

Essay

LIGHT STRIKES THE PINEAL GLAND AT BIRTH

From Politics to Philosophy

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Introduction

Camus once said the only real philosophical problem is suicide. Camus, existentialist, absurdist, took things personally. He could afford to. He was unaware of the effects of nuclear radiation.

Camus was right. The only real philosophical problem is suicide — of the human species.

To be or not to be, that *is* the question, for all of us, all together, now.

Some professors of philosophy would feel uncomfortable with this question. Even so, I don't think they could deny that this problem, for us, is universal.

We assume Camus was lonely when he said that. He spoke for himself and a few strangers. We, however, are legion. There is no place safe enough, no nook or cranny or cave deep enough, to escape the insidious effects of nuclear radiation.

The problem of genocide is universal, philosophical, too philosophical — it is so abstract, hard to get hold of, to know what to do . . . there is nothing we can do. We are not the powers that be; we feel impotent in the face of this danger, it is so real, so real we can taste it, smell it. Death is in the air.

We look around the real world as reported to us by the media, and all we see is death and the threat of death: posturing, skirmishing, warnings, danger. Babel reigns, a confusion of tongues; even our laughter is canned.

All we have in common is danger. Or it seems so. Actually, what we also have in common is our hidden philosophical selves, and the process we are going through, together.

All we see is diversity. All we are is unity. There are as many personalities and situations as there are individuals living on the planet; inside, however, we are all one, frightened, scared, human. The original contradiction between what we see and what we are generated the pre-Socratic philosophers, their conviction that the only real philosophical problem was that of “unity versus diversity,” or, how to reconcile the seeming diversity in the world with our need for the feeling of unity behind it.

Professors of philosophy today are not so unified as to what they think the only real philosophical problem is; indeed, they no longer ask that question.

I would say that the only real philosophical problem is how to find our way home. We’ve been gone so long, we’ve dipped so deeply into material phenomena.

I suggest that unity is a home, a psychic or spiritual “place” behind diversity.

I suggest that philosophy, for Socrates, was the process of aiming at and moving towards that place. This movement itself, the oscillation between experience and reflection upon it, is origin-al philosophy.

The pre-Socratics talked about fire, water, earth and air as the unifying forces of nature. We are afraid of nature’s unities: of the conflagration of fire, the inundation of water, the radiation of air, earthquakes.

The Greeks differed as to which force was the most powerful. We differ as to which one we think might do us in first. What the Greeks only imagined, we may soon act out.

So goes the process of history, of time and repetition. The beginning of Greek philosophy may have engendered the end of our time, over 2,000 years later, its cycle complete.

Socrates was the exception then.

Who are our Socrates's now?

Current Images of Philosophy

Today we tend to think of “philosophy” as some kind of mysterious and abstract field, confined to specialists in universities. University professors of philosophy talk only to each other, and what they say has little relation to life.

Or, we may think of “the philosopher” as a stooped old man with long white beard, eyes aglitter, mouth dropping pearls. Here, the image is that of philosophy as wisdom, gleaned through long life experience.

Then there are the profound remarks that pop from the mouths of small children. “Where did that come from?” We marvel, briefly — and label it “cute.”

Genuine philosophy seems to be confined to both ends of the spectrum of life; nowhere is it found in the middle.

But why is it that we are sometimes driven by the need for a feeling of inner self-security to seek out these old men and women for the pearls they have to offer us — and then promptly forget to apply what we have “learned” from them to our lives?

And why is it that the more we learn, the less we know?

And what has any of this to do with wisdom?

The Greek Socrates, one of the wisest men who ever lived, did not feel himself to be wise. Rather, he loved wisdom — thus the original Greek meaning of the word “philosophy” as *philo-sophy* or, “love of wisdom.”

These may be clues to the relative incompleteness of both our current images of philosophy.

These Images Are Poles Apart

The first image, academic philosophy, is barren; the second, the “wise old man,” overly-rich, too simple for anyone not equally old. Neither one satisfies. Neither one recognizes the philosopher inside each of us.

The first image divorces philosophy from experience; the second marries philosophy to experience.

University professors like to think they study the “perennial” philosophical problems — those that lie so deep they have no answers. And yet, the academic field known as “philosophy of science” attempts to redefine philosophical conundrums into problems, thus rendering them “scientific,” and subject to solutions. They seem to assume that wisdom can be either captured or replaced — by knowledge. What in fact they actually do with words, however, tends either to be full of tiny answers to technical questions or else to vaporize. In this first image, there is little opportunity to apply what one is thinking to ordinary life — and as long as the “mind-body problem” remains “perennial” for them, so too will their own bodies and minds tend to lead separate lives, isolated from each other and any other human being with whom they come in contact.

This all started with Descartes. *I think, therefore I am.* Therefore my thinking is me. But what does thinking have to do with love? With wisdom? With learning?

The second image marries philosophy to experience. Here, “the philosopher” is burdened down by a knowledge that he (or she) is unable to share with anyone. He/she is “very old,” lives in a nursing home, and/or is “very wise,” surrounded by adoring students. Either way, the old one is isolated from the others who do not, who cannot know him.

It appears that being a philosopher these days — in either image — is a lonely business.

Question: Was Socrates lonely?

I don't think so. He was alone; he was not lonely.

If Socrates was not lonely, and if Socrates was a philosopher — and I think both the professors and the old ones would give him that — then philosophy is not what either of our current images would have it to be.

Moreover, these images contradict each other, and according to the logic of the current order of the day: “From a contradiction, anything follows, *anything!*” What follows from a contradiction has not happened before. It follows no logical rules.

Our current images of philosophy are poles apart. Once we recognize that, we can create a synthesis, and move from one order of being to another, more inclusive one. This is originality, rebirth. Remembering. Through recognition something new is born.

(Some babies are born stillborn.)

The earth mother herself is about to give birth to herself again. (Will she be born alive?)

And we are in the labor pains now — as individuals, as communities, as nations, as a species.

Evil as Ignorance

Socrates taught that evil is ignorance. That the devil is in your mind. It is up to you to exorcize him.

It's time for love, for the loving search for wisdom. Time for all of us to become philosophers, in the original sense of that word.

It's time for Socrates, time for an original philosophy, one which incorporates the values within both current images of philosophy and transcends them both.

We need to turn from the philosophy of images, reflections, and enter the real world of philosophy, the study of infinity, of an infinity of cycles, of cycles within cycles and their interrelationships.

Here, philosophy becomes, literally, the study of time, as defined by the precise and measurable movement of phenomena in space — with reference to a certain frame.

Each cycle of experience, once completed, creates a circle or frame. Frames are symbolic reference systems; we use them to orient ourselves as we go.

Our frames increase in size as we go through life — they give us increasing perspective — or they can, when we become philosophically attuned. Perspective lends detachment to danger, while allowing full participation in experience.

The longer we live, the more we will know, the more we will remember, the less ignorant, evil will we be. Wars are caused by evil forces, and evil is ignorance. We need to remember this. Then we will no longer need to take offense at our own or others' evil thoughts or deeds. Once we remember ourselves, we will have no more war nor the need for war.

Life as a Journey of Hard Knocks

For Socrates, the meaning of life was the search for the meaning of life, motivated by love. What counts on this search is not the goal, but the journey.

The journey begins at birth, which, as Wordsworth remembered, is “but a sleep and a forgetting.”

What we love as “poetic” may be literally true.

We come to this earth “trailing clouds of glory,” hinting at immortality. Then: shock: the birth trauma.

Light hits the pineal gland through the opened fontanel. The child screams. Spirit recedes to make way for emergent personality.

Sources say the time-table for this process varies from four to twenty-six months. In this context, it is interesting to note that certain Native American tribes looked for their future tribal philosophers in those children whose fontanelles close slowly. These children were watched carefully, protected by their tribe.

As for the rest of us, only the fittest survive. We lock our skulls tight quick or suffer a few knocks on the head to remind us.

To survive in this world is to “learn from experience,” to accept the pain of loss and forget the world we came from.

To survive here is to forget who we are.

To survive here is to forget where we came from, where we are going,

We lose touch with our origins. Our skulls close over. No longer original, we become mechanical — captured by passing phenomena of our daily lives. As a result, those lives come to seem fragmented, chaotic, inharmonious.

This process of forgetting is only natural: our very survival depends on it. We form patterns of thinking based on our early experiences and training (and past lives?). These patterns generate expectations, habits — driven through time and repetition deep into unconsciousness. As adults we carry these mental habits, largely unnoticed, around with us. They tell us what we can think and do. Taken together, they form an internal machine, a system, web, or structure, or framework through which we view and value the world.

The goal of this process of forgetting is childhood’s end: fully formed bodies, culturally and socially formed minds — mechanical, through and through.

Life as a boring routine

This may be why, as adults we sometimes grow bored with life, and the process of learning as taught by our parents, our peers, our schools. Once our frameworks are complete, all incoming information continues to be defined and evaluated in terms of

those same frameworks which themselves, however, remain hidden to us, invisible, and therefore powerful, automatic, absolute.

Our frameworks turn into cages, once they become too small for us. From then on, there is no room in them for new growth — no room for creation, for originality of any kind.

For the same reason, most adults are not original. They are robots, predictable: they go round and round in circles. They repeat themselves; their lives are boring, an endless routine.

From Boredom to Growth: the '60s Generation

Our frameworks completed, there was nothing left to learn. Our eyes glazed over; we began to escape, to drop out, to take drugs.

Some of us became casualties, tragically wasted by too much, too soon.

Some of us became casualties, tragically wasted in the carnage of war.

Others forgot our early experiments. Working nine to five, driving new cars, heavily mortgaged, they lead lives much like their parents lives and view the '60s nostalgically as a time of youthful, but passing idealism.

Still others never stopped experimenting. Now in our late 30s and early 40s, we are still childlike, unpredictable; we continue to grow. The frameworks we learned as children are now seen in relation to other frameworks, all of them relative. Into our former habitual circles we injected a dose of centrifugal energy, transforming those circles into spirals — widening gyres.

Learning, for us, consists in the continuous enlargement of frameworks, of seeing oneself — and in one's mind's eye, every other person — as his or her center of a continuously expanding Whole — as a slow gradual dawning, or a leaping — from order to order of being.

This is love.

This love embraces the other — body, mind, and soul.

Once we are all philosophers, there will be no more war, nor the need for war. War is possible only as we continue to see our personal (social) (national) frameworks as absolute. Absolute frameworks generate dogmatic thinking, and consequently the need for dominance, control, war: against the self, against the other, against the earth herself.

Love Is Not Easy

Love is not easy. Until recently, only a few hardy souls. — the isolated mystic, the saint — ever ventured on its path.

It was not until the 1960s, A.D., that love — or the longing for love — became a mass phenomenon.

We were perhaps the first generation in history to have our survival needs secured. To have our world be safe, predictable, boring. So, naturally, we longed for the new, for what had not happened before.

And what has not happened before but peace? Heaven on earth? The communion of souls? Unity in diversity?

But the world wasn't at peace. Nor were we.

We started experimenting, “tripping,” “getting into” drugs, yoga, meditation, therapy. These techniques served as initial aids in our learning to see through dogmatic frameworks — as taught by our fathers, and their fathers before them.

We learned that the values we give to things are relative.

We began to “expand” our “consciousness.”

As our consciousness expands, so does our feeling of responsibility expand from ourselves to all living things within our (relative) spheres of awareness.

As our consciousness expands, so do we become lovers of wisdom, philosophers in that original Greek sense of the word.

To Learn Is To Change

Our process of dropping out, of going beyond mere survival needs, was thought by the American order of the day to be mere escape from reality.

On the contrary: This process, for us, was only natural. It was the next evolutionary step, initiation into a whole new kind of learning.

As Neitzsche put it over a century ago: “To learn is to change.”

To change is to transform, is to undergo a process of conversion. To change is to journey to regions within the self that have been denied us since birth.

It is this journey which Socrates would have called philosophy.

The Greek order of that day killed him. We are luckier. Socrates was alone; we are legion. “And where two or more are gathered together . . .”

Cycles in Life

Our lives, like everything else, follow the movement of a circle. That is perhaps why everything worth knowing seems always just around the corner. So all we can do is keep on trucking, take it easy, take it day by day.

“Stay in the now, man, stay in the now.” So hippies used to tell me. “Yes,” I would say, “but the *now* can be large or small.”

The present moment can stretch to infinity; it can condense to a point — and beyond.

Wittgenstein once said, “It is hard to begin at the beginning . . . and not to go further back.” This remark applies to any now-point. Points, when looked at from close to, become circles. Circles, from afar, turn into points. And it’s all in the movement from

one to the other, from background to foreground to back again, in an ordered but infinite symbolic sequence relating the two.

Life is a circle. Each of our lives is its own cycle, and each moment of our lives has an infinity of cycles lying within it, waiting for remembrance.

Our Mid-Life Crisis

The first half of a cycle of any kind (be it of a person, an idea, a book, an opera company, a nation) is devolutionary: the descent of spirit into matter. This is the hard part. This is our hell on earth. This is the world of learning from experience, of being captured by phenomena, of eventual isolation, pain, loneliness.

The second half is evolutionary, and begins with initiation, that time in our lives when our desperation has become acute, critical, where it has reached the point of decision: change or die. To die is to dissipate our consciousness. To change is to reverse ourselves, switch our polarities and increase our consciousness.

This turning point, from night to day, from darkness to light, from one half of the cycle to the other, is even harder than learning from experience. We call it the *dark night of the soul*: a time in our lives when what we previously took for granted as true comes into question, when the framework itself which generated those truths begins to break down, allowing for new frameworks, new and relative orders of truth — as a continuous process, a widening gyre.

And this dark night happens over and over again, leading, over and over, to the bright light of day. It is the way we go through the process that counts, not whether we win or lose. For how can we win or lose if our lives transpire in cycles, so that the end is the beginning is the end? We no longer need our absolute frameworks (or our dogmatism) once we re-discover our immortal souls, each of us the still center point of a continuously expanding world.

We no longer need our absolute frameworks (or our dogmatism) once we center ourselves within the whole and stop running in circles around the periphery . . .

We no longer need to defend ourselves or our territory, once we give up our absolute frameworks and admit that everything in this world is relative, is in relation to everything else.

The Divine Spark In Us All

Though original philosophy is relativistic, it is not the usual kind, not nihilism. Nihilistic relativism assumes the divided Cartesian self, body and mind.

Descartes forgot the world.

Or, we'd like to think he did. Actually, Descartes said mind and body are joined, through the pineal gland — entry point of the spirit.

Unfortunately, when the skull closes over that gland, the light goes out too — almost, but not quite. All of us have a spark of the divine, no matter how evil (how ignorant) our personalities.

We need to remember this gland, and its symbolic importance, if we wish to see the light, and evoke our own soul's guidance through this life and beyond: spirit meets, transforms matter into energy through the agency of the pineal gland.

Where is the pineal gland of our mother earth located? From which nation shall the soul of the earth begin its rise?

This question is unanswerable at the present time. It is too metaphysical, philosophical. There will come a time, however, when this question shall be answered, and its place taken by another question. The search continues. There is no goal, there is only the journey, the way, the process.

Body and mind are integrated as a process, as a dynamic movement between one and the other, and their interpenetration. And the laws for that movement are of the spirit. These laws define one's path in life.

Each of us, individually, has our own set of spiritual laws to follow, our own unique path. All together, we form the harmony — or we will once we learn to switch polarities,

once we recognize the line they define — and then transcend them into a new and more inclusive order of being. This new order is not bound by the logic of the old. It is original, it follows its own nature, makes its own laws.

But this switch, this changeover, frightens us. We lack courage. We long to return to security. So we turn to others for “answers,” become enslaved by yet one more phenomenon — witness the recent proliferation of “gurus” and their disciples.

Socrates and Wittgenstein as Searchers

Socrates was no “guru.” Socrates did not have answers. He had questions. These generated that famous Socratic dialogue, aimed at exciting in the other his or her own process — of questioning, of remembering, of putting back together again, what we have always known.

There is only one recent well-known (university) philosopher who reminds me of Socrates — and that is Ludwig Wittgenstein. Significantly, this man never did identify with his role as a Cambridge don. Indeed, he left it several times — to live in an isolated cottage on the edge of the sea, to work as a gardener in a monastery — only to be persuaded to return.

Wittgenstein too was a searcher, and he lived and died a lonely man, convinced he was speaking, not to his colleagues, but “to a people who would breathe a different air, live a different life, than that of present day man.”

Wittgenstein died in 1948, so university philosophers are still dissecting him. They forgot Socrates long ago. So did we all. We remember his heroic death, we forget why he died: Socrates chose to die rather than stop philosophizing. His courage is the stuff of legends; so must become our own.

(University) “philosophers,” these days, are seldom heroes. Instead, they are academics — trained to accumulate, analyze, and debate “philosophical” opinions much the way a computer would.

Childhood's End

We need to return to philosophy as it was originally practiced by both Socrates and Wittgenstein. We need to encourage philosophy as a process of questioning, and incorporate it into the real world, as a method of investigation into personal, social, institutional, community, national and global dynamics.

Childhood's End is upon us. No longer can we afford to remain captured by phenomena. That process is done; our devolution is complete. It is time to move from diversity to unity, from politics to philosophy, time to remember the philosopher inside us all.

It is time. Time now, to begin our evolutionary ascent: time to begin the harmony.

The alternative is nuclear fusion.

Both harmony and holocaust lead, paradoxically, to unity.

This paradox defines a choice.

That choice is ours.

Our survival depends on it.

