which is based in the text turns between it and real life situations.

The practice of **bracketing** is useful. Bracketing is when you take note of a comment or question that bears upon your current discussion, but you lay it aside until you have thought the current discussion through. This practice keeps you from being side-tracked while not ignoring the fact (pressed upon you by certain participants) that this side-track is actually the main highway.

Getting a question from the texts in this book to be discussed as a CCOI may be one or two sessions in itself. The CCOI does not start after you have read the text, but the reading becomes part of the inquiry. It is *the whole point* that some of the texts in this book are 'difficult' from a logical common sense perspective. There is no-one who 'understands' them in the literal sense of "Do I make myself understood?" Continental philosophers go so far as to assert that it is not the author that constitutes the text (or is the controlling factor with respect to a text's meaning), rather it is the other way around, the text constitutes the author, and the *text*, not the authorial intent is authoritative. In other words, we speak of Heidegger or Sartre meaning the *writing*, not the persons for whom their writing is a vehicle of communication. Heidegger and Sartre are not communicators telling us something in words, they are philosophers whose words are tentatively in search of wisdom, which search, we the reader may be party to if we listen carefully to *what* the words are responses to.



## KEEPING GOING

Normally in a COI, the facilitator writes the questions raised by the pairs or small groups on the board. She may then ask participants if they can group or rank the questions. At some stage the Community needs to settle on a question as the basis of inquiry. It may be the question that gets the most votes if the reasons for the questions are all of fairly equal measure. If the questions are grouped let the Community decide which of the questions is most important. This alone can get a COI going.

Practice at asking *philosophical* questions, as opposed to scientific, political, general or merely idle questions is part of what is gained from a COI. Participants learn to distinguish different kinds of questions, and the wheat from the chaff

*Keeping going in a CCOI requires something else as well.*

Based on **Getting Started**, in which the text was read closely and upon which discussion was grounded, questions or ideas for discussion, which may be reformulated as questions, will emerge.

Beginning facilitators may feel themselves a sense of disorientation given the gravity and philosophical nature of the texts in this book. This is to be expected, even the authors felt like this before the own texts. Even having written them, but this is how great writing is.

Facilitators can ask: "Which part of the text leads you to say that? Or: Do other parts of the text support this view?"

*These questions belong to the techniques of textual reasoning.*

*Or the facilitator may ask: "What are you presupposing here? Or: What does the text seem to presuppose here?"*

These latter two are tough questions and are basic to the CCOI and its facilitation. The facilitator needs to know these two questions by heart. The experienced CCOI facilitator is one who is able to assist a Community to tease out their presuppositions. This can be done simply by addressing questions to the group, although knowing what questions to put is not simple and requires philosophical learning.

If the CCOI seems a bit lost with regard to how to judge or reflect upon their ideas and trains of thought the Facilitator may introduce the following technique.

Here you chart the 'substance' and 'accidents' of whatever is up for discussion. That means, in two columns on the white-board the Community decide what is essential, necessary or 'substantial' to the matter under discussion and what is contingent, peripheral or 'accidental'. For instance, to be a human it is necessary to be breathing, but contingent as to what your hair is like or whether you are

wearing a jacket or not. Inquiry directs itself toward what is more essential and it is easy to lose sight of this.

This technique is good for ascertaining the presuppositions of certain positions that the group or members of it are taking.

Discussion whether in a COI or CCOI is oriented from the beginning by the *search for an answer* or for *the truth of the matter*. From the facilitator's point of view, it is not the answer or the truth that matters so much as *the way there*, the inquiry. This inquiry should involve all the processes listed in **Help-Sheet 1** and/or **Help-Sheet 4**. Facilitation is the art of enabling questioning and thinking how to ask the *right* question.

Philosophy is not simply about 'answers' in the narrow propositional sense that saying x answers asking y, and Continental philosophy is certainly never about this. However, for pedagogical purposes it is beneficial if inquiry is end-directed, answer-directed (teleological). Purposeful inquiry develops thinking skills and makes demands on participants to clarify their reasoning and to see arguments for and against the position of meaning they are trying to define or express; furthermore, it is community building.

Returning now to the general protocols to conduct of a COI:

In *Thinking in Education*,<sup>5</sup> Matthew Lipman cites Arnold B. Arons' ten "thinking and reasoning processes that underlie analysis and inquiry." These are reproduced for reference below as **Help-Sheet 2**.

More simply, facilitators need to ensure that,<sup>6</sup>

1. Participants question one another
2. Participants request of each other reason's for beliefs
3. Participants build on one another's ideas
4. Participants deliberate among themselves
5. Participants offer counter-examples to the hypotheses of others
6. Participants point out the possible consequences of one another's ideas
7. Participants utilise specific criteria when making judgments
8. Participants cooperate in the development of rational problem-solving techniques

Facilitation requires that the Community is involved in inquiry according to the ways listed above.

Lipman matches this first list with the following,<sup>7</sup>

1. Individuals question themselves
2. Individuals reflect on their reasons for thinking as they do
3. Individuals build on their own ideas

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<sup>5</sup> M. Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, University of Cambridge Press, 1991, p.140-1.

<sup>6</sup> Another fine list from Lipman, *ibid.* p.52.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

4. Individuals deliberate in their own thinking
5. Individuals anticipate counter-examples to their own hypotheses
6. Individuals anticipate possible consequences of their own ideas
7. Individuals use specific criteria when making judgments
8. Individuals follow rational procedures in dealing with their own problems

If the facilitator can ensure that the characteristics of the first list above are in evidence in the Community, *then it is a COI*. Moreover, the facilitator, or the educational establishment for which they work, can rest assured that *the COI is a learning place*, because the behaviour of the first list is evidence that the things on the second list are going on at the same time. Improved *well-being* is a consequence of the second list. Educationally, abilities useful across any curriculum (and well beyond) are being achieved.

To ensure or enhance the behaviour of the Community according to the first list the facilitator will need to participate by interrupting the flow of discussion. As a rule this should take the form of asking questions. These questions may be either *procedural* or *substantial*.

*Procedural questions* deal with the way thinking is proceeding. The facilitator might ask any question which encourages participation in line with the first list.

*Substantive questions* are more difficult. They aim to elicit a response from one of the participants that will substantially alter the inquiry. Or to provoke a substantial contribution to the inquiry that either introduces new information, or sheds new light on the whole inquiry, or shifts the very grounds of inquiry. Facilitators need to be philosophers themselves to some degree in order to ask effective substantive questions, the great exemplar of course is Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. These dialogues ought to be compulsory reading for all new facilitators of philosophical Communities of Inquiry.

Most participants are not participating, that is, talking most of the time in a COI. They are thinking, or more precisely, *listening*.

Facilitators need to ensure good listening within the inquiry. This is one of their chief tasks. It is most difficult with school aged groups. It may be that you have a soft object that can be thrown between group members and set a rule that the person holding the said object is the speaker, and everyone else is a listener. This strategy works very well. Whoever is speaking then throws the ball to one or another of the group indicating that they are now the speaker, and so on.

It is important for the COI to come to understand that what someone else is saying is as important as what "I think". This may be part of the learning experience for some participants. What someone else says might modify, replace or extend what I think. Only where good listening is going on is the inquiry a *community* of inquiry.

It is the responsibility of each participant to monitor the adequacy of the discussion.

Different practices of thinking operate in a Community of Inquiry all the time. Participants will not have a name for many, or any, of these practices to begin with. The facilitator may draw attention to ways, styles and instances of thinking from time to time. This will provide participants with insight into the processes they are engaging in and serve to make them more deliberative and intentional.

A CCOI using texts from this book will carry out all of the foregoing. And yet there is this difference:

While the COI is basically a logical inquiry a CCOI is an investigation of meaning. A CCOI is governed less by what is logical (in the Anglo-American sense) than by what is meaningful. Of course there needs to be some reason why something is meaningful, but in a CCOI the reason may be discursive rather than deductive or inductive. Discursive reason is descriptive, rhetorical and expressive or evocative. By comparison deduction or induction tend to reduction of the matter in view.

In addition to the questions and strategies described in this section the procedural questions on **Help-Sheet 3** will assist new Facilitators to direct a CCOI in the search for meaning. Likewise, the aids to conversation on **Help-Sheet 4** will help facilitate the way of inquiry.

## ROUNDING OFF

Finally, rounding off a session. Normally a COI will finish with a quick show of hands or thumbs-up for a worthwhile, average or poor discussion.

Another way of rounding off is to ask who really changed his or her mind and why or how.

There are formal ways of assessment, of course, but an immediate sense of how the group got on from their point of view is useful for the facilitator and gives a sense of closure to the session. Participants like a sense that the discussion got somewhere because it means that they gained something, even if it is hard to put into words what.

It may be worthwhile to give photocopies of the written form of the discussion if it has been scribed.

For a CCOI the facilitator who wants to sharpen what has been said, or move the discussion toward a temporary stasis or denouement may ask: *What is the text not telling us?*

This might be the question that participants take away with them and bring back to the next session. Or the CCOI facilitator may ask: "What more need to know on such-and-such a point?"

A CCOI may lead to *further textual research* by the participants. It is always a benefit to the Community if this is the case. The oral component of the inquiry needs to return to the textual (sometimes with students writing something, for instance) and the textual needs to return to the oral. If not a balance, there should at least be a dynamic between these two: written and spoken.

Thus a CCOI may end, not with a feeling about the discussion, but with reading to be done.

This follow-up is important for a CCOI. Invariably students will take from the discussion a sense of *what they don't know*. Knowing what you don't know Socrates called *wisdom*, as opposed to *sophistry*, which is confident in its knowledge or its skills. It is a good procedure for the facilitator to get students, perhaps in pairs, to research something that they didn't know, which relates to the inquiry. For instance, one pair of students might look further into the historical background of an idea; another pair might look up what a particular term means in a particular philosopher. Deciding these things will be a good way of rounding off a CCOI.

It is helpful for the Community if different students look up different things, and it is helpful for them if the research is task-specific, that is, that they have to find out about one item in particular. The group will be able to pool their resources. It not inappropriate for more than one pair of students to find what they can about the same item. When the Community regroupes in the next session

participants will be able to shed new light on their thinking from the previous session. Furthermore, the follow up task teaches and hones a student's research skills. Students learn how to read philosophical texts creatively, that is, with a sense of the exercise of research, which is intrinsic to any proper reading. They learn *how to* research, they experience a *different kind* of research, into the conceptual. Conceptual research underpins every information and fact-based research. Philosophical research is guided by particular questions about a matter that is not simply 'solved' by some bit of information, but which need to be thought about. There may be a variety of answers to a question, which the student then has to make judgements about. Or the student can bring the different ideas back to the Community where criteria for decision about the matter can be decided. Students discover that in any philosophical text there are particular *determinations* that have to be thought about, which is the real matter of the text.

## FORMAL ASSESSMENT

A Community of Inquiry is difficult to assess because its work is oral. There is also much work going on in the minds of each listener that is silent. How are we to assess this?

What follows is a list of what the facilitator might assess. The list is courtesy of Ann Margaret Sharp<sup>8</sup>

:

- Accepts corrections by peers willingly.
- Able to listen to others attentively.
- Able to revise one's views in the light of reasons from others.
- Able to take one another's ideas seriously.
- Able to build upon other's ideas.
- Able to develop their own ideas without fear of rebuff or humiliation from peers.
- Open to new ideas.
- Shows concern for the right of others to express their views.
- Asks relevant questions.
- Shows respect for persons in the community.
- Shows sensitivity to context when discussing moral conduct.
- Verbalises relationship between means and ends.

To this last behaviour may be added any that reflects the kind of thinking work being done in a particular Community of Inquiry:

- Able to distinguish the substantial idea from those incidental to it.
- Able to use technical vocabulary where appropriate.
- Able to explain complexes of ideas.
- Able to problematise.
- Able to synthesise.
- Able to analyse
- Able to simplify.
- Able to exemplify.

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<sup>8</sup> Splitter, L.J., Sharp A. M., *Teaching for Better Thinking: The Classroom Community of Inquiry*, ACER, Melbourne, 1995, pp.147-154.

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Aim

Philosophy sessions aim to train students in thinking skills.

### Rationale

- Thinking skills are not only useful across the curriculum, but they give students an integral sense of the curriculum; for they help students to see the conceptual underpinnings of subject areas and how they are related.
- Thinking skills are the basis of other academic skills and of 'professionalism'.
- Thinking skills will assist a student in further education.
- Thinking skills are coveted in the work-place environment and required in day-to-day life.

### Objectives

- To build a student Community of Inquiry in which participants experience thinking and the processes of thought.
- That students perceive the Community of Inquiry is directed.
- That students feel the freedom of thought necessary to do philosophy as well as for the Community of Inquiry to function effectively.

### Strategy

The 'Community of Inquiry' is the means. A Community of Inquiry does not happen automatically, it is built by practice and experience.

A Community of Inquiry is different from a class discussion.

Communities of Inquiry are:

*Student directed* – based on the student's ideas, not the teachers'. The students are developing their own definitions and coming up with their own reasons and ideas.

*Rigorous* – each idea must be backed up by reasons and will be considered, challenged and evaluated by others. It is not a situation where anything goes. The students are rigorously focussing on the exploration of the concept.

*Moving Forward* – A Community of Inquiry makes progress or moves forward through various levels of clarification: word clarification, values clarification and conceptual clarification. The target is to answer either a philosophical question or a non-philosophical question philosophically.

*Thinking together* – A Community of Inquiry is different from debating. The group works together to build upon one another's understanding, or to consider alternatives means of understanding something.

*Safe and open environment* – there is a climate of mutual respect and listening.

- The Role of the Student

The student is not an absorber of information, but an active participant. The point is not to win but to think. The way is to assist each other in this. Each person participates in this process by thinking about what was said and working out whether it was correct or not.

- The Role of the Teacher



The teacher listens but stays out of the discussion. The teacher facilitates. S/he does this by asking different kinds of questions to assist the progression of the discussion. Facilitation in this environment means helping the students feel they are getting somewhere. (cf. enc.)

**Within the Community of Inquiry strategies include:**

- Philosophy Games
- Written stimulus material
- Preliminary work in pairs

**Outcomes**

Students will improve at being able to:

- ask appropriate questions
- make necessary distinctions
- discover useful connections
- draw relevant inferences
- seek better alternatives
- give good reasons
- use reasonable criteria
- make careful judgements

Students learn how to:

- converse, debate and hypothesise
- present a point of view
- argue a case
- clarify general thoughts
- question effectively
- challenge ideas
- develop critical listening skills

## THINKING IN EDUCATION

Mat Lipman is an extraordinary writer of lists. With his kind help and permission I want to provide a few of his lists here so that facilitators of CCOI's have something against which to check themselves or their work. For further information and discussion of any of the points you can refer to *Thinking in Education*, the publication details of which are given below.

*Thinking in Education* is an authoritative account of how to balance *content* areas of a subject that is being taught with the *method* of thinking that the subject demands. The method of thinking does not change from subject to subject, so much as expand here or deepen there. Lipman gives the following characterizations of the key processes.<sup>9</sup>

1. *Inquiry* is a self-corrective practice in which a subject matter is investigated with the aim of discovering or inventing ways of dealing with what is problematic. The products of inquiry are judgements.
2. *Reasoning* is the process of ordering and coordinating what has been found out through the inquiry. It involves finding valid ways of extending and organizing what has been discovered or invented while retaining its validity.
3. *Concept formation* involves organizing information into relational clusters and then analyzing and clarifying them so as to expedite their employment in understanding and judging. Conceptual thinking involves the relating of concepts to one another so as to form principles, criteria, arguments, explanations, and so on.
4. *Translation* involves carrying meanings across contexts or settings. It is a form of reasoning. While reasoning preserves validity, translation preserves the meaning or sense.

*Note:* the use of *judgement* is something that people need in everyday life, at work and at home. If everyone were able to make better judgements, which means on the basis of reasonable criteria, the world would be a happier place. *The COI is a place where judgment is formed.* Lipman provides an excellent chapter in which he describes all the different kinds of judgement.<sup>10</sup>

Lipman lists the benefits of thinking for education, in terms of judgement, as follows:<sup>11</sup>

1. *Prejudice reduction.* Students need to be given practice in avoiding the making of premature judgments, in identifying circumstances in which the temporary suspension of judgement is called for, and in taking a non-judgmental stance when this is appropriate.
2. *Classification.* Students need continual practice in grouping, classifying and categorizing – anything that will give them practical experience in making judgements of inclusion and exclusion.

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, University of Cambridge Press, 1991, p.45. [slightly edited]

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* Ch.8 'Criteria as hinges of practice', p.143ff.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* pp.63-64 [slightly edited version]

3. *Evaluation*. Students need to be introduced first to evaluative practices in various trades and crafts to familiarize themselves with the grounds of ranking as a practical activity.
4. *Criterion identification*. Practice must be provided in working with reasons so students understand the role they play in justifying whatever is made, said, or done. Criteria can then be identified as governing or decisive considerations in any attempt to justify a classification or evaluation.
5. *Sensitization to context*. Students should be given opportunity to distinguish among contexts and differentiate the slight from the significant.
6. *Analogical reasoning*. This is the opposite of 5. It involves the practice of identifying features that are the same in contexts that are conspicuously different. This form is used a lot in theological contexts where one tries to talk about divinity, or where one tries to shed light on the particular by talking about it from the point of view of the whole.
7. *Self-correction*. Individuals and groups seeking to strengthen their judgement making should practice questioning others and themselves, offering counter-examples and counter-arguments and looking for disconfirming evidence or testimonies. They should recognize the potential value of dissent in the community as a possible basis for correction or balance.
8. *Sensitization to consequences*. Students need practice in anticipating the possible consequences of what they do. They should be assisted in learning to what extent the meaning of what they do will be made up of the consequences of those actions.
9. *Adjusting means and ends*. Practice is needed not only in adjusting means to ends but in seeing each as flexible, as means-in-view and ends-in-view, rather than as fixed.
10. *Adjusting parts to wholes*. If adjusting means to ends emphasizes the value of consistency, adjusting parts to wholes emphasizes the value of coherence. Practice in each comes from dealing with such questions as “What sort of world do I want to live in?” and “What sort of person do I want to be?”

The outcome is *thinking*. Lipman calls this “creative” or “higher-order” thinking, following Hegel in the epigram to this book, I would just call it “thinking”, suggesting that anything less only *seems* like thinking, but *is not*.

“Thinking is making connections, and creative thinking is making new and different connections.”<sup>12</sup> I would add that thinking is also *revelatory*. Not only does thought *shed* light and *bear* the light, it *is* that light.

“Education should aim to produce reasonable, judicious and creative individuals.”<sup>13</sup>

When teaching is too content-based, the education system is basically attempting to stamp this content onto the minds of students, and the education system needs to be an unpleasant regime to do this. Where education is more method-based, more to do with inquiry, it is doing what its verb form suggests, *educing*,

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p.92.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

that is, *bringing forth*. Not bringing forth this or that bit of information at exam time, but bringing forth *the person*. Education in Western culture is about making persons all that they are, good creatures in “the image and likeness” of God.

## “CONVERSATION WITH A TEXT”

Seminar participation is an integral component of the course. Seminars focus on the reading given before each class, around which class members participate in a disciplined conversation engaging the subject-matter of these readings.

Heidegger said:

It is one thing to determine and describe the ideas of philosophers. It is an entirely different thing to talk through with them what they are saying, and that of which they think.

The last two points, "to talk through with them what they are saying" and addressing one's own thinking to "that of which they think" is what we are aiming to do, in dialogue and partnership with one another, in class.

It is commonly recognised that "discussion groups" can be a waste of time if they are not structured and the participants not prepared. In order to facilitate a fruitful conversation with the texts, class members will be asked to bring a brief written response (approx. one page or 300 words) to the following questions.

**1. What question is this text grappling with?** What question provoked this text into being? What question is it seeking to answer?

**2. What response does the text offer?** What is it saying? What is it arguing for or against? What proposal is it making?

**3. Do you find the text's response compelling, puzzling, unconvincing?** In the light of the question under consideration (= subject-matter), does the text's response resonate with your experience and understanding, or is it at odds with your view of things? Why? Where does it seem "right"? Where does it seem "wrong"? Where is it unclear? What issues remain?

**4. Has conversation with this text led you to a different understanding?** Has the text confirmed your understanding? Has it challenged your understanding? Has it opened-up new possibilities for addressing the question at issue?

Matthew Del Nevo and Terry Veling

## Help-Sheet 1

### THE LOGIC OF CONVERSATION IN A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

#### *Quantity*

1. Don't tell me less than I need to know. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of exchange).
2. Don't tell me too much. Don't make your contribution more informative than is required.

#### *Quality*

3. Contribute only the truth, not what you believe to be false.
4. Don't say that for which you lack adequate evidence. I expect your contributions to be genuine and not spurious.

#### *Relation*

5. Be relevant. There are different kinds and focuses of relevance, and these shift in the course of a discussion. What is contributed must be relevant to these shifting contextual changes.
6. Don't let earnestness take hold of every exchange, otherwise the conversation becomes monotonous (single-toned).

#### *Manner*

7. Be clear (avoid obscurity of expression and make sure everyone can hear you).
8. Avoid ambiguity.
9. Be brief (don't ramble on).
10. Be orderly.

[Source: M, Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.233, slightly amended.]

## Help-Sheet 2

### THINKING AND REASONING PROCESSES IN A COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY

1. Consciously raising the questions What do we know....? How do we know...? Why do we accept or believe...?, What is evidence for...? when studying some body of material or approaching a problem.
2. Being clearly and explicitly aware of gaps in available information and being able to tolerate the resulting ambiguity and uncertainty.
3. Discriminating between observation and inference, between established fact and subsequent conjecture.
4. Recognizing the necessity of using only words of prior definition, rooted in shared experience, in forming a new definition and of avoiding technical jargon.
5. Probing for the implicit, unarticulated assumptions behind a line of reasoning.
6. Drawing inferences from evidence and recognizing when firm inferences cannot be drawn.
7. Performing hypotheticals so that abstract relations are imaginable and parts of systems can be seen in their relation to other parts.
8. Discriminating between inductive and deductive reasoning.
9. Testing our own reasoning for internal consistency, thereby developing intellectual self-reliance.
10. Being conscious of our reasoning, recognizing the processes we are using, selecting those that are appropriate, and reasoning between familiar and unfamiliar contexts.

[Source: M. Lipman, *Thinking in Education*, University of Cambridge Press, 1991, p.140-1.]

## Help-Sheet 3

### PROCEDURAL QUESTIONS FOR CCOI FACILITATORS

Heidegger says,

The [philosophical] work stays mute if we do not contribute anything to it. We have to bring to the work nothing less than a living question and its demands for an appropriate treatment. It is only thus that the content of the work gets moving; and the inner movement of the work, its transitions, are what is decisive – not so much the material, which is graspable in detail.

[Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Tr. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, Indiana University Press, 1994, p.79.]

[The questions below are for teachers and need to be adapted to the student group.]

1. What do you hear the text saying? What issues or exigencies is it raising? In what way are these exigencies important for philosophy?
2. How do you respond to the text's insights, wisdom, proposals? How do you critically appropriate these in the light of your own socio-cultural and philosophical context?
3. What implications do you discern for your own / society's philosophical practice or understanding?
4. How can you consider this more precisely?
5. How can you consider this more critically?
6. What are the history / historical circumstances of this?
7. What are the historical ramifications or consequences of this? What are the (likely) effects of these ramifications or consequences now or in the future?
8. What role does experience play here? What does this mean for our own experience?
9. What is the nature of this? What is its inner movement?
10. What is this working toward? What should we work with this toward?



## Help-Sheet 4

### CONVERSATION IN COMMUNITY

This Helpsheet is designed by Thomas Groome. He shares it with participants in his Communities of Inquiry in order to invite them into a mode of conversation. They are a list of practices for the art of conversation in community.

- Be “out there” making things happen rather than sitting back and letting others carry the ball.
- Welcome the opportunity to share your thoughts and, as comfortable, your feelings.
- Recognize everyone as a resource and welcome the contributions of all.
- Be willing to truly listen to people – more than just hearing them but listening “between the lines” and with empathy – even if their perspective is very different from your own.
- Try not to dominate or to talk too much.
- Help to draw out other people, enabling them to express what they know or want to share.
- Practice speaking clearly, concisely, and without repetition.
- Appreciate all contributions and let people know that they are being heard.
- When you disagree, as you must when that is your sentiment, do it respectfully.
- Don’t try to control how the conversation turns out.
- Be faithful to your own point of view, but open to change your mind as well.

[Source: Thomas Groome, *Educating for Life*, Thomas More, Allen, Texas, 1998, p.199.]

## THE TEXTS



## METHOD AND PHILOSOPHY

René Descartes (1596-1650) has often been called the father of modern philosophy. Educated by the Jesuits, Descartes became a mathematician and lived an itinerant and mostly solitary existence in various countries of Europe, preferring Holland, where free thinkers were better protected from the inquisitorial arms of the Church. Even here Descartes' ideas ran into trouble with theologians. Looking for a change of scenery Descartes took up an offer to tutor the Queen of Sweden. Here was a man who for over 40 years had never got out of bed before 11 O'clock, neither at boarding school nor in the army. Queen Christina expected tuition to commence at 5am. The shock of rising at the Hour of the Wolf, trying to get ready (here was a man accustomed to long lunchtime breakfasts) then having to go by sleigh, which is extremely bumpy indeed, over iron-hard black ice in a piercing Arctic blast five hours before dawn, hardly suited the intellectual Frenchman. He caught cold, which turned to pneumonia, and he died.

His influence has pervaded modern thought in the West and been decisive for Western culture. Hegel said that with Descartes "we enter into autonomous philosophy proper...Here we can state we are at home and can as a navigator after a long journey in a stormy sea cry out 'Land', ..." (WW.XV, 328). "Autonomous philosophy" refers to thought which is not bound by the certainties (*sic*) of Faith, but that establishes a subject-object relation to begin with. Philosophy from Descartes onward is established in the certainty of subjectivity. Sartre said that subjectivism means, "on the one hand, that an individual chooses and makes himself; and, on the other, that it is impossible for man to transcend human subjectivity." "We have no other truth to start from than this," writes Sartre, "*I think; therefore I exist*. There we have the absolute truth of consciousness becoming aware of itself. Every theory which takes man out of the moment in which he becomes aware of himself is, at its very beginning, a theory which confounds truth." (*Humanism is an Existentialism*).

Descartes has this to say.

Since I desired to devote myself wholly to the search for the truth, I thought it necessary...to reject as if utterly false anything in which I could discover the least grounds for doubt, so that I could find out if I was left with anything at all which was absolutely indubitable. Thus, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to suppose that nothing was really as they led us to believe it was. And, because some of us make mistakes in reasoning, committing logical errors in even the most simplest matters of geometry, I rejected as erroneous all reasonings that I had previously taken as proofs. And finally, when I considered that the very same things we perceive when we are awake, may also occur to us while we are asleep and not perceiving anything at all, I resolved to pretend that anything which had ever entered my mind was no more than a dream. But immediately I noticed that while I was thinking in this way, and regarding everyday as false, it was nonetheless absolutely

necessary that I, who was doing this thinking, was still something. And observing that this truth “I think, therefore I am” was so sure and certain that no ground for doubt, be it ever so extravagantly sceptical, was capable of shaking it, I therefore decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking to create.

\* \* \* \* \*

## TEXTS

### I

It is some time since I first realized how many false opinions I accepted as true from my childhood, and how doubtful was the entire structure of thought which I had built upon them. I therefore understood that I must, if I wanted to establish anything at all in science that was firm and liable to last, once and for all rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and start from an entirely new foundation. (*Meditations*, 1: opening lines)

### II

A multitude of laws often hampers justice, so that a state is best governed when it has only a few laws which are strictly administered; similarly, instead of the large number of laws which make up logic, I was of the opinion that the four following laws were perfectly sufficient for me, provided I took a firm and unwavering resolution to stick to them clearly at all times.

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not clearly know it to be so; that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgement than was presented clearly and distinctly to my mind so that I had no reason to doubt it.

The second, to divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for a proper solution.

The third, to conduct my thoughts in an orderly fashion, by starting with the simplest and most easily known objects, so that I could ascend, little by little, and step by step, to more complex knowledge; and by giving some order even to those objects which appeared to have none.

And the last, always to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so comprehensive, that I could be sure of leaving nothing out. (*Discourse on Method*, Part II)

### III

The long chain of simple and easy reasonings, which geometers use to reach the most difficult conclusions, had given me reason to suppose that all things which can be known by humanity are connected in some way. And that there is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, as long as we abstain from accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another. Also, I had little difficulty in determining the objects with which it was necessary to commence, for I was already convinced that these must be the simplest and easiest known. (*Discourse on Method*, Part II)

### IV

There is a vast difference between the mind and the body, in that the body by its very nature is always divisible, whilst the mind is completely indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or rather when I consider myself simply as a thinking thing, I find I can distinguish no parts within myself, and I clearly discern that I am a thing utterly one and complete. Although my whole mind seems to be united to my whole body, when a foot, or an arm, or any other part is severed, I am not conscious of anything having been removed from my mind. Nor can the faculties of willing, perceiving, conceptualising and so forth, in any way be called parts of the mind, as it is always the same mind which is doing the willing, perceiving, conceptualising and so forth. Meanwhile, utterly the opposite holds for all corporeal or extended things. For I cannot imagine any one of them which I cannot in my thoughts easily split into parts, and thus I understand that it is divisible. (*Meditations*, 6)

## V

Good sense is most evenly distributed amongst all humanity; for all consider themselves to be so well endowed with it that even those who complain of their lot in all other ways seldom express the desire for more good sense. And here it is unlikely that everyone is mistaken. It shows rather that the power of correct judgement and the ability to distinguish truth from error – what we properly call good sense or reason – is by nature equally given to all humanity. As a result, the diversity of our opinions does not arise from any of us being endowed with a greater quantity of reason, but solely because we direct our thoughts in different directions and do not pay attention to the same things. For it is not enough just to have a fine mind; the main thing is to learn how to apply it properly. The finest minds are capable of both the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues; and those who travel slowly often make better progress, as long as they follow the right path, than those who rush ahead and stray from it. (*Discourse on Method*, Part 1, opening lines)

[Source: Paul Strathern, *Descartes in 90 Minutes*, Constable, London, 1996. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.]

## MAN'S DISPROPORTION

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a mathematician and a visionary. Born in the Auvergne, his family moved to Paris when he was eight. Pascal was roughly contemporary with Descartes. Both men wrote as individuals first, not as functionaries. Both men had run-ins with the Jesuits, a religious Order at the forefront of the Roman Catholic stranglehold on the freedom of thought. Pascal sided with the 'Jansenists' who were centred at the abbey of Port-Royal in the Faubourg St-Jacques in Paris and their sister house "in the fields" just outside Paris. The Jansenists sought a purer and more engaged Christian living, close to the standards of the Gospel, rather than the theological authoritarianism of Rome rooted in the Middle Ages. Port-Royal was fiercely persecuted by the Roman authorities who eventually physically destroyed it and imprisoned the better known figures involved, isolating and exiling the rest. The famous *Pensées* (Thoughts) of Pascal, from which our text is taken, is the fragmentary plan of a great work never completed. It is comprised of 804 aphorisms, not all of them complete and of different lengths. The thoughts tend to oscillate between two sides of an existential dichotomy: Man with God and Man without God.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

72. Man's disproportion.--This is where our innate knowledge leads us. If it be not true, there is no truth in man; and if it be true, he finds therein great cause for humiliation, being compelled to abase himself in one way or another. And since he cannot exist without this knowledge, I wish that, before entering on deeper researches into nature, he would consider her both seriously and at leisure, that he would reflect upon himself also, and knowing what proportion there is... Let man then contemplate the whole of nature in her full and grand majesty, and turn his vision from the low objects which surround him. Let him gaze on that brilliant light, set like an eternal lamp to illumine the universe; let the earth appear to him a point in comparison with the vast circle described by the sun; and let him wonder at the fact that this vast circle is itself but a very fine point in comparison with that described by the stars in their revolution round the firmament. But if our view be arrested there, let our imagination pass beyond; it will sooner exhaust the power of conception than nature that of supplying material for conception. The whole visible world is only an imperceptible atom in the ample bosom of nature. No idea approaches it. We may enlarge our conceptions beyond an imaginable space; we only produce atoms in comparison with the reality of things. It is an infinite sphere, the centre of which is everywhere, the circumference nowhere. In short, it is the greatest sensible mark of the almighty power of God that imagination loses itself in that thought.

Returning to himself, let man consider what he is in comparison with all existence; let him regard himself as lost in this remote corner of nature; and from the little cell in which he finds himself lodged, I mean the universe, let him estimate at their true value the earth, kingdoms, cities, and himself. What is a man in the Infinite?

But to show him another prodigy equally astonishing, let him examine the most delicate things he knows. Let a mite be given him, with its minute body and parts incomparably more minute, limbs with their joints, veins in the limbs, blood in the veins, humours in the blood, drops in the humours, vapours in the drops. Dividing these last things again, let him exhaust his powers of conception, and let the last object at which he can arrive be now that of our discourse. Perhaps he will think that here is the smallest point in nature. I will let him see therein a new abyss. I will paint for him not only the visible universe, but all that he can conceive of nature's immensity in the womb of this abridged atom. Let him see therein an infinity of universes, each of which has its firmament, its planets, its earth, in the same proportion as in the visible world; in each earth animals, and in the last mites, in which he will find again all that the first had, finding still in these others the same thing without end and without cessation. Let him lose himself in wonders as amazing in their littleness as the others in their vastness. For who will not be astounded at the fact that our body, which a little while ago was imperceptible in the universe, itself imperceptible in the bosom of the whole, is now a colossus, a world, or rather a whole, in respect of the nothingness which we cannot reach? He who regards himself in this light will be afraid of himself, and observing himself sustained in the body given him by nature between those two abysses of the Infinite and Nothing, will tremble at the sight of these marvels; and I think that, as his curiosity changes into admiration, he will be more disposed to contemplate them in silence than to examine them with presumption.

For, in fact, what is man in nature? A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything. Since he is infinitely removed from comprehending the extremes, the end of things and their beginning are hopelessly hidden from him in an impenetrable secret; he is equally incapable of seeing the Nothing from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up.

What will he do then, but perceive the appearance of the middle of things, in an eternal despair of knowing either their beginning or their end. All things proceed from the Nothing, and are borne towards the Infinite. Who will follow these marvellous processes? The Author of these wonders understands them. None other can do so.

Through failure to contemplate these Infinities, men have rashly rushed into the examination of nature, as though they bore some proportion to her. It is strange that they have wished to understand the beginnings of things, and thence to arrive at the knowledge of the whole, with a presumption as infinite as their object. For surely this design cannot be formed without presumption or without a capacity infinite like nature.

If we are well informed, we understand that, as nature has graven her image and that of her Author on all things, they almost all partake of her double infinity. Thus we see that all the sciences are infinite in the extent of their researches. For who doubts that geometry, for instance, has an infinite infinity of problems to



solve? They are also infinite in the multitude and fineness of their premises; for it is clear that those which are put forward as ultimate are not self-supporting, but are based on others which, again having others for their support, do not permit of finality. But we represent some as ultimate for reason, in the same way as in regard to material objects we call that an indivisible point beyond which our senses can no longer perceive anything, although by its nature it is infinitely divisible.

Of these two Infinities of science, that of greatness is the most palpable, and hence a few persons have pretended to know all things. "I will speak of the whole," said Democritus.

But the infinitely little is the least obvious. Philosophers have much oftener claimed to have reached it, and it is here they have all stumbled. This has given rise to such common titles as First Principles, Principles of Philosophy, and the like, as ostentatious in fact, though not in appearance, as that one which blinds us, *De omni scibili*.<sup>5</sup>

We naturally believe ourselves far more capable of reaching the centre of things than of embracing their circumference. The visible extent of the world visibly exceeds us; but as we exceed little things, we think ourselves more capable of knowing them. And yet we need no less capacity for attaining the Nothing than the All. Infinite capacity is required for both, and it seems to me that whoever shall

have understood the ultimate principles of being might also attain to the knowledge of the Infinite. The one depends on the other, and one leads to the other. These extremes meet and reunite by force of distance and find each other in God, and in God alone.

Let us, then, take our compass; we are something, and we are not everything. The nature of our existence hides from us the knowledge of first beginnings which are born of the Nothing; and the littleness of our being conceals from us the sight of the Infinite.

Our intellect holds the same position in the world of thought as our body occupies in the expanse of nature.

Limited as we are in every way, this state which holds the mean between two extremes is present in all our impotence. Our senses perceive no extreme. Too much sound deafens us; too much light dazzles us; too great distance or proximity hinders our view. Too great length and too great brevity of discourse tend to obscurity; too much truth is paralysing (I know some who cannot understand that to take four from nothing leaves nothing). First principles are too self-evident for us; too much pleasure disagrees with us. Too many concords are annoying in music; too many benefits irritate us; we wish to have the wherewithal to overpay our debts. *Beneficia eo usque laeta sunt dum videntur exsolvi posse; ubi multum antevenere, pro gratia odium redditur.* [Tacitus, *Annals*, iv. "Kindnesses are agreeable so long as one thinks them possible to render further, recognition makes way for hatred."] We feel neither extreme heat

nor extreme cold. Excessive qualities are prejudicial to us and not perceptible by the senses; we do not feel but suffer them. Extreme youth and extreme age hinder the mind, as also too much and too little education. In short, extremes are for us as though they were not, and we are not within their notice. They escape us, or we them.

This is our true state; this is what makes us incapable of certain knowledge and of absolute ignorance. We sail within a vast sphere, ever drifting in uncertainty, driven from end to end. When we think to attach ourselves to any point and to fasten to it, it wavers and leaves us; and if we follow it, it eludes our grasp, slips past us, and vanishes for ever. Nothing stays for us. This is our natural condition and yet most contrary to our inclination; we burn with desire to find solid ground and an ultimate sure foundation whereon to build a tower reaching to the Infinite. But our whole groundwork cracks, and the earth opens to abysses.

Let us, therefore, not look for certainty and stability. Our reason is always deceived by fickle shadows; nothing can fix the finite between the two Infinities, which both enclose and fly from it.

If this be well understood, I think that we shall remain at rest, each in the state wherein nature has placed him. As this sphere which has fallen to us as our lot is always distant from either extreme, what matters it that man should have a little more knowledge of the universe? If he has it, he but gets a little higher. Is he not always infinitely removed from the end, and is not the duration of our life equally removed from eternity, even if it lasts ten years longer?

In comparison with these Infinities, all finites are equal, and I see no reason for fixing our imagination on one more than on another. The only comparison which we make of ourselves to the finite is painful to us.

If man made himself the first object of study, he would see how incapable he is of going further. How can a part know the whole? But he may perhaps aspire to know at least the parts to which he bears some proportion. But the parts of the world are all so related and linked to one another that I believe it impossible to know one without the other and without the whole.

Man, for instance, is related to all he knows. He needs a place wherein to abide, time through which to live, motion in order to live, elements to compose him, warmth and food to nourish him, air to breathe. He sees light; he feels bodies; in short, he is in a dependent alliance with everything. To know man, then, it is necessary to know how it happens that he needs air to live, and, to know the air, we must know how it is thus related to the life of man, etc. Flame cannot exist without air; therefore, to understand the one, we must understand the other.

Since everything, then, is cause and effect, dependent and supporting, mediate and immediate, and all is held together by a natural though imperceptible chain which binds together things most distant and most different, I hold it equally impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole and to know the whole without knowing the parts in detail.

The eternity of things in itself or in God must also astonish our brief duration. The fixed and constant immobility of nature, in comparison with the continual change which goes on within us, must have the same effect.

And what completes our incapability of knowing things is the fact that they are simple and that we are composed of two opposite natures, different in kind, soul and body. For it is impossible that our rational part should be other than spiritual; and if any one maintain that we are simply corporeal, this would far more exclude us from the knowledge of things, there being nothing so inconceivable as to say that matter knows itself. It is impossible to imagine how it should know itself.

So, if we are simply material, we can know nothing at all; and if we are composed of mind and matter, we cannot know perfectly things which are simple, whether spiritual or corporeal. Hence it comes that almost all philosophers have confused ideas of things, and speak of material things in spiritual terms, and of spiritual things in material terms. For they say boldly that bodies have a tendency to fall, that they seek after their centre, that they fly from destruction, that they fear the void, that they have inclinations, sympathies, antipathies, all of which attributes pertain only to mind. And in speaking of minds, they consider them as in a place, and attribute to them movement from one place to another; and these are qualities which belong only to bodies.

Instead of receiving the ideas of these things in their purity, we colour them with our own qualities, and stamp with our composite being all the simple things which we contemplate.

Who would not think, seeing us compose all things of mind and body, but that this mixture would be quite intelligible to us? Yet it is the very thing we least understand. Man is to himself the most wonderful object in nature; for he cannot conceive what the body is, still less what the mind is, and least of all how a body should be united to a mind. This is the consummation of his difficulties, and yet it is his very being. *Modus quo corporibus adhaerent spiritus comprehendere ab hominibus non potest, et hoc tamen homo est.* [St. Augustine, *City of God*, xxi. 10. "The manner in which the spirit is united to the body can not be understood by man; and yet it is man."] Finally, to complete the proof of our weakness, I shall conclude with these two considerations.

73. But perhaps this subject goes beyond the capacity of reason. Let us therefore examine her solutions to problems within her powers. If there be anything to which her own interest must have made her apply herself most seriously, it is the inquiry into her own sovereign good. Let us see, then, wherein these strong and clear-sighted souls have placed it and whether they agree.

One says that the sovereign good consists in virtue, another in pleasure, another in the knowledge of nature, another in truth, *Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas*, [Virgil, *Georgics*, ii. "Happy is he who is able to know the causes of things."] another in total ignorance, another in indolence, others in disregarding

appearances, another in wondering at nothing, *nihil admirari prope res una quae possit facere et servare beatum*, [Horace, Epistles, I. vi. 1. " To be astonished at nothing is nearly the only thing which can give and conserve happiness."] and the true sceptics in their indifference, doubt, and perpetual suspense, and others, wiser, think to find a better definition. We are well satisfied.

We must see if this fine philosophy has gained nothing certain from so long and so intent study; perhaps at least the soul will know itself. Let us hear the rulers of the world on this subject. What have they thought of her substance? .[Cicero, *Disputationes Tusculanae*, i, ii *Harum sententiarum quae vera sit, Deus aliquis viderit*, ["Which of these opinions in the truth, a god will see."] Have they been more fortunate in locating her? 395. What have they found out about her origin, duration, and departure? *Harum sententiarum*, [ Montaigne, *Essays*, ii.]

Is, then, the soul too noble a subject for their feeble lights? Let us, then, abase her to matter and see if she knows whereof is made the very body which she animates and those others which she contemplates and moves at her will. What have those great dogmatists, who are ignorant of nothing, known of this matter?

This would doubtless suffice, if Reason were reasonable. She is reasonable enough to admit that she has been unable to find anything durable, but she does not yet despair of reaching it; she is as ardent as ever in this search, and is confident she has within her the necessary powers for this conquest. We must therefore conclude, and, after having examined her powers in their effects, observe them in themselves, and see if she has a nature and a grasp capable of laying hold of the truth.

[Source: <http://www.ccel.org/p/pascal/pensees/pensees.htm>; translation by W. F. Trotter.]

## INFINITY – NOTHING: THE WAGER

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) was a mathematician and a visionary. Born in the Auvergne, his family moved to Paris when he was eight. Pascal was roughly contemporary with Descartes. Both men wrote as individuals first, not as functionaries. Both men had run-ins with the Jesuits, a religious Order at the forefront of the Roman Catholic stranglehold on the freedom of thought. Pascal sided with the 'Jansenists' who were centred at the abbey of Port-Royal in the Faubourg St-Jacques in Paris and their sister house "in the fields" just outside Paris. The Jansenists sought a purer and more engaged Christian living, close to the standards of the Gospel, rather than the theological authoritarianism of Rome rooted in the Middle Ages. Port-Royal was fiercely persecuted by the Roman authorities who eventually physically destroyed it and imprisoned the better known figures involved, isolating and exiling the rest. The famous *Pensées* (Thoughts) of Pascal, from which our text is taken, is the fragmentary plan of a great work never completed. It is comprised of 804 aphorisms, not all of them complete and of different lengths. The thoughts tend to oscillate between two sides of the existential dichotomy: Man with God and Man without God.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

199. Let us imagine a number of men in chains and all condemned to death, where some are killed each day in the sight of the others, and those who remain see their own fate in that of their fellows and wait their turn, looking at each other sorrowfully and without hope. It is an image of the condition of men.

205. When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me? *Memoria hospitis unius diei praetereuntis.*[ Wisd. of Sol. 5:15. "The remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day."]

206. The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.

207. How many kingdoms know us not!

208. Why is my knowledge limited? Why my stature? Why my life to one hundred years rather than to a thousand? What reason has nature had for giving me such, and for choosing this number rather than another in the infinity of those from which there is no more reason to choose one than another, trying nothing else?

209. Art thou less a slave by being loved and favoured by thy master? Thou art indeed well off, slave. Thy master favours thee; he will soon beat thee.

210. The last act is tragic, however happy all the rest of the play is; at the last a little earth is thrown upon our head, and that is the end for ever.

211. We are fools to depend upon the society of our fellow-men. Wretched as we are, powerless as we are, they will not aid us; we shall die alone. We should therefore act as if we were alone, and in that case should we build fine houses, etc. We should seek the truth without hesitation; and, if we refuse it, we show that we value the esteem of men more than the search for truth.

229. This is what I see and what troubles me. I look on all sides, and I see only darkness everywhere. Nature presents to me nothing which is not matter of doubt and concern. If I saw nothing there which revealed a Divinity, I would come to a negative conclusion; if I saw everywhere the signs of a Creator, I would remain peacefully in faith. But, seeing too much to deny and too little to be sure, I am in a state to be pitied; wherefore I have a hundred times wished that if a God maintains Nature, she should testify to Him unequivocally, and that, if the signs she gives are deceptive, she should suppress them altogether; that she should say everything or nothing, that I might see which cause I ought to follow. Whereas in my present state, ignorant of what I am or of what I ought to do, I know neither my condition nor my duty. My heart inclines wholly to know where is the true good, in order to follow it; nothing would be too dear to me for eternity.

230. It is incomprehensible that God should exist, and it is incomprehensible that He should not exist; that the soul should be joined to the body, and that we should have no soul; that the world should be created, and that it should not be created, etc.; that original sin should be, and that it should not be.

233. Infinite--nothing.--Our soul is cast into a body, where it finds number, dimension. Thereupon it reasons, and calls this nature necessity, and can believe nothing else.

Unity joined to infinity adds nothing to it, no more than one foot to an infinite measure. The finite is annihilated in the presence of the infinite, and becomes a pure nothing. So our spirit before God, so our justice before divine justice. There is not so great a disproportion between our justice and that of God as between unity and infinity.

The justice of God must be vast like His compassion. Now justice to the outcast is less vast and ought less to offend our feelings than mercy towards the elect.

We know that there is an infinite, and are ignorant of its nature. As we know it to be false that numbers are finite, it is therefore true that there is an infinity in number. But we do not know what it is. It is false that it is even, it is false that it is odd; for the addition of a unit can make no change in its nature. Yet it is a number, and every number is odd or even (this is certainly true of every finite number). So we may well know that there is a God without knowing what He is. Is there not one substantial truth, seeing there are so many things which are not the truth itself?

We know then the existence and nature of the finite, because we also are finite and have extension. We know the existence of the infinite and are ignorant of its nature, because it has extension like us, but not limits like us. But we know neither the existence nor the nature of God, because He has neither extension nor limits.

But by faith we know His existence; in glory we shall know His nature. Now, I have already shown that we may well know the existence of a thing, without knowing its nature.

Let us now speak according to natural lights.

If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no affinity to us. We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is. This being so, who will dare to undertake the decision of the question? Not we, who have no affinity to Him.

Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their belief, since they profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They declare, in expounding it to the world, that it is a foolishness, *stultitiam*; and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they proved it, they would not keep their word; it is in lacking proofs that they are not lacking in sense. "Yes, but although this excuses those who offer it as such and takes away from them the blame of putting it forward without reason, it does not excuse those who receive it." Let us then examine this point, and say, "God is, or He is not." But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here.

There is an infinite chaos which separated us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Do not, then, reprove for error those who have made a choice; for you know nothing about it. "No, but I blame them for having made, not this choice, but a choice; for again both he who chooses heads and he who chooses tails are equally at fault, they are both in the wrong. The true course is not to wager at all."

Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is. "That is very fine. Yes, I must wager; but I may perhaps wager too much." Let us see. Since there is an equal risk of gain and of loss, if you had only to gain two lives, instead of one, you might still wager. But if there were three lives to gain, you

would have to play (since you are under the necessity of playing), and you would be imprudent, when you are forced to play, not to chance your life to gain three at a game where there is an equal risk of loss and gain. But there is an eternity of life and happiness. And this being so, if there were an infinity of chances, of which one only would be for you, you would still be right in wagering one to win two, and you would act stupidly, being obliged to play, by refusing to stake one life against three at a game in which out of an infinity of chances there is one for you, if there were an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain. But there is here an infinity of an infinitely happy life to gain, a chance of gain against a finite number of chances of loss, and what you stake is finite. It is all divided; where ever the infinite is and there is not an infinity of chances of loss against that of gain, there is no time to hesitate, you must give all. And thus, when one is forced to play, he must renounce reason to preserve his life, rather than risk it for infinite gain, as likely to happen as the loss of nothingness.

For it is no use to say it is uncertain if we will gain, and it is certain that we risk, and that the infinite distance between the certainty of what is staked and the uncertainty of what will be gained, equals the finite good which is certainly staked against the uncertain infinite. It is not so, as every player stakes a certainty to gain an uncertainty, and yet he stakes a finite certainty to gain a finite uncertainty, without transgressing against reason. There is not an infinite distance between the certainty staked and the uncertainty of the gain; that is untrue. In truth, there is an infinity between the certainty of gain and the certainty of loss. But the uncertainty of the gain is proportioned to the certainty of the stake according to the proportion of the chances of gain and loss. Hence it comes that, if there are as many risks on one side as on the other, the course is to play even; and then the certainty of the stake is equal to the uncertainty of the gain, so far is it from fact that there is an infinite distance between them. And so our proposition is of infinite force, when there is the finite to stake in a game where there are equal risks of gain and of loss, and the infinite to gain. This is demonstrable; and if men are capable of any truths, this is one.

"I confess it, I admit it. But, still, is there no means of seeing the faces of the cards?" Yes, Scripture and the rest, etc. "Yes, but I have my hands tied and my mouth closed; I am forced to wager, and am not free. I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?"

True. But at least learn your inability to believe, since reason brings you to this, and yet you cannot believe. Endeavour, then, to convince yourself, not by increase of proofs of God, but by the abatement of your passions. You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness. "But this is what I am afraid of." And why? What have you to lose?



But to show you that this leads you there, it is this which will lessen the passions, which are your stumbling-blocks.

The end of this discourse.--Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others? I will tell you that you will thereby gain in this life, and that, at each step you take on this road, you will see so great certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you risk, that you will at last recognise that you have wagered for something certain and infinite, for which you have given nothing.

"Ah! This discourse transports me, charms me," etc.

If this discourse pleases you and seems impressive, know that it is made by a man who has knelt, both before and after it, in prayer to that Being, infinite and without parts, before whom he lays all he has, for you also to lay before Him all you have for your own good and for His glory, that so strength may be given to lowliness.

[Source: <http://www.ccel.org/p/pascal/pensees/pensees.htm>; translation by W. F. Trotter.]

## MAN AND THE ETERNAL

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was Denmark's greatest modern philosopher. His influence remained fairly dormant until after the collapse of European Christian civilisation in 1914. Thereafter, with the wisdom of hindsight, Kierkegaard became revered as one of the greatest influences upon Twentieth Century philosophy and literature, alongside Nietzsche, who in some ways he resembles. He is an imaginative and dramatic philosopher. He saw himself as a prophet. In 1842 he began writing twelve hours a day and in 1843 he published the six major works of philosophy. He is perhaps best known for *Fear and Trembling* (1843) and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848). All of his works, except his *Edifying Addresses* were written – not just under assumed names – under assumed *personæ*. For Kierkegaard, Descartes' "I think therefore I am" did not go far enough. Kierkegaard would press the *I* beyond its capacity to think to discover "in the core of the *I* a centre from which choice springs, from which responsibility for one's acts springs, from which the ultimate sense of uneasiness and weariness" with anything inauthentic or superficial arises, where dread and anxiety lie concealed.<sup>14</sup>

It is as well to keep in mind when we read Kierkegaard's parable's the following key to them all:

A thinker erects an immense building, a system, a system which embraces the whole of existence and world-history etc. – and if we contemplate his personal life, we discover to our astonishment this terrible and ludicrous fact, that he himself personally does not live in this immense high-vaulted palace, but in a barn alongside of it, or in a dog kennel, or at the most in the porter's lodge. If one were to take the liberty of calling his attention to this by a single word, he would be offended. For he has no fear of being under a delusion, if only he can get the system completed...by means of the delusion. (*Sickness Unto Death*)

It is often said that Kierkegaard had Hegel in mind in the above quotation. But this is a parable and not really about Hegel – for who but God is in a position to estimate the inner life of that philosopher? What Kierkegaard is against is a philosophy divorced from the philosopher. If he thought Hegel at a remove from his teaching, then his followers were twice removed. Knowledge for Kierkegaard was about application.

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### THE TEXTS

Remorse, Repentance, Confession (Eternity's Emissaries to Man)

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<sup>14</sup> Quoting from Dougal V. Steere's Introduction to Kierkegaard's *Purity of Heart is To Will One Thing*, (Fontana Paperback, Collins, London, 1961) p.14. Refer to this for the full text of the *First Edifying Address*.

A Providence watches over each man's wandering through life. It provides him with two guides. The one calls him forward. The other calls him back. They are, however, not in opposition to each other, these two guides, nor do they leave the wanderer standing there in doubt, confused by the double-call. Rather the two are in eternal understanding with each other. For the one beckons forward to the Good, the other calls man back from evil. Nor are they blind guides. Just for that reason there are two of them. For in order to make the journey secure, they must look both forward and backward. Alas, there was perhaps many a one who went astray through not understanding how to continue a good beginning. For his course was along a false way, and he pressed on so continuously that remorse could not call him back onto the old way. There was perhaps someone who went astray because, in the exhaustion of repentance, he could go no further, so that the guide could not help him to find the way forward. When a long procession is about to move, a call is heard first from the one who is furthest forward. But he waits until the last has answered. The two guides call out to a man early and late, and when he listens to their call, then he finds his way, then he can know where he is, on the way; because these two calls designate the place and show the way. Of these two, the call of remorse is perhaps the best. For the eager traveller who travels lightly along the way does not, in this fashion, learn to know it as well as a wayfarer with a heavy burden. The one who merely strives to get on does not learn to know the way as well as the remorseful man. The eager traveller hurries forward to the new, to the novel, and, indeed, away from experience. But the remorseful one, who comes behind, laboriously gathers up experience. (*Purity of Heart*)

### Eternity...

Now the unspeakable is like the murmuring of a brook. If you go buried in your own thoughts, if you are busy, then you do not notice it at all in passing. You are not aware that this murmuring exists. But if you stand still, then you discover it. And if you have discovered it, then you must stand still. And when you stand still, then you discover it. And if you have discovered it, then you must stand still. And when you stand still it persuades you. And when it has persuaded you, then you must stoop and listen attentively to it. And when you have stooped to listen to it, then it captures you. And when it has captured you, then you cannot break away from it, then you are overpowered. Infatuated, you sink down at its side. At each moment it is as if in the next moment it must offer an explanation. But the brook goes on murmuring, and the wanderer at its side grows older. (*Purity of Heart*)

### The Amusement of the Gods

Something wonderful has happened to me. I was caught up into the seventh heaven. There sat all the gods in assembly. By special grace I was granted the privilege of making a wish. "Will you," said Mercury, "have youth, or beauty or

power or a long life or the most beautiful maiden or any of the other glories we have in the treasure chest? Choose, but only one thing.” For a moment I was at a loss. Then I addressed myself to the gods as follows: “Most honourable contemporaries, I choose this one thing, that I may always have the laugh on my side.” Not one of the gods said a word; on the contrary, they all began to laugh. From that I concluded that my wish was granted, and found that the gods knew how to express themselves with taste; for it would hardly have been suitable for them to have answered gravely: “Your wish is granted.”  
(*Either / Or*)

### **The Postponed Answer**

When a Greek philosopher was asked to define religion, he asked for time to prepare an answer; when the agreed period had elapsed, he asked for another postponement, and so on. In this way he wished to express symbolically that he regarded the question as unanswerable. This was genuinely in the Greek spirit, beautiful and ingenious. But if he had argued with himself, that since it was so long that he had left the question unanswered, he must now have come nearer to the answer, this would have been a misunderstanding; just as when a debtor remains in debt so long that the debt is finally paid – through having remained so long unpaid. (*Concluding Unscientific Postscript*)

### **The Girl of Sixteen and The Man of Twenty Five**

What existence is the happiest? It is that of a young girl of sixteen years when she, pure and innocent, possess nothing, not a chest of drawers or a pedestal, but has to make use of the lowest drawer of her mother’s *escritoire* to keep all her magnificence: the confirmation dress and a prayer-book! Happy the individual who possesses no more than she is content to put in the next drawer.

What existence is the happiest? It is that of a young girl of sixteen years, pure and innocent, who indeed can dance but goes to a ball only twice a year!

What is the happiest existence? It is that of a young girl when, sixteen summers old, pure and innocent, she sits diligently at her work and yet finds time to glance sidewise at him, at him who possesses nothing, not a chest of drawers, not a pedestal, but is only a partner in the same wardrobe, and yet has an entirely different explanation of the case, for in her he possesses the whole world, in spite of the fact that she possesses nothing.

And who then is the most unhappy? It is that rich young man twenty-five winters old who dwells opposite.

When one is sixteen summers old and the other sixteen winters old, are they not equally old? Ah, no! How is that, is not the time identical when it is identical? Ah, no! The time is not identical. (*Stages on Life’s Way*)

[Kierkegaard, S., *Parables of Kierkegaard*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, Princeton University Press, 1979. Reprinted by permission of Princeton University Press. All Rights Reserved. You may read and browse this material at this website. (Apart from educational use in the Continental Community of Inquiry)] no further copying, downloading, or linking is permitted. No part of this material may be further reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission from Princeton University Press. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers. For permissions and requests contact the publisher through [www.pup.princeton.edu](http://www.pup.princeton.edu)]

## CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) has had an extraordinary influence on twentieth century philosophy, arts and politics. Coming from a strong Lutheran background he studied classical philology in Bonn and Leipzig and was made a professor at the early age of 24. In 1879, after taking an early retirement on a small pension, Nietzsche lived in cheap boarding houses in the Alps and along the Italian seaboard, becoming increasingly estranged from the world. He eventually went insane in 1889 and lived out the rest of his life in mental darkness. Nietzsche was a great literary stylist and most of his works are collections of highly unsystematic aphorisms. His best known works are *The Gay Science* (1882/9); *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-5); *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *The Twilight of the Idols* (1888). He is often regarded as a 'dangerous' thinker. Our text is taken from the early essay 'Schopenhauer as Educator' (1876) – a tribute the nineteenth century renegade German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer – published in *Untimely Meditations* (1893).

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### THE TEXT

A traveller who had seen many lands and peoples and several of the earth's continents was asked what quality in men he had discovered everywhere he had gone. He replied: 'They have the tendency to laziness.' To many it will seem that he ought rather to have said: 'They are all timid. They hide themselves behind customs and opinions.' In his heart every man knows quite well that, being unique, he will be in the world only once and that no imaginable chance will for a second time gather together into a unity so strangely variegated an assortment as he is: he knows it but he hides it like a bad conscience – why? From fear of his neighbour, who demands conventionality and cloaks himself with it. But what is it that constrains the individual to fear his neighbour, to think and act like a member of a herd, and to have no joy in himself? Modesty, perhaps, in a few rare cases. With the great majority it is indolence, inertia, in short that tendency to laziness of which the traveller spoke. Artists alone hate this sluggish promenading in borrowed fashions and appropriated opinions and they reveal everyone's secret bad conscience, the law that every man is a unique miracle; they dare to show us man as he is, uniquely himself to the very last movement of his muscles, more, that in being thus strictly consistent in uniqueness he is beautiful, and worth regarding, and in no way tedious. The man who does not wish to belong to the mass needs only to cease taking himself easily; let him follow his conscience, which calls to him: 'Be your self! All you are now doing, thinking, desiring, is not you yourself.'

Every youthful soul who hears this call day and night trembles when he hears it; for the idea of its liberation gives the soul a presentiment of the measure of happiness allotted it from all eternity – a happiness to which it can by no means attain so long as it lies fettered by the chains of fear and convention. And how dismal and senseless life can be without this liberation! There exists no more repulsive and desolate creature in the world than the man who has evaded his genius and who now looks furtively to left and right, behind him and all about him. In the end such a man becomes impossible to get hold of, since he is wholly exterior, without kernel, a tattered, painted bag of clothes, a decked-out

ghost that cannot inspire even fear and certainly not pity. And if it true to say of the lazy that they kill time, then it is greatly to be feared that an era which sees its salvation in public opinion, that is to say in private laziness, is a time that really will be killed: I mean that it will be struck out of the history of the true liberation of life. How reluctant later generations will be to have anything to do with the relics of an era ruled, not by living men, but by pseudo-men dominated by public opinion; for which reason our age may be to some distant posterity the darkest and least known, because least human, portion of human history.

I go along the new streets of our cities and think how, of all these gruesome houses which the generation of public opinion has built for itself, not one will be standing in a hundred years time, and how the opinions of these house-builders will no doubt by then likewise have collapsed. On the other hand, how right it is for those who do not feel themselves to be citizens of this time to harbour great hopes; for if they were citizens of this time they too would be helping to kill their time and so perish with it – while their desire is rather to awaken their time to life and so live on themselves in this awakened life.

I will make an attempt to attain freedom, the youthful soul says to itself; and is it to be hindered in this by the fact that two nations happen to hate and fight one another, or that two continents are separated by an ocean, or that all around it a religion is taught which did not yet exist a couple of thousand years ago? All that is not you, it says to itself. No one can construct for you the bridge upon which precisely you must cross the stream of life, no one but you yourself alone. There are, to be sure, countless paths and bridges and demi-gods which would bear you through this stream; but only at the cost of yourself: you would put yourself in pawn and lose yourself. There exists in the world a single path along which no one can go except you: whither does it lead?

Let the youthful soul look back on life with the question: what have you truly loved up to now, what has drawn your soul aloft, what has mastered it and at the same time blessed it? Set up these revered objects before you and perhaps their nature and their sequence will give you a law, the fundamental law of your own true self. Compare these objects one with another, see how they constitute a stepladder upon which you have clambered up to yourself as you are now; for your true nature lies not concealed deep within you, but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be. Your true educators and formative teachers reveal to you what the true basic material of your being is: your educators are your liberators.

And that is the secret of all culture: it does not provide artificial limbs, wax noses or spectacles – that which can provide these things is, rather, only sham education. Culture is liberation, the removal of all the weeds, rubble and vermin that want to attack the tender buds of the plant, an out-streaming of light and warmth, the gentle rustling of nocturnal rain, it is imitation and worship of nature where nature is in her motherly and merciful mood, it is the perfecting of nature when it deflects her cruel and merciless assaults and turns them to good, and when it draws a veil over the expressions of nature's step-motherly mood and her sad lack of understanding.

The much admired way in which our German men of learning set about scientific pursuits reveals above all that they are thinking more of science than they are of mankind, that they have been trained to sacrifice themselves to it like a legion of the lost, so as in turn to draw the next generations on to the same

sacrifice. If it is not directed and kept within bounds by a higher maxim of education, but on the contrary allowed to run wilder and wilder on the principle 'the more the better', traffic with science is certainly as harmful to men of learning as the economic principle of *laissez faire* [profit before people] is to the morality of whole nations. Who is there that still remembers that the education of the scholar is an extremely difficult problem, if his humanity is not to be sacrificed in the process? Where are we scholars and unscholarly, high placed and low, to find the moral exemplars and models among our contemporaries, the visible epitome of morality for our time? What has become of any reflection on questions of morality – questions that have at all times engaged every more highly civilised society? There is no longer any model or any reflection of any kind; what we are in fact doing is consuming the moral capital we have inherited from our forefathers, which we are incapable of increasing but know only how to squander.

[Source: Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, tr. R.J. Hollingdale, University of Cambridge Press, 1983. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.]



## THE DEATH OF GOD

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 -1900) published *The Gay Science* in 1882, and then in 1887 he brought out a second edition with a fifth book added, an important Preface and Appendix of Songs. The German title *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* has the Italian inscription beneath "*la gaya scienza*" and the book is dedicated to "My joyful Sophia". Nietzsche wrote the book under clear Italian skies in the clean Mediterranean and Alpine air. By 'science' Nietzsche does not have white coats, labs and test-tubes and Bunsen burners in mind, he means "the great *passion* of the seeker after knowledge who lives and must live continuously in the thundercloud of the highest problems and heaviest responsibilities (by no means as an observer, outsider, indifferent, objective)." (§.351). One like himself, perhaps. By "gay" Nietzsche means something like "merry", everything that is not cool, 'northern', portentous, heavy, inhibited, retentive and 'Germanic'. By 'science' Nietzsche underlines *passion*, by 'gay' he emphasizes the *fun* of this passion. *The Gay Science* as we have it is broken up into 383 reasonably short aphorisms that are highly opinionated, diverse, equivocal, random and contagious. Although at the time of publication *The Gay Science* sold less than ten copies and then went 'underground' until the collapse of European civilisation World War One, our text here is now one of the most famous pieces of writing from the Nineteenth Century and is instantly recognisable far and wide as *Nietzsche*, who wrote of the Anti-Christ and went mad.

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### TEXT

*New struggles.* – After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave – a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the say of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. – And we – we still have to vanquish his shadow, too. (§.108)

*The madman.* – Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!" – As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated? – Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Where is God gone?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? To where is it moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continuously? Backward, sideways, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of

the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

“How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history until now.”

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. “I have come too early,” he said; “my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves.*”

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there stuck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Let out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?” (§.125)

[Source: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann, Random House Vintage, New York, 1974.]

## BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

Aphorism from Book Five of *The Gay Science* by Nietzsche

*Morality as a problem.* – The lack of personality always takes its revenge: A weakened, thin, exhausted personality that denies itself is no longer fit for anything good – least of all for philosophy. “Selflessness” has no value either in heaven or on earth. All great problems demand great love, and of that only strong, round, secure spirits who have a firm grip on themselves are capable. It makes the most telling difference whether a thinker has a personal relationship to his problems and finds in them his destiny, his distress, and his greatest happiness, or an ‘impersonal’ one, meaning that he can do no better than to touch them and grasp them with the antennae of cold, curious thought. In the latter case nothing will come of it; that much one can promise in advance, for even if great problems should allow themselves to be *grasped* by them they would not permit frogs and weaklings to *hold on* to them; such has been their taste from time immemorial – a taste, incidentally, that they share with redoubtable females.

Why is it then that I have never yet encountered anybody, not even in books, who approached morality in this personal way and who knew morality as a problem, and this problem as his own personal distress, torment, voluptuousness, and passion? It is evident that up to now morality was no problem at all, but, on the contrary, precisely that on which after all mistrust, discord, and contradiction one could agree – the hallowed place of peace where thinkers took a rest even from themselves, took a deep breath, and felt revived. I see nobody who ventured a *critique* of moral valuations; I miss even the slightest attempts at scientific curiosity, of refined, experimental imagination of psychologists and historians that readily anticipates a problem and catches it in flight without quite knowing what it has caught.

These historians of morality (mostly Englishmen) do not amount to much. Usually they themselves are still quite unsuspectingly obedient to one particular morality and, without knowing it, serve that as shield-bearers and followers – for example, by sharing that popular superstition of Christian Europe which people keep mouthing so guilelessly to this day, that what is characteristic of moral actions is selflessness, self-sacrifice, or sympathy and pity. Their usual mistaken premise is that they affirm some consensus of nations, at least of tame nations, concerning certain principles or morals, and then they infer from this that these principles must be unconditionally binding also for you and me; or, conversely, they see the truth that among different nations moral valuations are *necessarily* different and then infer from this that *no* morality is at all binding. Both procedures are equally childish.

The mistake made by the more refined among them is that they uncover and criticise the perhaps foolish opinions of people about their morality, or of humanity about all human morality – opinions about its origin, religious sanction, the superstition of free will, and things of that sort – and then suppose that they have criticized morality itself. But the value of a command “thou shalt” is still fundamentally different from and independent of such opinions about it and the weeds of error that may have overgrown it – just as certainly as the

value of a medication for a sick person is completely independent of whether he thinks about medicine scientifically or the way old women do. Even if a morality has grown out of an error, the realization of this fact would not as much as touch the problem of its value.

Thus nobody up to now has examined the *value* of that most famous of all medicines which is called morality; and the first step would be – for once to *question* it. Well, then, precisely, this is our task.- (§.345)

[Source: Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, tr. W. Kaufmann, Random House Vintage, New York, 1974.]

## NON-EUCLIDEAN REALITY

Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1888) is regarded far and wide as one of the greatest novelists of all time. He ranks alongside Tolstoy, who was his contemporary, with Homer, Virgil, Dante, Cervantes and Goethe. He was born in Moscow. His mother died of consumption when he was young and his father was murdered. In his twenties Dostoyevsky was arrested for attendance at a political gathering and sentenced to death. The sentence was commuted just before it was to be carried out and Dostoyevsky was sent into penal servitude in Siberia instead. He survived, married, wrote, travelled in Europe where, with wife and child in tow he fell victim to his gambling addiction and cast the three of them into penury, the child in fact dying. Dostoyevsky made his living by journalism. In his late forties he married again, to an eighteen year old girl. She stabilised him and looked after his finances so that in time he became relatively wealthy. He wrote four major works of fiction: *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1868) *The Possessed* (1871) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). Even his minor works were astonishing. By the time of his death he was hailed throughout Russia as a saint, a prophet and a genius. Thirty thousand people followed his coffin at his funeral, which was a national event.

This reading is excerpted from the chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov* entitled 'Rebellion'. It leads into what has been called the single greatest chapter ever written in the history of world literature. Penguin Classics published the chapter in a special slim volume all by itself. It is an outstanding chapter even within a book which is everywhere regarded as a masterpiece. The spiritual authority and audacity of this chapter ranks alongside Biblical literature, it is entitled, 'The Grand Inquisitor'.

The chapter from which our reading is taken is hardly less great, in it we can witness what I call Dostoyevsky's *incandescent* style. For there is an emotional intensity about it which is infectious and a stroke of genius and which more than one hundred years has done nothing to diminish. In fact, Dostoyevsky's words ring more true to our ears now than they must have done to his contemporaries, accustomed to 'non-Euclidean reality' as we have become. Wittgenstein continually reread these pages, finding them medicinal. This chapter has also exerted a strong influence on thinkers associated with 'existentialism', the theatre of the Absurd, Dada, modernism and nihilism. A Kafkaesque world is foreshadowed. Camus' *The Rebel*, is directly inspired by this chapter and there can't be a twentieth century thinker or artist who doesn't know it or who hasn't been affected by it.

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### THE TEXT

[Ivan Karamazov is speaking to his brother Alyosha who is a novice monk. As a religious, Alyosha believes in non-violence and the redemptive power of suffering]

"There may be *four* hypotheses framed concerning the first causes of the universe: *that* they are endowed with perfect goodness; *that* they have perfect malice; *that* they are opposite, and have both goodness and malice; *that* they have neither goodness nor malice. Mixed phenomena can never prove the two

former unmixed principles; and the uniformity and steadiness of general laws seem to oppose the third. The fourth, therefore, seems by far the most probable.

...”You don’t know why I am telling you all this Alyosha? My head aches and I am sad.”

“You speak with a strange air,” observed Alyosha uneasily, “as though you were not quite yourself.”

“By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow,” Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his bother’s words, “told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave so till morning, and in the morning they hang them – all sorts of things you can’t imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that’s all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother’s womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother’s eyes. Doing it before the mother’s eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They’ve planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk point a pistol four inches from the baby’s face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby’s face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn’t it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say.”

“Brother, what are you driving at?” asked Alyosha.

“I think if the devil doesn’t exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness.”

“Just as he did God, then?” observed Alyosha.

“You see, I am fond of collecting certain facts, and, would you believe, I even copy anecdotes of a certain sort from newspapers and books, and I’ve already got a fine collection. The Turks, of course, have gone into it, but they are foreigners. I have specimens from home that are even better than the Turks. You know we prefer beating – rods and scourges – that’s our national institution. Nailing ears is unthinkable for us, for we are, after all, Europeans...”

A well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch-rod, a girl of seven. I have an exact account of it. The papa was glad that the birch rod was covered with twigs. ‘It stings more’, said he, and so he began stinging his daughter. I know for a fact there are people who at every blow are worked up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively at every blow they inflict. They beat for a minute, for five minutes, for ten minutes, more often and more savagely. The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, ‘Daddy! Daddy!’ By some diabolical unseemly chance the case was brought to court. A counsel is engaged. The Russian people have long called a barrister ‘a conscience for hire.’ The counsel protests in his client’s defence. ‘It’s such a simple thing,’ he says, ‘an everyday domestic event. A father corrects his child. To our shame be it said, it is brought into court.’ The jury, convinced by him, give a favourable verdict. The public roars with delight that

the torturer is acquitted. Ah, pity I wasn't there! I would have proposed to raise a subscription in his honour!... Charming pictures.

"But 'I've still better things about children. I've collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother, 'most worthy and respectable people, of good education and breeding.' You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. To all other types of humanity these torturers behave mildly and benevolently, like cultivated and humane Europeans; but they are very fond of tormenting children, even fond of children themselves in that sense. It's just their defencelessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire. In every man, of course, a demon lies hidden – the demon of rage, the demon of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the demon of lawlessness let off the chain, the demon of diseases that follow on vice, gout, kidney disease, and so on.

"This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty – shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to 'dear, kind, God!' I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones! I am making you suffer, Alyosha, you are not yourself. I'll leave off if you like."

"Never mind, I want to suffer too," muttered Alyosha.

"One picture, only one more, because it's so curious, so characteristic, and I have only just read it in some collection of Russian antiquities. I've forgotten the name. I must look it up. It was in the darkest days of serfdom at the beginning of the century, and long live the Liberator of the People! There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men – somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then – who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned absolute power over the lives of their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in great pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbours as though they were dependents and buffoons. He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys – all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favourite hound. 'Why is my favourite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw.

'so you did it.' The general looked the child up and down. 'Take him.' He was taken – taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It's gloomy cold, foggy autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror not daring to cry.... 'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! Run!' shout the dog-boys. The boy runs.... 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eye! ... I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well – what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak Alyosha!"

"To be shot," murmured Alyosha, lifting his eyes to Ivan with a pale twisted smile.

"Bravo!" cried Ivan delighted. "If even you say so... Your're a pretty monk! So there is a little devil sitting in your heart, Alyosha Karamazov!"

"What I said was absurd, but.."

"That's just the point that 'but' " cried Ivan. "Let me tell you novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and nothing would have come to pass in it without them. We know what we know!"

"What do you know?"

"I understand nothing," Ivan went on, as though in delirium. " I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact and I have determined to stick to the fact."

"Why are you trying me?" Alyosha cried, with sudden distress. "Will you say what you mean at last?"

"Of course, I will; that's what I've been leading up to. You are dear to me, I don't want to let you go, and I won't give you up to your Zossima."

Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad.

"Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its core I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and recognise in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidian understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everyting flows and finds its level – but that's only Euclidian nonsense, I know that, and I can't consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it – I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my



sufferings, may manure the oil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when one suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among mankind. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for their father's crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud; 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God!' It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation,

*even if I were wrong.* Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."

"That's rebellion," murmured Alyosha, looking down.

[Source: Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, tr. Constance Garnett, Constable, London, 1927 .]

## IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

William James (1842-1910) was born in New York City on January 11, 1842. He is the brother of Henry James, the famous novelist. James taught physiology and later, psychology and philosophy at Harvard. He became a philosopher of international repute, especially after *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James was a pioneer of modern depth psychology. His later lectures published as *Pragmatism: A New Name for Old Ways of Thinking* (1907) spread the practical logic of C. S. Pierce to a wider audience. James was a humane and liberal thinker who opposed thought which made truth abstract. Among others he influenced the educationalist John Dewey and the physicist Albert Einstein. Our reading comes from his 1897 work, *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*. It was first given as an address to the Harvard Young Men's Christian Association.

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### THE TEXT

Religion has meant many things in human history; but when from now onward I use the word I mean to use it in the supernaturalist sense, as declaring that the so-called order of nature, which constitutes this world's experience, is only one portion of the total universe, and that there stretches beyond this visible world an unseen world of which we now know nothing positive, but in its relation to which the true significance of our present mundane life consists. A person's religious faith (whatever more special items of doctrine it may involve) means for me essentially her faith in the existence of an unseen order of some kind in which riddles of the natural order may be found explained. In the more developed religions the natural world has always been regarded as the mere scaffolding or vestibule of a truer, more eternal world, and affirmed to be a sphere of education, trial or redemption. In these religions, one must in some fashion die to the natural life before one can enter into life eternal. The notion that this physical world of wind and water, where the sun rises and the moon sets, is absolutely and ultimately the divinely aimed-at and established thing, is one which we find only in very early religions, such as that of the most primitive Jews. It is this natural religion (primitive still, in spite of the fact that poets and men of science whose good-will exceeds their perspicacity keep publishing it in new editions tuned to our contemporary ears) that, as I said a while ago, has suffered definitive bankruptcy in the opinion of a circle of persons, among whom I must count myself, and who are growing more numerous everyday.

Now I wish to make you feel, if I can in the short remainder of this hour, that we have a right to believe the physical order to be only a partial order; that we have a right to supplement it by an unseen spiritual order which we assume on trust, if only thereby life may seem to us better worth living again. But as such a trust will seem to some of you sadly mystical and execrably unscientific, I must first say a word or two to weaken the veto which you may consider that science opposes to our act.

There is included in human nature an ingrained naturalism and materialism of mind which can only admit facts that are actually tangible. Of this sort of mind the entity called 'science' is the idol. Fondness for the word 'scientist' is one of the notes by which you may know its votaries; and its short

way of killing any opinion that it disbelieves in is to call it 'unscientific'. It must be granted that there is no slight excuse for this. Science has made such glorious leaps in the last three hundred years, and extended our knowledge of nature so enormously both in general and in detail; men and women of science, moreover, have as a class displayed such admirable virtues, – that it is no wonder if the worshippers of science lose their head. In this very University, accordingly, I have heard more than one teacher say that all the fundamental conceptions of truth have already been found by science, and that the future has only the details of the picture to fill in. But the slightest reflection on the real conditions will suffice to show how barbaric such notions are. They show such a lack of scientific imagination, that it is hard to see how one who is actively advancing any part of science can make a mistake so crude. Think how many absolutely new scientific conceptions have arisen in our own generation, how many new problems have been formulated that were never thought of before, and then cast an eye upon the brevity of science's career. It began with Galileo, not three hundred years ago. For thinkers since Galileo, each informing his successor of what discoveries his own lifetime had seen achieved, might have passed the torch of science into our hands as we sit here in this room. Indeed, for the matter of that, an audience much smaller than the present one, an audience of some five or six score people, if each person in it could speak for his own generation, would carry us away to the black unknown of the human species, to days without a document or a monument to tell their tale. Is it credible that such a mushroom knowledge, such a growth overnight as this, can represent more than the minutest glimpse of what the universe will really prove to be when adequately understood? No! our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea. Whatever else be certain, this at least is certain, – that the world of our present natural knowledge *is* enveloped in a larger world of *some* sort of whose residual properties we at present can frame no positive idea.

[Source: W. James, *The Will to Believe and other essays in popular philosophy*, Dover Publications, New York, 1956.]

## BEFORE THE LAW

Franz Kafka (1883-1924) was born in Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia, the son of a rich Jewish business man. His outward life was scarcely remarkable, he was an office clerk who had a few slight affairs but couldn't face getting married. Yet his literary life is renowned and the word Kafkaesque has entered the English language to describe it: alienated, nightmarish, oppressively reflective and self-destructively, painfully, imaginative. The French literary critic Maurice Blanchot once wrote that: "Kafka's narratives are among the darkest in literature, the most rooted in absolute disaster." Before Kafka died he persuaded his best friend, Brod, to destroy his fragmentary writings, all of them in German. But Brod couldn't bring himself to do it and he published them instead. They were a literary sensation, in an age when that meant something, and Kafka's name has risen to rank alongside those of Proust and Joyce as one of the imaginative summits of twentieth century literature, although his oeuvre is slight compared to theirs. Major contemporary philosophers have found much to think about in Kafka. Our text appears both in Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1925) and as a short story entitled "Before the Law". *The Trial* has a famous first line. Whether it is humourous, innocent, a little eerie or decidedly chilling is indeterminable. "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning."

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### THE TEXT

Before the Law stands a doorkeeper. To this doorkeeper there comes a countryman and prays for admittance to the Law. But the doorkeeper says that he cannot grant admittance at the moment. The man thinks it over and then asks if he will be allowed in later. "It is possible," says the doorkeeper, "but not at the moment." Since the gate stands open, as usual, and the doorkeeper steps to one side, the man stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior. Observing that, the doorkeeper laughs and says: "If you are so drawn to it, just try to go in despite my veto. But take note: I am powerful. And I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one doorkeeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third doorkeeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him." These are difficulties the countryman has not expected; the Law, he thinks, should surely be accessible at all times and to everyone, but as he now takes a closer look at the doorkeeper in his fur coat, with his big sharp nose and long, thin, black Tartar beard, he decides that it is better to wait until he gets permission to enter. The doorkeeper gives him a stool and lets him sit down at one side of the door. There he sits for days and years. He makes many attempts to be admitted, and wearies the doorkeeper by his importunity. The doorkeeper frequently has little interviews with him, asking him questions about his home and many other things, but the questions are put indifferently, as great lords put them, and always finish with the statement that he cannot be let in yet. The man, who has furnished himself with many things for his journey, sacrifices all he has, however valuable, to bribe the doorkeeper. That official accepts everything, but always with the remark: "I am only taking it to keep you from thinking you have omitted anything." During these many years the man

fixes his attention almost continuously on the doorkeeper. He forgets the other doorkeepers, and this first one seems to him the sole obstacle preventing access to the Law. He curses his bad luck, in his early years boldly and loudly, later, as he grows old, he only grumbles to himself. He becomes childish, and since in his years-long contemplation of the doorkeeper he has come to know even the fleas in his fur collar, he begs the fleas as well to help him and to change the doorkeeper's mind. At length his eyesight begins to fail, and he does not know whether the world is really darker or whether his eyes are only deceiving him. Yet in his darkness he is now aware of a radiance that streams inextinguishably from the gateway of the Law. Now he has not very long to live. Before he dies, all his experiences in these long years gather themselves in his head to one point, a question he has not yet asked the doorkeeper. He waves him nearer, since he can no longer raise his stiffening body. The doorkeeper has to bend low towards him, for the difference in height between them has altered much to the countryman's disadvantage. "What do you want to know now?" asks the doorkeeper. "You are insatiable." "Everyone strives to reach the Law," says the man, "so how does it happen that for all these years no one but myself has ever begged for admittance?" The doorkeeper recognizes that the man has reached his end, and to let his failing senses catch the words roars in his ear: "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. Now I am going to shut it."

[Source: Franz Kafka in *Wedding Preparations in the Country and Other Stories*, tr. Willa and Edwin Muir, Penguin, 1978.]

## "K"

"Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning." The famous opening line of *The Trial*. Franz Kafka (1883-1924), from Prague in Austria, writes in German. His short stories, such as "The Metamorphosis" (1916), and novels, including *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926), concern isolated and perplexed individuals in a nightmarishly uncertain and elusive world. The word "Kafkaesque" has been coined to describe an aspect of Kafka's world, which is impossible to tell apart from our own, fantastic though it is. The following quotation is taken from a lecture by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) on Kafka's brilliant short story "The Metamorphosis". This is the Nabokov who wrote *Lolita* (1955), but he was also one of the 20th century's most gifted teachers of literature.

I don't know if you read a couple of years ago in the papers about that teenage girl and boy who murdered the girl's mother. It starts with a very Kafkaesque scene: the girl's mother has come home and found her daughter and the boy in the bedroom, and the boy has hit the mother with a hammer—several times—and dragged her away. But the woman is still thrashing and groaning in the kitchen, and the boy says to his sweetheart, "Gimme that hammer. I think I'll have to knock her again." But the girl gives her mate a knife instead and he stabs the girl's mother many, many times, to death—under the impression, probably, that this all is a comic strip: you hit a person, the person sees lots of stars and exclamation marks but revives by and by, in the next installment. Physical life however has no next installment, and soon boy and girl have to do something with dead mother.

"Oh, plaster of paris, it will dissolve her completely!" Of course, it will—marvelous idea—place body in bathtub, cover with plaster, and that's all. Meanwhile, with mother under the plaster (which does not work—wrong plaster, perhaps) boy and girl throw several beer parties. What fun! Lovely canned music, and lovely canned beer. "But you can't go, fellas, to the bathroom. The bathroom is a mess."

I'm trying to show you that in so-called real life we find sometimes a great resemblance to the situation in Kafka's fantastic story. Mark the curious mentality of the morons in Kafka who enjoy their evening paper despite the fantastic horror in the middle of their apartment.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

We are sinful not merely because we have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, but also because we have not eaten of the Tree of Life.

You do not need to leave your room. Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.

Anyone who cannot come to terms with his life while he is alive needs one hand to ward off a little his despair over his fate . . . but with his other hand he can note down what he sees among the ruins.

My fear is my substance, and probably the best part of me.

Every revolution evaporates and leaves behind only the slime of a new bureaucracy.

You can hold yourself back from the sufferings of the world, that is something you are free to do and it accords with your nature, but perhaps this very holding back is the one suffering you could avoid.

All human errors are impatience, a premature breaking off of methodical procedure, an apparent fencing-in of what is apparently at issue.

Life's splendour forever lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It is there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come.

There are two main human sins from which all the others derive: impatience and indolence. It was because of impatience that they were expelled from Paradise, it is because of indolence that they do not return. Yet perhaps there is only one major sin: impatience. Because of impatience they were expelled, because of impatience they do not return.

A belief is like a guillotine, just as heavy, just as light.

[Source: Katherina Eiermann <<http://www.mindpleasures.com>>]



## FAITH

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is a German philosopher who published *Being and Time* in 1927, which is widely regarded as the most original and influential work of philosophy in the twentieth century. It inspired existentialism, the 'linguistic turn' and deconstruction. Heidegger started as a student of theology but came under the influence of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl at Freiburg. From 1923 to 1928 Heidegger taught at Marburg University. He then returned to Freiburg in 1928, inheriting Husserl's position as professor of philosophy, which Husserl was unable to keep because he was Jewish. Due to his passive, but nevertheless, public, support of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933 and 1934, Heidegger's professional activities were restricted in 1945, and controversy surrounded his university standing until his retirement in 1959. Nevertheless Heidegger conducted a long love affair with the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who was Jewish. Heidegger's life work in philosophy revolved around one question only, the *Seinsfrage*, or question of Being. While Heidegger's early philosophical style was marked by the analytic tendency of Husserl's phenomenology, and was therefore full of neologisms, his later style was poetic and one almost needs to read his later lectures as if they are prose poems. He died in Messkirch on May 26, 1976. Our text comes from a lecture in Heidegger's 1935 course in metaphysics at the University of Freiburg.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

Anyone for whom the Bible is divine revelation and truth has the answer to the question "Why are there essents [things that are] rather than nothing?" even before it is asked: everything that is, except God himself, has been created by Him. God himself, the increate creator, "is". One who holds to such faith can in a way participate in the asking of our question, but he cannot really question without ceasing to be a believer and taking all the consequences of such a step. He will only be able to act "as if"...

On the one hand a faith that does not perpetually expose itself to the possibility of unfaith is no faith but merely a convenience: the believer simply makes up his mind to adhere to the traditional doctrine. This is neither faith nor questioning, but the indifference of those who can busy themselves with everything, sometimes even displaying a keen interest in faith as well as questioning.

From the standpoint of faith our question is "foolish".

Philosophy is this very foolishness.

[Source: Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, tr., Ralph Manheim, Yale University Press, 1959.]

## PROVOCATIVE THINKING

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is a German philosopher who published *Being and Time* in 1927, which is widely regarded as the most original and influential work of Continental philosophy in the twentieth century. It inspired existentialism, the 'linguistic turn' and deconstruction. Heidegger started as a student of theology but came under the influence of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl at Freiburg. From 1923 to 1928 Heidegger taught at Marburg University. He then returned to Freiburg in 1928, inheriting Husserl's position as professor of philosophy, which Husserl was unable to keep because he was Jewish. Due to his passive, but nevertheless, public, support of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933 and 1934, Heidegger's professional activities were restricted in 1945, and controversy surrounded his university standing until his retirement in 1959. Nevertheless Heidegger conducted a long love affair with the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who was Jewish. Heidegger's life work in philosophy revolved around one question only, the *Seinsfrage*, or question of Being. While Heidegger's early philosophical style was marked by the analytic tendency of Husserl's phenomenology, and was therefore full of neologisms, his later style was poetic and one almost needs to read his later lectures as if they are prose poems. He died in Messkirch on May 26, 1976. Our text comes from the first lecture in the course given in 1951-2 at Freiburg on thinking.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

What is most thought-provoking? How does it show itself in our thought-provoking time?

*Most thought provoking is that we are still not thinking* – not even yet, although the state of the world is becoming constantly more thought-provoking. True, this course of events seems to demand rather that man should act, without delay, instead of making speeches at conferences and international conventions and never getting beyond proposing ideas on what ought to be, and how it ought to be done. What is lacking, then, is action, not thought.

And yet – it could be that prevailing man has for centuries acted too much and thought too little. But how dare anyone assert today that we are still not thinking, today when there is everywhere a lively and constantly more audible interest in philosophy, when almost everybody claims to know what philosophy is all about! Philosophers are *the* thinkers *par excellence*. They are called thinkers precisely because thinking properly takes place in philosophy.

Nobody will deny that there is an interest in philosophy today. But – is there anything at all left today in which man does not take an interest, in the sense in which he understands "interest"?

Interest, *interesse*, means to be among and in the midst of things, or to be at the center of a thing and to stay with it. But today's interest accepts as valid only what is interesting. And interesting is the sort of thing that can freely be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else, which then concerns us just as little as what went before. Many people today take the view that they are doing great honour to something by finding it

interesting. The truth is that such an opinion has already relegated the interesting thing to the ranks of what is indifferent and soon boring.

It is no evidence of any readiness to think that people show an interest in philosophy. There is, of course, serious preoccupation everywhere with philosophy and its problems. The learned world is expending commendable efforts in the investigation of the history of philosophy. These are useful and worthy tasks, and only the best talents are good enough for them, especially when they present to us models of great thinking. But even if we have devoted many years to the intensive study of the treatises and writings of the great thinkers, that fact is still no guarantee that we ourselves are thinking, or even are ready to learn thinking. On the contrary – preoccupation with philosophy more than anything else may give us the stubborn illusion that we are thinking just because we are incessantly “philosophising”.

Even so, it remains strange, and seems presumptuous, to assert that what is most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking. Accordingly, we must prove the assertion. Even more advisable is first to explain it. For it could be that the demand for a proof collapses as soon as enough light is shed on what the assertion says. It runs:

*Most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking time is that we are still not thinking.*

It has been suggested earlier how the term “thought-provoking” is to be understood. Thought-provoking is what gives us to think. Let us look at it closely, and from the start allow each word its proper weight. Some things are food for thought in themselves, intrinsically, so to speak, innately. And some things make an appeal to us to give them thought, to turn toward them in thought: to think them.

What is thought-provoking, what gives us to think, is then not anything that we determine, not anything that only we are instituting, only we are proposing. According to our assertion, what of itself gives us most to think about, what is most thought-provoking, is this – that we are still not thinking.

This now means: We have still not come face to face, have not yet come under the sway of what intrinsically desires to be thought about in an essential sense. Presumably the reason is that we human beings do not yet sufficiently reach out and turn toward what desires to be thought. If so, the fact that we are still not thinking would merely be a slowness, a delay in thinking or, at most, a neglect on man’s part. Such human tardiness could then be cured in human ways by the appropriate measures. Human neglect would give us food for thought – but only in passing. The fact that we are still not thinking would be thought-provoking, of course, but being a momentary and curable condition of modern man, it could never be called one of the most thought-provoking matters. Yet that is what we call it, and we suggest thereby the following: that we are still not thinking is by no means only because man does not yet turn sufficiently toward that which, by origin and innately, wants to be thought about since in its essence it remains what must be thought about. Rather, that we are still not thinking stems from the fact that the thing itself that must be thought about turns away from man, has turned away long ago.

We said, man still does not think, and this because what must be thought about turns away from him; by no means only because man does not sufficiently reach out and turn to what is to be thought.

What must be thought about, turns away from man. It withdraws from him. But how can we have the least knowledge of something that withdraws from the beginning, how can we even give it a name?

Whatever withdraws, refuses arrival. But – withdrawing is not nothing. Withdrawing is an event. In fact, what withdraws may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him.

[Source: Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (*Was Heisst Denken?* 1951-2), tr. J. Glenn Gray, Harper Colophon, N.Y., 1972.]

## MEMORY

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is a German philosopher who published *Being and Time* in 1927, which is widely regarded as the most original and influential work of philosophy in the twentieth century. It inspired existentialism, the 'linguistic turn' and deconstruction. Heidegger started as a student of theology but came under the influence of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl at Freiburg. From 1923 to 1928 Heidegger taught at Marburg University. He then returned to Freiburg in 1928, inheriting Husserl's position as professor of philosophy, which Husserl was unable to keep because he was Jewish. Due to his passive, but nevertheless, public, support of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933 and 1934, Heidegger's professional activities were restricted in 1945, and controversy surrounded his university standing until his retirement in 1959. Nevertheless Heidegger conducted a long love affair with the philosopher Hannah Arendt, who was Jewish. Heidegger's life work in philosophy revolved around one question only, the *Seinsfrage*, or question of Being. While Heidegger's early philosophical style was marked by the analytic tendency of Husserl's phenomenology, and was therefore full of neologisms, his later style was poetic and one almost needs to read his later lectures as if they are prose poems. He died in Messkirch on May 26, 1976. Our text comes from the first lecture in the course given in 1951-2 at Freiburg on thinking.

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### TEXT

In a draft of one of his hymns, Hölderlin writes:

“We are a sign that is not read.”

He continues with these two lines:

“We feel no pain, we almost have  
Lost our tongue in foreign lands.”

The several drafts of the hymn – besides bearing such titles as “The Serpent”, “The Sign”, “The Nymph”, – also include the title “Mnemosyne”. This Greek word may be translated: Memory. And since the Greek word is feminine, we break no rules if we translate “Dame Memory”.

For Hölderlin uses the Greek work *Mnemosyne* as the name of a Titaness. According to the myth, she is the daughter of Heaven and Earth. Myth means the telling word. For the Greeks, to tell is to lay bare and make appear – both the appearance and that which has its essence in the appearance, its epiphany. *Mythos* is what has its essence in its telling – what is apparent in the unconcealedness of its appeal. Logos says the same; mythos and logos are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such; on the contrary, the early Greek thinkers (Parmenides, fragment 8) are precisely the ones to use mythos and logos in the same sense. *Mythos* and *logos* become separated and opposed only at the point where neither *mythos* nor *logos* can keep to its original nature. In Plato's work, this separation has already taken

place. Historians and philologists, by virtue of a prejudice which modern rationalism adopted from Platonism, imagine that mythos was destroyed by logos. But nothing religious is ever destroyed by logic; it is destroyed only by the God's withdrawal.

Mnemosyne, daughter of Heaven and Earth, bride of Zeus, in nine nights becomes the mother of the nine Muses. Drama and music, dance and poetry are in the womb of Mnemosyne, Dame Memory. It is plain that the word means something else than merely the psychologically demonstrable ability to retain a mental representation of an idea, of something which is past. Memory – from Latin *memor*, mindful – has in mind something that is in the mind, thought. But when the name of the Mother of the Muses, “Memory” does not mean just any thought of anything that can be thought. Memory is the gathering and convergence of thought upon what everywhere demands to be thought about first of all. Memory is the gathering of recollection, thinking back. It safely keeps and keeps concealed within it that to which at each given time thought must be given before all else, in everything that essentially is, everything that appeals to us as what has being and has been in being. Memory, Mother of the Muses – the thinking back to what is to be thought is the source and ground of poesy. This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward toward the source, toward thinking as a thinking back, a recollection. Surely, as long as we take the view that logic gives us any information about what thinking is, we shall never be able to think how much all poesy rests upon thinking back, recollection. Poetry wells up only from devoted thought thinking back, recollecting.

Under the heading *Mnemosyne*, Hölderlin says:

“We are a sign that is not read...”

We? Who? We the people of a “today” that has lasted since long ago and will still last for a long time, so long that no calendar in history can give its measure. In the same hymn, *Mnemosyne*, it says: “Long is/The time” – the time in which we are a sign, a sign that is not read. And this, that we are a sign, a sign that is not read – does this not give enough food for thought?

[Source: Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (*Was Heisst Denken?* 1951-2), tr. J. Glenn Gray, Harper Colophon, N.Y., 1972.]

## THE VOICE OF SILENCE

Simone Weil (1909-1943) was an important twentieth century philosopher, although she published little in her life-time. She was born in Paris to an agnostic Jewish family with Germanic and Austrian origins. At the Sorbonne, she was a student of the noted French teacher and philosopher Alain. She finished first in the entrance examination for the École Normale Supérieure ahead of Simone de Beauvoir who came second. She always identified strongly, almost mystically, with the oppressed and poor; in fact this was largely responsible for her untimely death in her mid-thirties. She was a woman of action and original ideas. She fought in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s on the side of the Republicans, but later felt ideology and the social engineering of governments was not the answer to the world's ills. When Paris fell in World War II she fled the Nazis, first to America and then to England. She supported De Gaulle's Free French Movement from England, but her sympathy for the plight of Occupied France led her to refuse any more food than they would have had, which, because they had a black market, turned out to be far less than they would have had. This led to serious illness, and again, in sympathy with the oppressed, she refused medical treatment and consequently she died. Since her death she has been endlessly criticized and diagnosed by those who think they know better. Her posthumously published philosophical fragments run to sixteen volumes. She was one of the few modern philosophers who live their ideas, rather than pontificate or just write about them for academic circles or 'the public', but because of this her works ring with greater authenticity.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

There is a question which is absolutely meaningless and therefore, of course, unanswerable, and which we normally never ask ourselves, but in affliction the soul is constrained to repeat it incessantly like a sustained monotonous groan. This question is: Why? Why are things as they are? The afflicted man naively seeks an answer, from men, from things, from God, even if he disbelieves in him, from anything or everything. Why is it necessary precisely that he should have nothing to eat, or be worn out with fatigue and brutal treatment, or be about to be executed, or be ill, or be in prison? If one explained to him the causes which have produced his present situation, and this is in any case seldom possible because of the complex interaction of circumstances, it will not seem to him to be an answer. For his question 'Why?' does not mean 'By what cause?' but 'For what purpose?' And it is impossible, of course to indicate any purposes to him; unless we invent some imaginary ones, but that sort of invention is not a good thing.

It is singular that the affliction of other people, except sometimes though not always, those very close to us, does not provoke this question. At the most, it may occur to us casually for a moment. But so soon as a man falls into affliction the question takes hold and goes on repeating itself incessantly. Why? Why? Why? Christ himself asked it: 'Why has thou forsaken me?'

There can be no answer to the 'Why?' of the afflicted, because the world is necessity and not purpose. If there were finality in the world, the place of the

good would not be in the other world. Whenever we look for final causes in this world it refuses them. But to know that it refuses, one has to ask.

The only things that compel us to ask the question are affliction and beauty; for the beautiful gives us such a vivid sense of the presence of something good that we look for some purpose there, without even finding one. Like affliction, beauty compels us to ask: Why? Why is this thing beautiful? But rare are those who are capable of asking themselves this question for as long as a few hours at a time. The afflicted man's question goes on for hours, days, years; it ceases only when he has no strength left.

He who is capable not only of crying out but also of listening will hear the answer. Silence is the answer. This is the eternal silence for which Vigny [the romantic French poet] bitterly reproached God; but Vigny had no right to say how the just man should reply to the silence, for he was not one of the just. The just man loves. He who is capable not only of listening but also of loving hears this silence as the word of God.

Just as there is no tree like the Cross so there is no harmony like the silence of God. The Pythagoreans discerned this harmony in the fathomless eternal silence around the stars. In this world, necessity is the vibration of God's silence.

Our soul is constantly clamorous with noise, but there is one point in it which is silence, and which we never hear. When the silence of God comes to the soul and penetrates it and joins the silence which is secretly present in us, from then on we have our treasure and our heart in God; and space opens before us as the opening fruit of a plant divides in two, for we are seeing the universe from a point situated outside space.

This operation can take place in only two ways, to the exclusion of all others. There are only two things piercing enough to penetrate our souls in this way; they are affliction and beauty.

Often, one could weep tears of blood to think how many unfortunates are crushed by affliction without knowing how to make use of it. But, coolly considered, this is not a more pitiful waste than the squandering of the world's beauty. The brightness of the stars, the sound of the sea-waves, the silence of the hour before dawn – how often do they not offer themselves in vain to people's attention? To pay no attention to the world's beauty is, perhaps, so great a crime of ingratitude that it deserves the punishment of affliction. To be sure it does not always get it; but then the alternative punishment is a mediocre life, and in what way is a mediocre life preferable to affliction? Moreover, even in the case of great misfortune such people's lives are probably still mediocre. So far as conjecture is possible about sensibility, it would seem that the evil within a person is a protection against the external evil that attacks them in the form of pain. One must hope it is so, and that for the impenitent thief God has mercifully reduced to insignificance such useless suffering. In fact, it certainly is so, because that is the great temptation which affliction offers; it is always possible for an afflicted person to suffer less by consenting to become wicked.

The person who has known pure joy, if only for a moment, and who has therefore tasted the flavour of the world's beauty, for it is the same thing, is the only person for whom affliction is something devastating. At the same time, they are the only persons who have not deserved punishment. But, after all, for them it is no punishment; it is God himself holding their hand and pressing it



rather hard. For if he remains constant, what he will discover buried deep under the sound of his own lamentations is the pearl of the silence of God.

[Source: Simone Weil, *Gateway to God*, David Raper (ed.), Fontana Books, London, 1974. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.]

## NAUSEA

"On first reading Sartre's *Nausea*" by Colin Amery (with permission) from a Philosophy Pathways essay:

I remember exactly when I first read Sartre's *Nausea*. I was thirty. It was 1968. A revolution was beginning to erupt in Paris with Sartre active on the barricades in support of the workers and students. I then worked as a night watchman in Sydney at the opposite end of the world. On 25th April, just five days before the students began rioting on May day, I leapt without knowing of the revolution, into the heady world of . I quit the law where I made a modest living as a criminal advocate with the idea of devoting myself exclusively to the craft of writing philosophical novels. Vague reports of street fighting where Sartre had addressed the masses were reaching the antipodes. After the first month and no pay-checks I was feeling distinctly hungry. I had no mentor to speak of, and it was then that I made the acquaintance of Jean Paul Sartre and his novel *Nausea*.

It was like moving into a new and much imagined world. I had always wanted to be a writer. Now I had discovered a man who was both a writer and a philosopher. *Nausea* occupied the quiet hours close to dawn when I returned from a cleaning job that involved flushing out toilets in hotel latrines that were often clogged with vomit. The book was a wonderful antithesis to what my daily work routine involved. I started to inhabit two parallel worlds, which slowly became intertwined. The characters portrayed in Sartre's fiction I began to look for on the street. Sydney's George Street had one coffee bar run by a Greek with a slightly affected waiter who still imagined he was serving ouzo in Athens' Constitution Square. I put his habits down in my yellow-covered notebook so that one day he could creep into my fiction rather in the manner of Sartre's famous *garçon*.

At this time I had a girl friend I visited at the end of our mutual night shifts. She also might have stepped from the pages of literature. Her name was Juliet. I wrote poems about her — she was very beautiful — and we spent weekends at Bondi beach, communing about the mysteries of life as the surf beat its way to our door. She liked the novels of Dostoyevsky and for a while I played the part of her Raskolnikov. I guess this was my first existential relationship. The imagined world of the axe murderer was a dangerous one to stray into. Eventually, there would be a climax that teetered on the edge of our respective realities. I thought about Sartre's woman who wouldn't let on about her sexuality. I wish I could have shown the same restraint towards my Juliet, but we became embroiled in an affair of passionate intensity that made me decide to leave the law and seek solace in the twin beds of love and literature.

I saw my Juliet on our days off and we sat in cafes overlooking the beach at Watson's Bay talking about existentialism. She was a kind of guide and mentor, for she had arrived there first. I went to my job each night rather like the robotic waiter in Sartre's left bank cafe and went through the motions of my work. The pile of yellow pages got higher and higher, as I scrawled my strange signature across a phase in my life that was probably memorable. I walked across new

boundaries and found that man was condemned to be free. I had left my wife, the profession of law and I loved my Juliet. I was bold enough to celebrate that freedom and say hang to the consequences.

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## The NAUSEA

I live alone, entirely alone. I never speak to anyone, never; I receive nothing, I give nothing... When you live alone you no longer know what it is to tell something: the plausible disappears at the same time as the fiends. You let events flow past; suddenly you see people pop up who speak and who go away, you plunge into stories without beginning or end: you make a terrible witness. But in compensation, one misses nothing, no improbability or, story too tall to be believed in cafes. [14-15]

Objects should not touch because they are not alive. You use them, put them back in place, you live among them. They are useful nothing more. But they touch me, it is unbearable. I am afraid of being in contact with them as though they were living beasts. [19]

People who live in society have learned to see themselves in mirrors as they appear to their friends. Is that why my flesh is naked? You might say – yes you might say, nature without humanity... Things are bad! Things are very bad: I have it, the filth, the Nausea. [29]

The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it out there in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the café, I am the one who is within it. [31]

I grow warm, I begin to feel happy. There is nothing extraordinary in this, it is a small happiness of Nausea: it spreads at the bottom of the viscous puddle, at the bottom of our time – the time of purple suspenders, and broken chair seats; it is made of white, soft instants, spreading at the edge, like an oil stain. No sooner than born, it is already old, it seems as though I have known it for twenty years. [33]

I tear myself from the window and stumble across the room; I glue myself against the looking glass. I stare at myself, I disgust myself: one more eternity. Finally, I flee from my image and fall on the bed. I watch the ceiling I'd like to sleep. [46]

I am all alone, but I march like a regiment descending on a city... I am full of anguish: the slightest movement irks me. I can't imagine what they want with me. Yet I must choose: I surrender to the Passage Gillet, I shall never know what has been reserved for me. [77]

Nothing seemed true; I felt surrounded by cardboard scenery which could quickly be removed.... [106-7]

I can't say I feel relieved or satisfied, just the opposite, I am crushed. Only my goal is reached: I know what I have to know; I have understood all that has happened to me since January. The Nausea has not left me and I don't believe it will leave me so soon; but I no longer have to bear it, it is no longer an illness or a passing fit: it is I. [170]

## On EXISTENCE

The thing which was waiting was on alert, it pounced on me, it flows through me. I'm filled with it. It's nothing: I am the Thing. Existence, liberated, detached, floods over me. I exist. [134]

I hadn't the right to exist. I appeared by chance, I exited like a stone, a plant or a microbe. My life put out feelers towards small pleasures in every direction. Sometimes it sent out vague signals; at other times, I felt nothing more than a harmless buzzing... he (Jean Pacome) had used his right to live... He has always done his duty, is duty as son, husband, father, leader...For a right is nothing more than the other aspect of duty. [115-6]

I exist. It's sweet, so sweet, so slow. And light: you'd think it floated all by itself. It stirs. It brushes by me, melts and vanishes. Gently, gently. There is bubbling water in my throat, it caresses me- and now it comes up again into my mouth. For ever I shall have a little pool of whitish water in my mouth – lying low – grazing my tongue. And this pool is still me. And the tongue. And the throat is me. [134]

My thought is me: that's why I can't stop. I exist because I think... and I can't stop myself from thinking. At this very moment – it's frightful – if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing. I am the one who pulls myself from the nothingness to which I aspire. [135-6]

I am. I am. I exist, I think, therefore I am; I am because I think that I don't want to be, I think that I ... because ... ugh! I flee. [137] I exist, that's all. And that trouble is so vague, so metaphysical that I am ashamed of it. [143]

I was just thinking ... that here we sit, all of us, eating and drinking to preserve our precious existence and really there is nothing, nothing absolutely no reason for existing. [157]

I realized that there was no halfway house between non-existence and this flaunting abundance. If you existed, you had to exist all the way, as far as mouldness, bloatedness, obscenity were concerned. [172]

The world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence. [174]

The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as a necessity. To exist is simply to be there; those who exist let themselves be

encountered, but you can never deduce anything from them. I believe that there are people who have understood this. Only they tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary, causal being. But no necessary being can explain existence: contingency is not a delusion, a probability, which can be dissipated; it is the absolute, consequently, the perfect free gift. All is free, this park, this city, and myself. [176]

Existence is not something which lets itself be thought of from a distance; it must invade you suddenly, master you, weigh heavily on your heart like a great motionless beast – or else there is nothing at all. [177]

They did not want to exist; only they could not help it. [179] It was impossible for them not to exist. [181]

Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance, [180]

Existence is a fulness which man can never abandon. [180]

Existence is what I am afraid of. [214]

To do something is to create existence – and there is quite enough existence a sit is. [228]

An existant can never justify the existence of another existant. [237]

Now when I say "I," it seems hollow to me. I can't manage to feel myself very well, I am so forgotten. The only real thing left in me is existence which feels it exists... Consciousness forgotten, forsaken between these walls, under this grey sky. And here is the sense of existence: it is conscious of being superfluous. [227]

There is knowledge of the consciousness. It sees through itself, peaceful and empty between the walls, freed from the man who inhabited it; monstrous because empty. [228]

And I too wanted to be. That is all I wanted; and this is the last word. At the bottom of all these attempts which seemed without bounds, I find the same desire again: to drive existence out of me, to rid the passing moments of their fat, to twist them, dry them, purify myself, harden myself, to give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note. That could even make an apologue: there was a poor man who got in the wrong world. [234]

Behind the existence which falls from one present to the other, without a past, without a future, behind these sounds which decompose from day to day, peel off and slip towards death, the melody stays the same, young and firm, like a pitiless witness.

## On ADVENTURES

"What sort of adventures?" I asked him, astonished. "All sorts, Monsieur. Getting on the wrong train. Stopping in an unknown city. Losing your briefcase, being arrested by mistake, spending the night in prison. Monsieur, I believe the word adventure could be defined: an event out of ordinary without being necessarily extraordinary. [52]

Adventure – it was an event which happened to me... I never had adventures. Things have happened to me, events, incidents, anything you like. But no adventures. [53]

I have suddenly learned without apparent reason, that I have been lying to myself for ten years. And naturally, everything they tell about in books can happen in real life, but not in the same way. It is to this way of happening that I clung so tightly. [54]

But an adventure never returns nor is prolonged. [55]

This is what I thought: for the most banal event to become an adventure, you must (and this is enough) begin to recount it. This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his own life as if he were telling a story. But you have to choose: live or tell. [56]

But for me there is neither Monday nor Sunday: there are days which pass in disorder, and then, sudden lightning like this one. Nothing has changed and yet everything is different. I can't describe it, it's like the Nausea and yet it's just the opposite: at last an adventure happens to me and when I question myself I see that it happens that I am myself and that I am here; I am the one who splits in the night, I am as happy as the hero of a novel. [76]

We forget that the future was not yet there; the man was walking in the night without forethought, a night which offered him a choice of dull rich prizes, and he did not make his choice.

Perhaps there is nothing in the world I cling to as much as this feeling of adventure; but it comes when it pleases; it is gone so quickly and how empty I am once it has left. [78]

This feeling of adventure definitely does not come from events: I have proved it. It's rather the way in which the moments are linked together. [79]

The privileged situation, slowly, majestically, comes into other people's lives. Then the question on whether you want to make a great moment out of it. [198]

## On PHENOMENOLOGY (Past, Present, Future)

Things are entirely what they appear to be- and behind them ... there is nothing. [13]

Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable, monotonous addition. [57]

My memories are like coins in the devil's purse: when you open it you find only dead leaves. [47]

I build memories with my present self. I am cast out, forsaken in the present; I vainly try to rejoin the past: I cannot escape. [49]

The past is a landlord's luxury. Where shall I keep mine? You don't put your past in your pocket; you have to have a house. I have only my body: a man entirely alone, with his lonely body, cannot indulge in memories; they pass through him. I should not complain: all I wanted was to be free. [91]

How can I, who have not the strength to hold to my own past, hope to save the past of someone else? [130]

The true nature of the present revealed itself: it was what exists, and all that was not present did not exist. The past did not exist. Not at all. Not in things, not even in my thought. [130]

[Source: Denchu Jose Decino: <<http://www.geocities.com/sartresite/index.html>> *Nausea*, (1927) tr. Lloyd Alexander, New Directions, New York, 1964.]

## FREEDOM AND EXPERIENCE

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) met when she was 21 years old in a café near the Sorbonne where they were both studying. In the 30s Sartre gathered a group of intellectuals around him who virtually lived in the Left Bank cafés. After the war Sartre and de Beauvoir founded the monthly review *Les Temps modernes* together. She would become probably the greatest champion of rights for women and the elderly in the twentieth century. If, today, you take the Paris Métro and alight at St. Germain, come up onto the street and you will see the grey crumbling façade of L'Eglise Saint Germain on your right. Cross Place St. Germain and you will find a café called, *Les Deux Maggots*. This is where de Beauvoir sat and wrote. From the terrace, look to the right down the Rue Bonaparte, and you can see Sartre's apartment up near the top of the block with a commanding view of the street. Just off the Boulevard St Germain is *Le Café Flore*, Sartre's favourite café, where intellectuals smoked and talked for decades in the middle of the twentieth century. Their ideas have changed the world. The text that follows is taken from Sartre's brilliant debut novel, *La Nausée* (1938). The main character in the book and in this piece is Antoine Roquentin.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

I go into Camille's, in the rue des Horlogers. It's a very quiet place; they serve sauerkraut or cassoulet all night. People come here for supper after the theatre; the police send travellers here who arrive during the night and are hungry. Eight marble-topped tables. A bench upholstered in leather runs along the walls. Two mirrors speckled with reddish stains. The panes of two windows and of the door are of frosted glass. The bar is an alcove. There is also a room at one side. But I have never been in it; it is reserved for couples.

The waitress, a huge girl with red cheeks, can never prevent herself from laughing when she talks to a man. I order a cassoulet. The *patron* is called Camille and he's a tough character. The waitress goes off. I am alone in this dark old room.

A man comes in, shivering. 'Evening everybody.' He sits down without taking off his greenish overcoat. He rubs his long hands together, clasping and unclasping his fingers.

The waitress finally makes up her mind to serve him. She lazily raises her long black arm, takes hold of the bottle and brings it to him with a glass.

'Here you are, Monsieur.'

'Monsieur Achille,' he says urbanely. She pours without answering.

I slip Anny's letter back into my wallet: it has given me all it could; I can't go back to the woman who took it in her hands, folded it, and put it in its envelope. Is it even possible to think of somebody in the past? As long as we were in love with each other we didn't allow the tiniest of our moments, the smallest of our sorrows to be detached from us and left behind. Sounds, smells, degrees of light, even the thoughts we had not told each other – we took all this with us and it all remained alive: we never stopped enjoying it and suffering



from it in the present. Not a single memory; and implacable, torrid love, without a shadow, without a withdrawal, without even an evasion. Three years present at one and the same time. That is why we separated: we no longer had enough strength to bear the burden. And then, when Anny left me, all at once, all together the three years collapsed into the past. I didn't even suffer, I felt empty. Then time started flowing again and the emptiness grew larger. Then, in Saigon, when I decided to come back to France, all that was left – foreign faces, squares, quays beside long rivers – all that was wiped out. And now my past is nothing but a huge hole. My present: this waitress in the black blouse dreaming near the bar, this little fellow. It seems to me as if everything I know about life I have learnt from books. The palaces of Benares, the terrace of the Leper King, the temples of Java with their great broken staircases, have been reflected for a moment in my eyes, but they have remained yonder, on the spot. The tram which passes the Hôtel Printania in the evening doesn't take away the reflection of the neon sign in its window panes; it flares up for a moment and moves away with dark windows.

The waitress turns on the lights: it is barely two o'clock, but the sky is black, she no longer has enough light to sew by. A soft glow; people are in their houses, they have probably turned on their lights too. They read, they look out of the window at the sky. For them....it's different. They have grown older in another way. They live in the midst of legacies and presents, and each piece of furniture is a souvenir. Clocks, medallions, portraits, shells, paper-weights, screens, shawls. They have cupboards full of bottles, material, old clothes, newspapers; they have everything. The past is the property-owner's luxury.

Where should I keep mine? You can't put the past in your pocket; you have to have a house in which to store it. I possess nothing but my body; a man on his own, with nothing but his body, can't stop memories; they pass through him. I shouldn't complain: all I have ever wanted was to be free.

The door opens noisily: it is Doctor Rogé. 'Afternoon everybody.'

He trots over to the coat rack to hang his wide-brimmed felt hat on a peg.

The waitress without moving a muscle, studies that huge furrowed face. She is pensive. The little fellow has raised his head with a smile of relief.

Doctor Rogé slowly pivots his head and shoulders: he can't move his neck.

'Well, so it is you, you old swine,' he exclaims. 'So you aren't dead yet?'

He addresses the waitress: 'You let a fellow like that in here?'

He looks at the little man with his fierce eyes. A direct gaze which puts everything in its place. He explains: 'He's an old crackpot, that's what he is.'

He doesn't even take the trouble to show that he's joking. He knows that the old crackpot won't take offence, that he's going to smile. And sure enough, the other man smiles humbly.

The doctor laughs, he darts an engaging, conspiratorial glance at me: because of my size I suppose – and besides, I'm wearing a clean shirt – he is willing to let me in on his joke.

I don't laugh, I don't respond to his advances: so, without stopping laughing, he tries the fire of his eyes on me. We consider each other in silence for a few seconds; he looks me up and down with half-closed eyes, he classifies me. In the crackpot category? Or in the scoundrel category?

All the same he is the one who turns his head away.

I feel ashamed for Monsieur Achille. We are of the same sort, we ought to make common cause against them. But he has left me, he has gone over to their side: he honestly believes in Experience. Not in his, nor in mine. In Doctor Rogé's. A little while ago Monsieur Achille felt peculiar, he had the impression of being all alone; now he knows that there have been others like him, a great many others: Doctor Rogé has met them, he could tell Monsieur Achille the story of each one of them and say how it ended. Monsieur Achille is simply a case, and a case which allows itself to be easily reduced to a few commonplace ideas.

How I should like to tell him that he is being duped, that he's playing into the hands of self-important people. Professionals in experience? They have dragged out their lives in stupor and somnolence, they have married in a hurry, out of impatience, and they have made children at random. They have met other men in cafés, at weddings, at funerals. Now and then, caught in a current, they have struggled without understanding what was happening to them. Everything that has happened around them has begun and ended out of their sight; long obscure shapes, events from afar, have brushed rapidly past them, and when they have tried to look at them, everything was already over. And then, about forty, they baptize their stubborn little ideas and a few proverbs with the name of Experience, they begin to imitate slot machines; put a coin in the slot on the left and out come anecdotes wrapped in silver paper; put a coin in the slot on the right and you get precious pieces of advice which stick to your teeth like soft caramels. At this rate, I could get myself invited to people's houses and they would tell one another that I was a great traveller in the sight of Eternity. Yes: the Moslems squat to pass water; instead of ergotine, Hindu midwives use ground glass in cow dung; in Borneo, when a girl has a period, she spends three days and nights on the roof of her house. I have seen burials in gondolas in Venice, the Holy Week festivities in Seville, the Passion play at Oberammergau. Naturally, that's just a tiny sample of my experience: I could lean back in a chair and begin with a smile: 'Do you know Jihlava, Madame? It's a curious little town in Moravia where I stayed in 1924...'

'How true that is, Monsieur, how human. I had a similar case at the beginning of my career. It was in 1902. I was deputy magistrate at Limoges...'

The trouble is that I had too much of all that when I was young. I didn't belong to a family of professionals, but there are amateurs too. These are the secretaries, the office workers, the shopkeepers, the people who listen to others in cafés: about the age of forty they feel swollen with an experience which they can't get rid of. Luckily they've made children and they force them to swallow it on the spot. They would like to make us believe that their past isn't wasted, that their memories have been condensed and gently transformed into Wisdom. Convenient past! Pocket-size past, little gilt-edged book full of fine maxims. 'Believe me, I'm talking from experience, I've learnt everything I know from life.' Are we to understand that Life has undertaken to think for them? They explain the new by the old – and the old they have explained by the older still, like those historians who describe Lenin as the Russian Robespierre and Robespierre as the French Cromwell: when all is said and done, they have never understood anything at all... behind their self-importance you can distinguish a morose laziness: they see a procession of semblances pass by, they yawn, they think that there's nothing new under the sun. 'an old crackpot' – and Doctor

Rogé thought vaguely of other old crackpots, without being able to remember any one of them clearly. Now nothing Monsieur Achille can do will surprise us: *because* he's an old crackpot!

[Source: J.-P. Sartre, *Nausea*, tr., Robert Baldick, Penguin Books, 1965. Copyright pending.]

## ABSURDITY

Albert Camus (1913-1960) came from an impoverished background in Algeria, then a French colony, he moved to France in 1938 and worked as a journalist. He became a member of the resistance in World War II and with Jean-Paul Sartre founded the underground newspaper *Combat*. After the war Camus had a very public split from Sartre who (Camus rightly believed) was being fooled by Stalinist propaganda into supporting Communist politics. Camus eschewed political parties and championed justice for the individual and human rights. Camus did not write a lot but what he wrote is of enduring worth and won him international notice. His novels are *The Stranger* (1942); *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1946). His main theoretical work is *The Rebel* (1951). He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1957, but died in mid-life in a car accident. Our edited text comes from *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942).

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## THE TEXT

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must answer the question of life first. And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of the reply, for it will precede the definitive act. These are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect.

If I ask myself how to judge that this question is more urgent than that, I reply that one judges by the actions it entails. I have never seen anyone die for the ontological argument [to prove the existence of God]. Galileo who held a scientific truth of great importance abjured it with the greatest ease as soon as it endangered his life. In a certain sense, he did right. That truth was not worth being burnt at the stake. Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference. To tell the truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions. How to answer it?

Suicide has never been dealt with except as a social phenomenon. On the contrary, we are concerned here, at the outset, with the relationship between individual thought and suicide. An act like this is prepared within the silence of the heart, as is a great work of art. The man himself is ignorant of it. One evening he pulls the trigger or jumps. Of an apartment-building manager who had killed himself I was told that he had lost his daughter five years before, that he had changed greatly since and that that experience had 'undermined' him. A more exact word cannot be imagined.

There are many causes for suicide and generally the most obvious ones were not the most powerful. Rarely is suicide committed (yet the hypothesis is

not excluded) through reflection. What sets off the crisis is almost always unverifiable. Newspapers often speak of 'personal sorrows' or of 'incurable illness'. These explanations are plausible.

But it is hard to fix the precise instant, the subtle step when the mind opted for death. In a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it. It is merely confessing that 'life is not worth the trouble'. Living, naturally, is never easy. You continue making the gestures commanded by existence for many reasons, the first of which is habit. Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation and the uselessness of suffering.

But on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land [as given by religion]. This divorce between a person and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy people having thought of their own suicide, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this mood of absurdity and the longing for death.

At any street corner the feeling of absurdity can strike any person in the face. As it is, in its distressing nudity, in its light without effulgence, it is elusive. But that very difficulty deserves reflection. It is probably true that a man remains forever unknown to us and that there is in him something irreducible that escapes us. But practically I know people and recognize them by their behaviour, by the totality of their deeds, by the consequences caused in life by their presence.

All great deeds and all thoughts have a ridiculous beginning. Great works are often born on a street-corner or in a restaurant's revolving door. So it is with absurdity. The absurd world more than others derives its nobility from that abject birth. In certain situations, replying 'nothing' when asked what one is thinking about may be pretence in someone. Those who are loved realize this. But if that reply is sincere, if it symbolizes that odd mood in which the void becomes eloquent, in which the chain of daily gestures is broken, in which the heart vainly seeks the link that will connect it again, then it is as it were the first sign of absurdity.

It happens that stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins' – this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return to the grind or it is the definitive awakening. Time carries us, but a moment always comes when we have to carry it. We live on the future: 'tomorrow', 'later on', 'when you have made your way', 'you will understand when you are old enough'. Such irrelevancies are wonderful, for, the future is a matter of dying. Everyone lives as if no one knew that 'tomorrow' we die. This is because in reality there is no experience of death. Properly speaking, nothing has been experienced but what has been lived and made conscious. Here, it is barely

possible to speak of the experience of other's deaths. It is a substitute, an illusion, and it never quite convinces us. All the pretty speeches about the soul will have their contrary convincingly proved, at least for a time. From the dead body upon which a slap makes no mark, the soul has disappeared. This elementary and definitive aspect of living and dying, is the absurd mood. But if one is assured of these facts, what is one to conclude, how far is one to go to elude nothing? Is one to die voluntarily or to hope in spite of everything? Beforehand it is necessary to make a rapid inventory on the plane of intelligence.

My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. That evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together. I hold certain facts from which I cannot separate. What I know, what is certain, what I cannot deny, what I cannot reject – this is what counts. I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, resists me – that is what I understand.

If I were a tree among trees, a cat among animals, this life would have a meaning or rather this problem would not arise, for I should belong to this world. I should be this world to which I am now opposed by my whole consciousness and my whole insistence upon familiarity. This ridiculous reason of mine is what sets me in opposition to all creation. I cannot cross it out with the stroke of a pen. What I believe to be true I must therefore preserve. What seems to me so obvious, even against me, I must support. And what constitutes the basis of that conflict, of that break between the world and my mind, but the awareness of it?

At this point the problem is reversed. It was previously a question of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now becomes clear on the contrary that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully. Now, no one will live this fate, knowing it to be absurd, brought to light by consciousness. Negating one of the terms of the opposition on which he lives amounts to escaping it. To abolish conscious revolt is to elude the problem. The theme of permanent revolution is thus carried into individual experience. Living is keeping the absurd alive. Keeping it alive is above all contemplating it. One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between the person and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man with the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends to the whole of experience. It is the constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it.

That revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of a life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it. The sight of human pride is unequalled. No disparagement is of any use. That discipline that the mind imposes on itself, that will conjured up out of nothing,

that face-to-face struggle have something exceptional about them. To impoverish that reality whose inhumanity constitutes man's majesty is tantamount to impoverishing him himself. I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life and yet I must carry on alone.

[Source: Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, tr., Justin O'Brien, *Penguin Modern Classics*, Penguin Books, 1981]

## NEGATIONS

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was the most widely regarded and controversial humanist philosopher of the twentieth century. He was born and educated in Paris during World War I. He fought on the Maginot Line in World War II and was captured and repatriated in 1941. He was then active in the French Resistance Movement. After the war he devoted his life to literature and philosophy and he travelled widely. His original and thought-provoking novel *La Nausée* [Nausea] was published in 1938. His major work in fiction was the trilogy, *Les Chemins de la liberté* (1945-49) [The Roads to Freedom]. His most prominent philosophical work was *L'Être et le Néant* (1943) [Being and Nothingness]. Sartre was associated with Existentialism and Marxism, but neither of these were ends in themselves, only part of his '*situation engagée*'. Freedom, egalitarianism and humanity were both his motives and ideals. Sartre's long and stormy relationship with the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir drew public attention to him, as did his refusal of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964. In the text that follows Sartre is considering the being or existence of nothingness.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the café a quarter of an hour late. Pierre is always punctual. Will he have waited for me? I look at the room, the patrons, and I say, "He is not here." Is there an intuition of Pierre's absence, or does negation indeed enter in only with judgement? At first sight it seems absurd to speak here of intuition since to be exact there could not be an intuition of *nothing* and yet the absence of Pierre is this nothing. Popular consciousness, however, bears witness to this intuition. Do we not say, for example, "I suddenly saw that he was not there." Is this just a matter of misplacing the negation? Let us look a little closer.

It is certain that the café by itself with its patrons, its tables, its booths, its mirrors, its light, its smoky atmosphere, and the sounds of voices, rattling saucers, and footsteps which fill it – the café is a fullness of being. And all the intuitions of detail, which I can have, are filled by these odours, these sounds, these colours, all phenomena which have a transphenomenal being [ie. they are apparent to everyone]. Similarly Pierre's actual presence in a place which I do not know is also a plentitude of being. We seem to have found fullness everywhere. But we must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground [gestalt]. No one object, no group of objects is especially designed to be organised as either specifically either ground or figure; all depends on the direction of my attention. When I enter this café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organisation of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear. This organisation of the café as the ground is an original nihilation [ground of nothing or non-Pierre, out of which Pierre will appear]. Each element of the setting, a person, a table, a chair, attempts to isolate itself, to lift itself upon the ground constituted by the totality of the other objects, only to fall back once more into the undifferentiation of this ground; it melts into the ground. For the ground is that which is seen only in addition, that which is the object of a purely marginal attention. Thus the original nihilation of all the figures which appear and are swallowed up in the



total neutrality of a ground is the necessary condition for the appearance of the principal figure, which is here the person of Pierre. This nihilation is given to my intuition; I am witness to the successive disappearance of all the objects which I look at – in particular of the faces, which detain me for an instant (Could this be Pierre?) and which as quickly decompose precisely because they “are not” the face of Pierre. Nevertheless if I should finally discover Pierre, my intuition would be filled by a solid element, I should be suddenly arrested by his face and the whole café would organise itself around him as a discrete presence.

But now Pierre is not here. This does not mean that I discover his absence in some precise spot in the establishment. In fact Pierre is absent from the whole café; his absence fixes the café in its evanescence; the café remains *ground*; it persists in offering itself as an undifferentiated totality to my only marginal attention; it slips into the background; it pursues its nihilation. Only it makes itself ground for a determined figure; it carries the figure everywhere in front of it, presents the figure everywhere to me. This figure which slips constantly between my look and the solid real objects of the café is precisely a perpetual disappearance; it is Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café. So that what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness; it is the nothingness of the ground, the nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure, and it is the figure – the nothingness which slips as a *nothing* to the surface of the ground. It serves as foundation for the judgement – “Pierre is not here”. It is in fact the intuitive apprehension of a double nihilation. To be sure, Pierre’s absence supposes an original relation between me and this café; there is an infinity of people who are without any relation with this café for want of a real expectation which establishes their absence. But, to be exact, I myself expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to *happen* as a real event concerning this café. It is an objective fact at present that I have discovered this absence, and it presents itself as a synthetic relation between Pierre and the setting in which I am looking for him. Pierre absent haunts this café and is the condition of its self-nihilating organization as ground. By contrast, judgements which I can make subsequently to amuse myself, such as, “*Wellington* is not in this café, *Paul Valéry* is no longer here, *etc.*” – these have a purely abstract meaning; they are pure applications of the principle of negation without real or efficacious foundation, and they never succeed in establishing a real relation between the café and *Wellington* or *Valéry*. Here the relation “is not” is merely *thought*. This example is sufficient to show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgement; it is the negative judgement, on the contrary, which is conditioned and supported by non-being.

[Source: J-P. Sartre, ‘The Problem of Nothingness’, tr. Hazel E. Barnes, in *Essays in Existentialism*, ed. Wade Baskin, Citadel Press, N.J., 1999. Temporary posting.]

## BAD FAITH

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) was a philosopher of freedom. Sartre wrote that as persons we are not 'this' or 'that', but "we *make ourselves* what we are." Existence, he thought, is 'beyond good and evil'. Therefore, what 'good' and 'bad' are depends on what we make them. And the making of God is a human project too. But Sartre thought that we are fearful of freedom, it is too immense for us, and so we hide it from ourselves; this he called bad faith. Sartre's philosophical friend, Michel Rybalka, said, "the most important thing to Sartre is whether or not you are lying to yourself." To hide our freedom from ourselves means that, in a sense we hide from ourselves and we do this in very many ways which we call 'ordinary, everyday life'. Everyday life, Sartre thought, hides what we are and what we might be. Everyday life means, he said, that "I am not what I am". But the strange thing is that nobody notices, because everybody, caught up in everyday life, lives in the same unreal dream.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

Our starting point: "What must be the being of man if he is the kind of being that is able to be in 'bad faith'?"

For example, here is a woman out on a first date. She knows full well the intentions of the man she is with in regard to her. She knows too that she must come to some decision about him. But she is in no rush at all: she focuses herself only on what is respectful and discreet in her partner's behaviour. She does not see any of what is passing between them as leading behaviour, as merely a preliminary hint of the intimacy that will take place later on; that is to say, she deliberately does not want to see what all this is more than likely leading to. She keeps herself fastidiously in the present and interprets everything he says in purely overt terms. For instance, if he says, "you're an extremely attractive young lady" she disarms the sexual connotation of the words, and in his behaviour, by taking them in a purely immediate sense, envisaging it all totally objectively. What he is saying is obviously sincere and respectable like the table is round or square, and the wall-paper blue or gray. As she listens to him she fixes his qualities with the permanence of things which are just there and do not suggest anything other than that. She behaves like this because she can't connect with what she wants, with her desire: while she is instinctively aware of the desire she inspires, she would be humiliated and horrified if she could see it as it is, naked lust. While on the other hand were his respect nothing more than polite she would feel slightly insulted. To make her happy so that she will go the extra yard with him, what she needs is for him to address her *as a person*, that is to say, she needs to see that he

recognises her as a free human being rather than as, primarily, a sex object. But at the same time it is necessary that this address be shown to be fully felt, passionate, aimed right at her, at her body, as though purely at a thing. Just at the moment, however, she refuses to acknowledge the desire between them for what it is, she cannot give it a name, and recognises it only to the extent that it masks itself as admiration, esteem, respect, and loses itself in a general warmth of their exchange. But now he takes her hand. Her partner's sudden act risks changing the situation and forcing an immediate decision: leaving her hand in his she consents to the flirtation, she engages with it; but pulling it away would break the spell, the harmonious tension, the trepidation and charm of the moment. But now that he actually has her hand in his the moment has come to delay all decision. You know what happens next: the young woman leaves her hand where it is without *having noticed* doing so! She hasn't noticed because, suddenly, at that exact moment, she has become totally animated about something or other. Suddenly she has switched the conversation with her partner into a sheer realm of laughter and gaiety, in which she now talks excitedly about life itself, about her life in particular, and all her words and effusion stream toward the one essential: that she is a person, a consciousness in her own right. And meanwhile, during the time soul is sundered from body in this way, her soft hand lies peaceably between his warm hands, neither consenting, nor resisting - a thing.

We have to say that this young lady is in bad faith. But we can plainly see that she uses every device to keep herself *in* bad faith. She has disarmed the behaviour of her partner by reducing it to what it is not, by eliminating from it all suggestion, she thus turns his behaviour into something in and of itself. But she allows herself to play with his desire to the extent that she knows it for what it is not, which means, to the extent to which she also recognises his desire beyond this mere knowledge. Lastly, while physical sensations assail her, perhaps deeply, she realises herself *as not being* this body as such, and she distances herself from it, seemingly regarding it in the passive, as an object to which things happen, things which she neither provokes nor can avert, but she can't help it because everything is honed in on her from without. (94-95)

If man is what he is, bad faith has to be impossible, in that case sincerity is not abstract any more, it becomes realised by my very being. But is man what he is? And generally, how is it possible for the being who is conscious of being - man - simply to be? If honesty or sincerity is a universal value, what does that say about the maxim, "it is necessary to be what you are" meant in more than just a regulative sense for judgements and concepts, but expressively and expressly what I am? This poses more than a straightforward question of knowledge, it raises the whole question of being. What is being, what is being if I am the prototype of it? In this sense it would be necessary to *make*

*ourselves* what we are. But what *are we* then if we are constantly obliged to make ourselves whatever we are, if being obliged to be what we are is our very mode of being in this world?

Consider the waiter; deft, unobtrusive movements, a little too precise, over-quick perhaps, he starts towards customers slightly too readily, and leans over them slightly too keenly, his voice, his eyes expressing slightly more solicitude for their orders than is due, then the sudden retreat, trying to give the impression by his robotic walk of high purpose, forever juggling his tray with the temerity of a rope-dancer, keeping it in an always unstable, always broken equilibrium, that he always merely restores by a light movement of the arm and hand. All this resembles a game. In everything he does, his swift successive movements, his voice, his mimicry he seems mechanical. He gives to everything he does a smoothness and relentless speed. He plays, he amuses himself. But what is it at which he plays? It shouldn't take a moment to see: he plays *at being* a waiter. There is nothing to be surprised about in this: the game is one of territorial pretend and display. The child explores his body by playing with it and comes to know its different parts; the waiter plays with the part of waiter, by *realising* it. This obligation is no different from that of any tradesman: their part is always a ceremony, and their public demand such ceremony of them, there is the grocer's dance, and the tailor's, the auctioneer's, by which they are forced to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but the grocer, auctioneer or tailor. A dreamy grocer is an annoyance to the customer. Convention dictates that he keep to being the grocer, like the way a guard on alert turns himself into a toy soldier, eyes fixed in front, unseeingly, he is not supposed to be looking at anything, because it is the rule ("fixed at ten paces") which decides his look and not the interest of the moment. We can see the hidden walls here which imprison man in what he is. As if we live in perpetual fear that the prisoner will escape, that he'll break out and elude his condition. Parallel then, is the waiter, who inwardly, perhaps, is not immediately a waiter in the sense that this pen is a pen, or this glass is a glass. There is no point at which he is unable to form reflexive judgements or concepts about his state of affairs. He knows exactly what "waiting" means: having to get out of bed at 5 a.m., sweep up and get the coffee on before opening time etc. He knows what rights go with the job: the right to keep the tips, to join the union etc. But all these concepts, all these judgements point to a larger reality of which they are but a part. In particular they point to the possibility of abstraction, to the "subject of rights", the one upon whom rights are conferred. And it is precisely this subject that I *have to be* but that I am not. Not that it is that I don't want to be this person and want not to be myself. But rather, there is nothing in common, no point of contact, between his being and mine. He is a "representation" to others as well as to himself, which is to say, he is unable to be except *by*

*representation.* But to put it more precisely, if being a waiter is representative of me, I cannot be it, I am separated from it like an object from a subject, although nothing actually separates me, and yet this nothing is what isolates me being a waiter from me being myself, I have no power to be, I can only *play at being*, that is to say, to imagine *that* is what I am. And, by the same token, what I pretend to be, I affect with nothingness for the difference between me the waiter and me myself, that is, nothing, has an affect on me. I am happy to carry out my waiting duties, but my real power to be is neutralised, like the actor playing Hamlet mechanically making the *typical gestures* of my role and by my gestures, making myself into this imaginary waiter, whose "analogy" I have become. I try to make the integral part (*être-en-soi*) of the waiter real, as if it were within my power to confer value on the role merely by the urgency of my actions in carrying out my duties, as if I get up everyday at 5 a.m. because I want to, as if the boss isn't going to fire me if I simply stayed in bed. As if just because I sustain this same role I don't transcend it on every side, as if really I am not *much more* than all this that you see. Although, this said, there is a sense in which *I am* a waiter - otherwise couldn't I equally well call myself a diplomat or a journalist? However, the point is that I am a waiter in the mode of *being that which I am not*.

[Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le Néant*, Gallimard, Paris, 1943. Excerpts from pp. 94-110. Translation Matthew Del Nevo. All Rights Reserved.]

## ENGAGEMENT AND ETHICS

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was the most widely regarded and controversial humanist philosopher of the twentieth century. He was born and educated in Paris during World War I. He fought on the Maginot Line in World War II and was captured and repatriated in 1941. He was then active in the French Resistance Movement. After the war he devoted his life to literature and philosophy and he travelled widely. His original and thought-provoking novel *La Nausée* [Nausea] was published in 1938. His major work in fiction was the trilogy, *Les Chemins de la liberté* (1945-49) [The Roads to Freedom]. His most prominent philosophical work was *L'Être et le Néant* (1943) [Being and Nothingness]. Sartre was associated with Existentialism and Marxism, but neither of these were ends in themselves, only part of his '*situation engagée*'. Freedom, egalitarianism and humanity were both his motives and ideals. Sartre's long and stormy relationship with the feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir drew public attention to him, as did his refusal of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964. In the text that follows Sartre is considering a notion of existence as the real basis of any talk of humanism.

\* \* \* \* \*

### THE TEXT

Man makes himself. He isn't ready made at the start. In choosing his ethics, he makes himself, and the force of circumstances is such that he can not abstain from choosing one...

I shall cite the case of one of my students who came to see me under the following circumstances: his father was on bad terms with his mother, and, moreover, was inclined to be a collaborationist [with the Nazis occupying Paris]; his older brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940, and the young man, with somewhat immature but generous feelings, wanted to avenge him. His mother lived alone with him, very much upset by the half-treason of her husband and the death of her older son; the boy was her only consolation.

The boy was faced with the choice of leaving England and joining the Free French Forces – that is, leaving his mother behind – or remaining with his mother and helping her to carry on. He was fully aware that the woman lived only for him and that his going off – and perhaps his death – would plunge her into despair. He was also aware that every act that he did for his mother's sake was a sure thing, in the sense that it was helping her to carry on, whereas every effort he made toward going off and fighting was an uncertain move which might run aground and prove completely useless; for example, on his way to England he might, while passing through Spain, be detained indefinitely in a Spanish camp; he might reach England or Algiers and be stuck in an office at a desk job. As a result, he was faced with two very different kind of action: one, concrete, immediate, but concerning only one individual; the other concerned an incomparably vaster group, a national collectivity, but for that very reason was dubious, and might be interrupted en route. And, at the same time, he was wavering between two kinds of ethics. On the one hand, an ethics of sympathy, of personal devotion; on the other, a broader ethics, but one whose efficacy was more dubious. He had to choose between the two.

Who could help him? Christian doctrine? No. Christian doctrine says, "Be charitable, love your neighbour, take the more rugged path, etc., etc." But which is the more rugged path? Whom should he love as a brother? The fighting man or his mother? Which does the greater good, the vague act of fighting in a group, or the concrete act of helping a particular human being to go on living? Who can decide *a priori*? [on principle, or by reason alone]. Nobody. No book of ethics can tell him. The Kantian ethics says, "Never treat any person as a means, but as an end." Very well, if I stay with mother I'll treat her as an end and not as a means; but by virtue of this very fact, I'm running the risk of treating the people around me who are fighting, as means; and, conversely, if I go to join those who are fighting, I'll be treating them as an end, and, by doing that, I run the risk of treating my mother as a means.

If values are vague, and if they are always too broad for the concrete and specific case that we are considering, the only thing left for us is to trust our instincts. That's what this young man tried to do; and when I saw him, he said, "In the end, feeling is what counts. I ought to choose whichever pushes me in one direction. If I feel that I love my mother enough to sacrifice everything else for her – my desire for vengeance, for action, for adventure – then I'll stay with her. If, on the contrary, I feel that my love for my mother isn't enough, I'll leave."

But how is the value of a feeling determined? What gives his feeling for his mother value? Precisely the fact that he remained with her. I may say that I like so-and-so well enough to sacrifice a certain amount of money for him, but may say so only if I've done it. I may say "I love my mother well enough to remain with her" if I have remained with her. The only way to determine the value of this affection is, precisely, to perform an act which confirms and defines it. But, since I require this affection to justify my act, I find myself caught in a vicious circle.

On the other hand, Gide has well said that a mock feeling and a true feeling are almost indistinguishable; to decide that I love my mother and will remain with her, or remain with her by putting on an act, amount somewhat to the same thing. In other words, the feeling is formed by the acts one performs; so, I can not refer to it in order to act upon it. Which means that I can neither seek within myself the true condition which will impel me to act, nor apply to a system of ethics for concepts which will permit me to act. You will say, "At least, he did go to a teacher for advice." But if you seek advice from a priest, for example, you have chosen this priest; you already knew, more or less, just about what advice he was going to give you. In other words, choosing your advisor is involving yourself. The proof of this is that if you are a Christian, you will say, "Consult a priest." But some priests are collaborating, some are just marking time, some are resisting. Which to choose? If the young man chooses a priest who is resisting or collaborating, he has already decided on the kind of advice he's going to get. Therefore, in coming to see me he knew the answer I was going to give him, and I had only to answer to give: "You're free, choose, that is, invent." No general ethics can show you what is to be done; there are no omens in the world. The Catholics will reply, "But there are." Granted – but, in any case, I myself choose the meaning they have.

When I was a prisoner, I knew a rather remarkable young man who was a Jesuit. He had entered the Jesuit order in the following way: he had had a

number of very bad breaks; in childhood, his father died, leaving him in poverty, and he was a scholarship student at a religious institution where he was constantly made to feel that he was being kept out of charity; then, he failed to get any of the honours and distinctions that children like; later on, at about eighteen, he bungled a love affair; finally, at twenty-two, he failed in military training, a childish enough matter, but it was the last straw.

This young fellow might well have felt that he had botched everything. It was a sign of something, but of what? He might have taken refuge in bitterness or despair. But he very wisely looked upon all this as a sign that he was not made for secular triumphs, and that only the triumphs of religion, holiness, and faith were open to him. He saw the hand of God in all this, and so he entered the order. Who can help seeing that he alone decided what the sign meant?

Some other interpretation might have been drawn from this series of setbacks: for example: that he might have done better to turn carpenter or revolutionist. Therefore he is fully responsible for the interpretation.

There was a madwoman who had hallucinations; someone used to speak to her on the telephone and give her orders. Her doctor asked her, "Who is it that talks to you?" She answered, "He says it's God." What proof did she really have that it was God? If an angel comes to me, what proof is there that it is an angel? And if I hear voices, what proof is there that they come from heaven and not from hell, or from the subconscious, or a pathological condition? What proves that they are addressed to me? What proof is there that I have been appointed to impose my choice and my conception of man on humanity? I'll never find any proof or sign to convince me of that. If a voice addresses me, it is always for me to decide that this is an angel's voice; if I consider that such an act is a good one, it is I who will choose to say that it is good rather than bad.

Ethical principles that are too abstract run aground in trying to decide action. Once again, take the case of the student. In the name of what, in the name of what great moral maxim do you think he could have decided, in perfect peace of mind, to abandon his mother or to stay with her? There is no way of judging. The content is always concrete and thereby unforeseeable; there is always the element of invention. The one thing that counts is knowing whether the inventing that has been done, has been done in the name of freedom.

For example, let us look at the following two cases. You will see to what extent they correspond, yet differ. Take *The Mill on the Floss*. We find a certain young girl, Maggie Tulliver, who is an embodiment of the value of passion and who is aware of it. She is in love with a young man, Stephen, who is engaged to an insignificant young girl. This Maggie Tulliver, instead of heedlessly preferring her own happiness, chooses, in the name of human solidarity, to sacrifice herself and give up the man she loves. On the other hand, Sanseverina, in *The Charterhouse of Parma*, believing that passion is man's true value, would say that great love deserves sacrifices; that it is to be preferred to the banality of the conjugal love that would tie Stephen to the young ninny he had to marry. She would choose to sacrifice the girl and fulfill her happiness; and, as Stendhal shows, she is even ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of passion, if this life demands it. Here we are in the presence of two strictly opposed moralities. I claim that they are much the same thing; in both cases what has been set up as the goal is freedom.

[Source: J-P. Sartre, 'The Humanism of Existentialism' (1947), public domain.]



## THINKING FOR ONESELF

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was brought up at home by a mother who was a devout Roman Catholic. She excelled at the Cours Désir, the private school where she was educated and later at the Sorbonne, where she met Sartre in 1929. She was involved in the French Resistance during the war and later founded *Les Temps Modernes*, a critical and topical journal, with Sartre. De Beauvoir was an intellectual who engaged in the issues of her day and who travelled widely in Europe and America. Although vocal on subjects such as women's rights, elderly rights, abortion (she thought there were circumstances in which it was permissible) and sexual violence, she remained underneath her public persona, primarily a writer. Our text is taken from the first volume of her four volume autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, an ironic title as it turned out. The author is recalling her early teens.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

It was very difficult for me to think for myself, for the standard of values I was taught was both monolithic and incoherent. If my parents had had differences of opinion, I could have compared those opinions. Or one firm line of argument would have given me something to get my teeth in. But brought up as I was on convent morals and paternal nationalism, I was always getting bogged down in contradictions. Neither my mother nor my teachers doubted for a moment that the Pope was elected by the Holy Spirit; yet my father thought His Holiness should not interfere in world affairs and my mother agreed with him; Pope Leo XIII, by devoting encyclicals to 'social questions' had betrayed his saintly mission; Pius X, who had not breathed a word about such things, was a saint. So I had to swallow the paradox that the man chosen by God to be his representative on earth had not to concern himself with earthly things. France was the elder daughter of the Roman Catholic Church; she owed obedience to her mother. Yet national values came before Catholic virtues; when a collection was being made at Saint-Sulpice for 'the starving children of Central Europe', my mother was indignant and refused to give anything for 'the Boche'. In all eventualities, patriotism and concern for maintaining the established order of things were considered more important than Christian charity. Telling lies was an offence against God; yet Papa could claim that in committing a forgery Colonel Henry had acted like an upright man. Killing was a crime, but the death penalty must not be done away with. At an early age I was indoctrinated in the compromises of casuistry and sophistry, to make a clear distinction between God and Caesar and to render unto each his due; all the same, it was most disconcerting to find Caesar always got the better of God. When we view the world at the same time through the verses of the Gospel and through the columns of the daily press, the sight tends to get blurred. There was nothing else I could do but to take refuge, with lowered head, under the wing of authority.

[Source: Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, tr. James Kirkup, *Penguin Modern Classics*, Penguin Books, 1963. Copyright permission pending.]

## THE QUESTION OF SOCIETY

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was born in Paris above the Café de la Rotonde in Montparnasse. Her childhood was fairly unremarkable, but by hard work combined with talent she rose to become one of the most well-known and radical intellectuals in Europe and the author of *The Second Sex* (1954), one of the most important and almost certainly the best written book by a critic of patriarchy and bigotry. Simone de Beauvoir later championed the cause of the elderly in our society. She won the prestigious Prix Goncourt in 1954 for her novel *The Mandarins*, which was loosely based on the lives and loves of left bank intellectuals, like Sartre, with whom she was on intimate terms her whole adult life, but never married. Our text is taken from the first volume of her four volume autobiography, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, an ironic title as it turned out. The author is recalling her early teens.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

I loved the country so much that the farmer's life seemed to me a very happy one. If I ever had a glimpse into one the labourer's way of life, I could hardly have failed to doubt the correctness of my assumptions; but I knew nothing of it. Before her marriage, Aunt Lili, with no work of her own, occupied her time with 'good works'. She sometimes took me with her to give toys to specially chosen under-privileged children; the poor did not seem to me to be very unhappy. There were many kindly souls who gave them charity and the sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul devoted themselves especially to their service. There were a few discontented ones among the poor: they were the would-be-poor, who stuffed themselves with turkey at Christmas, or wicked ones who drank. Some books – Dickens' novels and Hector Malot's *Sans famille* – described the hard life of the poor; I thought the miner's lot, cooped up all day in dark pits, and at the mercy of any sudden fall of rock, was terrible. But I was assured that times had changed. The workers worked much less, and earned much more; since the advent of trade unions, the real victims had been the employers. The workers, who were much luckier than we were, didn't have to 'keep up appearances' and so they could treat themselves to roast chicken every Sunday; their wives bought the best cuts in the markets and could even afford silk stockings. They were used to hard work and squalid homes: these things did not distress them as they would us. Their recriminations were not justified by the facts. 'Besides', my father would say, raising his shoulders, 'they're not dying of starvation!' No, if the workers hated the bourgeoisie, it was because they were conscious of our superiority. Communism and socialism were the results of envy. 'And envy,' my father would add, 'is not a pretty thing.'

I only once came into contact with real destitution. Louise and her husband, the slater, lived in a room in the rue de Madame, a garret right at the top of the house; she had a baby and I went to visit her with my mother. I had never set foot in a sixth-floor back before. The dreary little landing with its dozen identical doors made my heart sink. Louise's tiny room contained a brass bedstead, a cradle, and a table on which stood a small oil stove; she slept, cooked,

ate, and lived with her husband and child between these four walls; all around the landing there were families confined to stifling little holes like this; the comparative promiscuity in which I myself had to live and the monotony of bourgeois life oppressed my spirits. But here I got a glimpse of a universe in which the air you breathed smelt of soot, in which no ray of light ever penetrated the filth and squalor: existence here was a slow death. Not long after that, Louise lost her baby, and was left without anything: such terrible distress should have shaken the world to its foundations. 'It's not right!' I told myself. I wasn't only thinking of the dead child but also of that sixth-floor landing. But in the end I dried my tears without having called society into question.

[Source: Simone de Beauvoir, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*, tr. James Kirkup, Penguin Modern Classics, Penguin Books, 1963. Copyright permission pending.]

## WHAT IS ART?

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) was one of the most prominent philosophers of the twentieth century. He was born in Vienna and went to study Engineering at the University of Manchester when he was 19. He began instead to investigate the foundations of mathematics with a fervour that brought him into the orbit of Bertrand Russell (1872-1970). Russell, England's most distinguished philosopher, ushered Wittgenstein into studying Philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge, even though Wittgenstein didn't have the entry qualifications. Tired with academia, in 1913 Wittgenstein retreated to a cottage at the edge of the Sogne fjord, north of Bergen in Norway. He entered active military service for Austria on the Russian front in World War I. During his time in the trenches, and later in an Italian prisoner of war camp, he thought through, and finished, what would be one of the most important philosophical texts of the twentieth century, and the only work Wittgenstein would publish in his life-time, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (German edn. 1921; English edn. 1922).

After the war Wittgenstein became a country school teacher in Lower Austria, an assistant gardener in a monastery, an architect in Vienna, then in 1929 he returned to Cambridge where he was awarded a degree and made a fellow of Trinity College. He became a British citizen in 1938. During World War II Wittgenstein abandoned his new position at Cambridge and worked as a porter in Guy's Hospital in London, then as a lab assistant in Newcastle. From 1945 until 1947 he was a Professor of Philosophy at Cambridge. He died of cancer in 1951. His *Philosophical Investigations*, mostly written in a solitary hut on the coast of Galway in Ireland in the late forties, was published posthumously (in 1953). It is widely regarded as the most original philosophical achievement of the twentieth century. Wittgenstein's so-called 'Blue' and 'Brown' Books (1958) are collections of notes taken by Wittgenstein's students in the thirties, known by the colour of their original bindings, which circulated unofficially among budding philosophers at Cambridge. Our text comes from a 1947 notebook, the same year in which Wittgenstein also noted the following: "Sometimes a sentence can be understood only if it is read at the *right tempo*. My sentences are all supposed to be read slowly."

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### FOREWORD

Lev Tolstoy (1828-1910) who wrote two of the greatest novels in the history of any language – *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1877), also wrote the short treatise *What is Art?* (1898). Although short and simply written Tolstoy worked on this treatise for 15 years. Tolstoy was aggravated by academic approaches that treated art aesthetically. Tolstoy's iconoclastic starting point was that intellectuals and especially arty academics didn't know what they were talking about – in other words, they didn't know what *art* was. The thrust of Tolstoy's treatise is that all art is symbol. "If it had been possible for the artist to explain in words what he wished to say, he would have said it in words. But he has said it in art, because it is impossible to convey the feeling he experienced in any other way." (pp.94-5). What Tolstoy means by 'feeling' is close to what we mean by 'intuition' – something unspoken that we see in the mind's eye or hear in the mind's ear

and translate into terms called art. “The chief peculiarity of that feeling is that the perceiver merges with the artist to such a degree that it seems to him that the perceived object has been made, not by someone else, but by himself, and that everything expressed by the object is exactly what he has long been wanting to express.”

“If a person experiences this intuitive ‘feeling’, if he becomes infected with the author’s inwardness, if he feels his merging with others, then the object that calls up this state is art; if there is no such infection, no merging with the author and those perceiving the work – there is no art.” “The stronger the infection, the better the art is as art, regardless of its content – that is, independently of the worth of feelings it conveys.” (p.121) Excellence of expression (eg. clarity, colour) contribute to a work’s infectiousness. Whether the content of an artwork is good or bad depends upon its continued infectiousness – for instance Shakespeare continues to infect us (although Tolstoy didn’t like Shakespeare) and so does Tolstoy himself. A work of art is therefore a *living* thing. A work which no longer lives in people’s senses and contributes to their inwardness is dead and not art, but a mere artifact and museum piece.

[Source: Tolstoy, *What is Art?* tr., Richard Pevear & Larissa Volokhonsky, *Penguin Classics*, Penguin Books, 1995.]

## THE TEXT

There is a lot to be learned from Tolstoy’s bad theorising about how a work of art conveys ‘a feeling’.

– You really could call it, not exactly the expression of a feeling, but at least an expression of feeling, or a felt expression. And you could say too that in so far as people understand it, they ‘resonate’ in harmony with it, respond to it. You might say: the work of art does not aim to convey something else, just itself. Just as, when I pay someone a visit, I don’t just want to make him have feelings of such and such a sort; what I mainly want is to visit him, though of course I should like to be well received too.

And it does start to get quite absurd if you say that an artist wants the feelings he had when writing to be experienced by someone else who reads his work. Presumably I can think I understand a poem (e.g.), understand it as its author would wish me to – but what *he* may have felt in writing it does not concern me *at all*.

This second text is by Martin Heidegger:

## TEXT

A painting by Van Gogh. A pair of rough peasant shoes, nothing else. Actually the painting represents nothing. But as to what *is* in that picture, you are immediately alone with it as though you yourself were making your way wearily homeward with your hoe

on an evening in late autumn after the last potato fires have died down. What is here? The canvas? The brush strokes? The spots of colour?

[Sources: Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, tr. Peter Winch, University of Chicago 1984. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved. Heidegger "The Origin of the Work of Art," (1950) in, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Tr. Albert Hofstadter, Harper & Row 1971. Permission pending.]

## HUMAN RIGHTS

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was a student of Martin Heidegger at Marburg in the 1920s and later of Karl Jaspers at Heidelberg. She vigorously opposed Nazism in the 1930s and married a former associate of the Zionist, Rosa Luxemburg, in Paris in 1940. Soon afterward she and her husband were forced to flee for their lives from the Nazis who invaded France in 1941. In New York Arendt became active on behalf of Jewish organisations. Later she defended Heidegger whose reputation had been grievously tarnished by his involvement with the early years of the Nazi movement. Arendt became internationally famous for her works written in America: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), *Between Past and Future* (1961) and *On Revolution* (1968). These works are inspirational and controversial. Our text consists of a series of short excerpts from *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a provocative work, a work that has become more relevant over the decades since it was written; virtually every paragraph of it is ablaze with insight.

\* \* \* \* \*

### TEXT

The declaration of the rights of Man at the end of the eighteenth century was a turning point in history. It meant nothing more or less than that from then on Man, and not God's command or the customs of history, should be the source of Law. The declaration indicated man's emancipation from all tutelage and announced that he has now come of age.

Since the Rights of Man were proclaimed to be "inalienable", irreducible to and undeducible from other rights or laws, no authority was invoked for their establishment; Man himself was their source as well as their ultimate goal. No special law, moreover, was deemed necessary to protect them because all laws were supposed to rest upon them. Man appeared as the only sovereign in matters of law as the people was proclaimed the only sovereign in matters of government. The people's sovereignty (different from that of the prince) was not proclaimed by the grace of God but in the name of Man, so that it seemed only natural that the "inalienable" rights of man would find their guarantee and become an inalienable part of the right of the people to sovereign self-government. In other words... it gradually became evident that the people, and not the individual was the image of man.

The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable – even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them – whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state [ie. refugees]. To this fact, disturbing enough in itself, one must add the confusion created by the many recent attempts to frame a new bill of human rights, which have demonstrated that no one seems to be able to define with any assurance what these general human rights, as distinguished from the rights of citizens, really are. Although everyone seems to agree that the plight of these people consists precisely in their loss of the Rights of Man, no one seems to know which rights they lost when they lost these human rights....

The first loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of their homes, and this meant the loss of the entire social texture in which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world....

The second loss which the rightless suffered was the loss of government protection, and this did not imply just the loss of legal status in their own, but in all countries....

The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed, but that nobody wants even to oppress them....

These last points are crucial. The fundamental deprivation of human rights in manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer a matter of choice, or when one is placed in a situation where, unless he commits a crime, his treatment by others does not depend on what he does or does not do. This extremity, and nothing else, is the situation of people deprived of human rights. They are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion.

We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions) and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global political situation [after World War II]. The trouble is that this calamity arose not from any lack of civilisation, backwardness, or mere tyranny, but, on the contrary, that it could not be repaired, because there was no longer any "uncivilised" spot on earth, because whether we like it or not we have really started to live in One World. Only with a completely organised humanity could the loss of home and political status become identical with expulsion from humanity altogether.

Man of the twentieth century has become just as emancipated from nature as eighteenth-century man was from history. History and nature have become equally alien to us, namely, in the sense that the essence of man can no longer be comprehended in terms of either category. This new situation, in which "humanity" has in effect assumed the role formerly ascribed to nature or history, would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. This new situation, in which "humanity" has in effect assumed the role formerly ascribed to nature or history, would mean in this context that the right to have rights, or the right of every individual to belong to humanity, should be guaranteed by humanity itself. It is by no means certain that this is possible. For, contrary to the best-intentioned humanitarian attempts to obtain new declarations of human rights from international organizations, it should be understood that this idea transcends the present sphere of international law.... a



sphere that is above the nations does not exist. Furthermore, the dilemma would by no means be eliminated by the establishment of a "world government". Such a world government is indeed within the realm of possibility, but one may suspect that in reality it might differ considerably from the version promoted by well-intentioned organisations. For it is quite conceivable, and even within the realm of practical political possibilities, that one fine day a highly organised and mechanised humanity will conclude quite democratically – namely by majority decision – that for humanity as a whole it would be better to liquidate certain parts thereof. Here, in the problems of factual reality, we are confronted with one of the oldest perplexities of political philosophy, which could remain undetected only so long as a stable Christian theology provided a framework for all political and philosophical problems, but which long ago caused Plato to say: "Not man, but a god, must be the measure of all things."

[Source: Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1975. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.]

## THE UNSAYABLE

Edmond Jabès (1912-1991) was born in Cairo. His family moved permanently to Paris following the Suez crisis of 1956. There in Paris, Jabès produced a series of profound but strange poetic works, *The Book of Questions* in seven volumes (1963-1973) and *The Book of Resemblances* in three volumes (1976-1980), which he regarded as one long work. He went on to write two volumes of *The Book of Margins* and four volumes of *The Book of Limits* as well as several separate works in a similar bleak but lyrical, aphoristic style. Jabès was Jewish, living in exile, writing in French in the wake of Nazism and the Holocaust. Our texts are excerpted from *The Book of Questions* and *The Book of Resemblances*.

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### THE TEXT

“There is a word inside us stronger than all others – and more personal.

A word of solitude and certainty, so buried in its night that it is barely audible to itself.

A word of refusal, but also of absolute commitment, forging bonds of silence in the unfathomable silence of the bond.

This word cannot be shared. Only sacrificed.”

“God is a word too many, and a word without word.

So many words resemble God, that no one word can hold.”

“I write by the light of what is not revealed in what I express. Suffering doubly from a silence without words and from words already again silent...

I have got used to proceeding by words and in the wake of an unknown word...My Bible is the page you cannot choose.

Between one book and the next, there is the empty space of a missing book, linked with we do not know which of the two.”

“And you shall write My Book by falsifying it, and this falsification shall be your torment and leave you no peace.

My falsified book shall inspire another and so on till the end of time: for your line of descendants shall be long.

O sons and grandsons of the sin of writing, lies shall be your breath, and truth your silence.”

Thus God may have spoken to Moses.

And Moses might have replied:

“Why, O Lord, why condemn Your creatures to lying?”

And God might have added:

“So that each of your books should be your truth and that, faced with Mine, this unworthy truth should crumble and fall into dust.  
There is My glory.”

“The experience of the desert is both the place of the Word – where it is supremely word – and the non-place where it loses itself in the infinite. So that we never know whether we catch it at the moment it springs up or at the moment it begins ever so slowly to fade: the dazzling moment of its issue or its imperceptible vanishing.”

“Wandering word of God. It has for its echo the word of a wandering people. No oasis for it, no shade, no peace, only the vast and thirsty desert, only the book of this thirst.”

“Writing emerges from a lack; it comments unceasingly upon an absence that it tries to make present, for every book is a space written on by a missing word. We write in the name of a withdrawn word which is not an absence of words but a word of absence, an unfathomable abyss beyond words toward which all words tend...”

“You are free to call this familiar – wounded – place by the word ‘God’.”

“In each word there burns a wick.”

“Hope: the following page. Do not close the book.”

[Source: Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, 2 Vols, tr. Rosmarie Waldrop, Wesleyan University Press, New England, 1991. *The Book of Resemblances*, tr. Rosmarie Waldrop, Wesleyan University Press, New England, 1990. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.]

### THREE LEGENDS

Edmond Jabès' (1912-1991) came to Paris in 1957. While he was a professional and family man, like the poet Mallarmé, he was entirely devoted to literature and the silence that is proper to it. His writing exceeds the bounds of genre: it is not poetry, it is not philosophy, but it is also both of them. Jabès' work has been definitive for 'post-modernism' and 'post-structuralism'. Among those he has influenced are Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### TEXT

He gave his book to his Teacher who read it, rewrote it and gave it to his Teacher in turn.

The Teacher read it, rewrote it, and repeating his disciple's gesture, went to give it to his Teacher.

The Teacher read it, rewrote it and, likewise concerned about his Teacher's judgement, hastened to give it to him.

The Teacher read it carefully and feeling that his four disciples had attacked his teaching, threw it into the fire.

\*

To the rich man boasting of his fortune, the wise man said: "I pity your poverty."

To the poor man weeping for his misfortune, the wise man said: "I am happy for your riches."

As neither of the two understood his words, the wise man said to the rich man: "Your riches make you blind. For you, morning is dense, dark." And to the poor man: "Your eyes are so large through their tears that the world won't be long to take refuge there, to find a home in their total availability."

And he added: "It is God's poverty that His Creation can look with eyes so free and vacant as to embrace all the innumerable riches of heaven and earth rendered unto themselves."

"But I am hungry," said the poor man.

And the wise man wept.

\*

When a disciple ventured that the divine Book was perhaps not as perfect as believed, his teacher replied:

"The trouble with God is that we cannot really know if He is altogether dead or altogether alive.

"In this 'altogether' lies His mystery."

And he added: "If He is dead we must accept His Book as unique and read it accordingly.

"But if he is alive we may consider His Book as a first work preparing the way for others, and our reading can't but be considerably modified by it."

\*

“There are still some questions,” said a commentator. “To start with: What if God were not the God of one single Book?”

“Then we would have to search for the divine Word in other works. “But who would dare risk that?”

\*

“And what if the Word of God were intended especially to make us run this risk?”

“Ah, to hear, to see silence open out and fold back on itself. This is perhaps the divine message.”

\*

“Perhaps there is no divine book,” said another commentator. “This would mean unconditional divine allegiance to a blank book.”

\*

Nothing is perfect. Everything is to be perfected.  
The future makes us and unmakes us.

[Source: Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Shares*, tr., Rosmarie Waldrop, Chicago University Press, 1989. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.]

## *Images*

P. 1 Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and friends in a Paris cafe

P. 42 Photograph of Nusch Eluard by Man Ray c. 1936

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