



DAILY PHILOSOPHY

APRIL 2022

GUEST ARTICLES BY
BRENTYN RAMM
IAN JAMES KIDD

PURE AWARENESS
DOUBLE EFFECT
SMART CITIES AND CYBORGS
THE AGRICULTURALIST SCHOOL

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Daily Philosophy in April

Welcome once more to our monthly, printable round-up of the articles you could read on the Daily Philosophy sites, daily-philosophy.com and [dailyphilosophy.substack.com!](https://dailyphilosophy.substack.com)

This month, we moved the hosting of the Daily Philosophy website from a shared hosting provider to Google Cloud. This was primarily done because the site was growing (good thing!) but then also getting slower and slower. With Google Cloud, we are now directly running on the same infrastructure that the biggest websites are using, so that shouldn't be a problem any more. I hope that you can verify from your own experience that Daily Philosophy (the main website, not the Substack newsletter) is now faster than ever before.

In other news, in April we started the first philosophy online reading group. We are reading Epicurus' Principal Doctrines. Although we are already halfway through that short classic, you can still join us: just watch out for the emails that come every Monday.

Back to this magazine. As always, the content here is just what you could read on Daily Philosophy over the month. We have guest articles by Brentyn Ramm and Ian James Kidd and a number of fascinating topics, from pure awareness and the Agriculturalist School of Chinese philosophy to the ethics of double effect and the future of mankind.

The primary function of this magazine is to make it easier for you to read it on a Kindle or to print it out. By the way, if you try to print it, you may find that your printer dislikes the cover page with the big image. Many printers don't have enough memory to print an image of this size. If you experience problems with printing the file, please tell your viewer to just print pages "2-99", which will omit the first page (the cover). The rest should be fine, since it is primarily text with only small images.

And a last note: This time, the text contains a few words in Greek and Chinese characters, of which a few display fine on the website but not in all viewers. So if you are missing an occasional foreign-language character, that's a known issue, but I cannot do much about it. The problem affects a very small number of characters and the affected articles are perfectly readable without these characters.

If you received this from someone else, please subscribe here to receive your own copy in the future, directly in your inbox!

Thank you and have fun reading!

— Andy

Philosophy studies in EU-wide danger! (April Fools Day)



Prof Kotsovolos, President of the Hellenic Education Council

Shocking interview with the President of the Hellenic Education Council.

Dear friends of Daily Philosophy,
I don't know if you have been following the Greek papers, but there has been surprisingly little echo in the international press about what's going on right now in that country, especially considering the following, shocking interview.

A few days ago, the Hellenic Education Council, the governmental institution responsible for higher education planning, announced that they would recommend closing down all philosophy

departments in the country's universities.

The Council's president, Dr Kostas Kotsovolos, himself a theoretical physics professor, described the council's recommendation in an interview to the influential Greek newspaper *Ta Nea*.

"The country's economy is collapsing," he emphasised, pointing out the failing financial growth indicators and their downward trend since 2014. He continued (I just quote from the newspaper):

Government after government have been unable to reverse that trend. All parts of society must now work together to save our country from bankruptcy. In recognition of our responsibility as academics, we had a long, hard look at the expenses of the public education sector over the past decade. We compared expenses and societal benefits for physics (my discipline), chemistry, mathematics, but also geology, biology, medicine, and a number of other faculties. They all either provide positive returns in the long run, or at least don't lose too much money. But the situation in the humanities is abysmal. Historians, linguists, ancient Greek translators and philosophers are the worst in

terms of recovering their own education's costs for society.

So we decided to see what could be done about this situation. We soon realised that we need historians to remind us of the greatness of our country, of our glorious victories in the past, of our accomplishments in ancient literature and politics and so on. These effects might be hard to quantify, but they provide the essential background for what makes us Greeks.

The linguists and Ancient Greek students, after graduation they mostly end up in primary school, teaching modern Greek to children. Since they often don't have families when they come out of university, they are useful for posting at small island schools where they teach a handful of kids each. But they are cheap and their stories make good documentaries about our education system. (Youtube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiutZtD8Sk8>)

In short, we could determine some kind of benefit that our country was able to derive from each of these professions – with one, single exception: philosophy students never seemed to amount to anything, statistically speaking.

What have philosophers achieved recently? In every anarchist clash with police, it's philosophy students who

are in the first row, throwing Molotov cocktails at our forces. The whole thing with gender identity and trans people and all that: it's philosophers again who made all that up and confused everyone. Anarchism? Tick. Support for illegal refugees? Tick. Criticising the government? Tick. Turn any thrown cobblestone around and you'll find a philosopher clinging at the bottom.

According to government statistics, 92 percent of philosophy graduates remain unemployed in the long-term, or they switch jobs to become farmers and bus drivers: occupations for which no such education is needed. The few of them who actually successfully get a philosophy job, do so abroad. So in an economic sense, we spend our money to educate other countries' academics for free.

In terms of influence of philosophy graduates on our country, things look even more bleak. Yanis Varoufakis fancies himself a philosopher, and see where his politics have brought us to. Marx was a philosopher, wasn't he? They're all the same. In recent surveys, two thirds of our graduates expressed allegiance to destructive existentialist lifestyles, or considered themselves "continental" philosophers. Three quarters of them reported sympathising with left-wing, anarchist or nihilist worldviews. None of them knew more than two out of our National Anthem's 158 verses.

So the Council conferred with the European Commission, who reported similar findings across Europe. **In a EU-wide pilot, Greece will therefore take the lead in abolishing academic teaching in philosophy.** The buildings and human resources that will be freed up in this way will be used to extend our military training capacities, which is particularly timely now with the continuing threat from the Turkish side and the conflict in Ukraine.

We are aware that this might seem strange, given that Greece is considered the cradle of civilisation and the place where philosophy started. But, as I also said yesterday in the Education Council meeting, this is what places a particular responsibility onto our shoulders. We started it all, and now it's on us to end it. We can say with a clear conscience that we tried philosophy seriously for over three thousand years, and that now, finally, we have the certainty that it just doesn't work. It's time to stop deceiving the young by offering them these useless programs that only destroy their patriotic attitude and their will to work hard in the world.

Thankfully, no professors or students would have their careers jeopardised

by our initiative. The Greek army has, with the generous support of NATO, declared its willingness to employ all philosophy professors and other teaching staff in a special landmine-clearing operation in south Ukraine. Philosophy students will be offered officer's training in the Greek navy to bolster the Frontex mission of keeping unwanted refugees out, thus becoming, once again, useful members of society.

The interview ended after a few more comments on the relations between Greece and Turkey. You can read the whole interview online.

The prime ministers of Poland, Austria and Hungary have already declared their intention to follow Greece's example.

Germany's Olaf Scholz is said to have officially declined to comment, education being the domain of the individual states, not of the Federal Government. But as he exited the room, observers reported hearing him say: "I never understood what 'das Nichts nichtet' was supposed to mean, anyway."

Boris Johnson confirmed that the UK would immediately suspend the teaching of French philosophers, in a move to assert the country's sovereignty in matters of education. "But we will keep Donald Hume and that Locke fellow," he said. "We will not take away from our people what makes Britain great."

Wilderness and Civilisation

Different societies on Earth seem to conceptualise nature in entirely different ways. A fascinating paper by Miller and Kirk shows how our perceived strength shapes our attitudes to nature. But will we ever be able to reach a stage where we can peacefully and respectfully coexist with the universe?



Viewpoints

It's interesting to think about how our situation within the world changes our ethics toward it.

Today, when we look at an ocean or a forest, many of us will only see a resource: a particular number of fish or trees and their market value in fish fingers or timber. But this was not always the case.

Tribal societies living in nature often have a different view of their surroundings. Where peo-

ple are not yet able to dominate their environment, they perceive nature as something powerful and potentially threatening: a place where unpredictable gods reign, where a sunny day might suddenly turn into a thunderstorm, where a stroll in the woods might end with an encounter with a wolf or bear. People in this situation won't see nature as a resource to be exploited, but as a potent agent. Perhaps they will personify nature's agency and imagine it filled with spirits or gods and try to devise means to secure the favour of these spirits. They might offer them sacrifices, build churches on the shores of wild seas, and perform magical rituals to ask for rain or a good harvest.

An interesting thing happens when human societies progress from this tribal stage, through the stage of exploitation, and on to the stage where we are today. Many of us will not be satisfied to see the oceans and forests of the Earth only as a resource. We will be concerned with their well-being. We will think about how to protect them, how to clean the seas from plastic pollution, how to restore the wolves and bears to the wild: how to return nature, as much as possible, to its original, healthy and vigorous state. So we move from seeing nature as something dangerous and powerful to seeing it as something that is weak and endangered and in need of our protection.

It was just as I was reading about life on the oceans for this series of articles, that I found an interesting paper 1. Although it's titled "Marine

Environmental Ethics,” it turns out to be about much more: the ways that societies relate to the natural environments that surround them.

Strength and vulnerability

Marc Miller and Jerome Kirk, the two authors of the paper, think that there is more to environmental ethics than just random sets of rules. In ethics, we often say that it is morally right, for example, to maximise the benefit of the greatest number of stakeholders. Or that we must act following particular rational principles. Or that we must exercise virtues like honesty, courage and kindness. But in the end, how do we decide which of these approaches to take?

Miller and Kirk think that beyond the agreement to particular rules there is a more fundamental level of ethical discourse. In order to be able to agree with each other on a moral stance, we must share some fundamental values, a kind of basic moral outlook. And this is particularly important when we talk about nature, because here our basic moral outlook is often imposed on us by our culture and we have little conscious control over it.

The authors think that we can use what they call “potency” or “power” as the main criterion according to which we can distinguish these different approaches to nature. A whole culture will usually share a basic understanding about its own power in relation to nature’s power. And then we can see four different ways how these power relations may be perceived:

Tribal ethic. When human beings are seen as weak and nature as powerful, we have the situation that we saw above. Tribal societies will see nature as populated by spirits and gods and try to gain their favour. They are acutely aware of

both the gifts that nature provides and the terrible forces of destruction that it can unleash. Their approach to nature is not romanticised (as we sometimes tend to think when we describe them) but pragmatic: they know that the forces of nature determine their survival and so in their dealings with it they will focus on whatever they can do to maximise their chances.

Development ethic. As human power grows through science and technology, the relationship between humans and nature changes. In the stage of development ethic, humans realise that they have power over nature; at the same time, nature itself is still perceived as powerful and its resources as inexhaustible. This is the stage at which nature is seen as a resource to be exploited. Every forest is a source of wood and medicines, the sea is nothing but a storage for live fish, the air is an unlimited place in which we can vent the fumes of our technological civilisation and get rid of them.

Compassionate ethic. Human influence over nature keeps growing and at some point we realise that the natural environment is not unlimited. We can overfish the seas. We can destroy the ozone layer. We can change the climate and melt the polar ice. The capacity of nature to absorb mistreatment and abuse is limited and we have reached those limits. This realisation drives the transition to the next stage of our relationship with nature. Seeing how the environment is vulnerable and we have grown too powerful, we develop a compassionate approach to it. Saving the pink dolphins of China, the polar bears, the pandas, the whales – these causes become the expression of our concern for nature. This concern is accompanied by feelings of obligation to protect and preserve nature.

Holothetic ethic. Finally, we realise that the compassionate ethic is based on a false assump-

tion. We are not in the position to protect nature, because we are not stronger than nature is. Instead, we *are* nature. We are a part of it, impossible to separate from the rest of creation. Realising the intimate connection between us and our environment, we also understand the interdependence between us and the rest of nature. As a result, we see that we are all vulnerable and in need of care and protection: both the human and the natural environment, both society and wilderness.

This “*holothetic*” approach is particularly conscious of the systems and feedback loops in nature and understands that these include both living and inanimate things. While the compassionate approach tends to sentimentalise the plight of the polar bears and to focus on individual suffering, the holothetic ethic considers the well-functioning of climate systems, CO₂ levels, sunlight, rivers and living things, all as part of the big system of life on Earth.

Miller and Kirk don’t quite put it in these words (they seem to be particularly suspicious of the compassionate ethic approach), but I think that this is roughly what it amounts to.

Evolution and historical necessity

While they don’t say it clearly, there seems to be a historical progression in these modes of relationship, from the tribal to the development ethic, and from there to the compassionate and the holothetic consciousness. One interesting question is whether this is indeed a “progression” that necessarily will unfold in the same way across every possible culture (including, for example, on other planets); or whether this is a rationalisation that we create when we look back at what happened at the actual history of human

civilisations on Earth.

Could we imagine a culture of sentient beings that does not go through these stages?

Take the octopus, for example (I won’t attempt to form a plural of that word 2). We might imagine a (science-fictional perhaps) octopus culture that permanently exists in the holothetic stage, being aware of themselves and their interconnectedness with their environment, without trying to dominate it and without being afraid of it.

If one were in a religious frame of mind, one might perhaps say that the holothetic ethic is what we would naturally adhere to, before the original sin separated us from the rest of creation. Being expelled from the Garden Eden, we find ourselves in an opposition with nature, and it is this opposition that creates the tribal, development and compassionate attitudes. They are all, one could say, manifestations of the deep-seated, fundamental alienation that separates man from nature. In a more Zen-like vocabulary, one might say that the holothetic consciousness is the only “real” one, while every view that is based on a perceived duality between man and nature is the result of erroneous thinking, of illusion that can and should be overcome.

Space apes

Another interesting question is whether we, as humanity, can walk through this sequence only once, or whether this is likely to oscillate as we further expand into different environments.

On Earth, we are now in the stage where we can dominate nature, we can afford to be compassionate, and some of us have reached the holothetic stage of relating to their environment (even if societies as a whole are slow to follow).

But what will happen as we expand into space?

When the first, fragile humans land on Mars, Titan or Europa in their tiny capsules, will they confront with the alien strangeness and the immense destructive power of these new environments, revert to a tribal attitude? Will they pray, will they use charms against cosmic radiation and x-ray belts? Will they slowly work up their abilities to reach, once again, the development stage? And will they end up pitying Mars before they realise that they are also interconnected with its red sands as they are with everything else in creation?

In Andy Weir's "The Martian," the astronaut left on Mars does not undergo any such transformation. One could say that he lands there in the typical "development" state of mind: the lone engineer, a conquistador, a *Homo Faber* who feels free to use, misuse and deplete every resource the planet provides as long as this is useful to him. He's not concerned about his footprint on Mars, he does not pick up his garbage or bury his radioactive heater. He is not concerned with the contamination of Mars from his excrement or his potato experiment. He is willing to explode, destroy, pollute the planet, all in order to force nature into submission, into the service of his own survival.

Is this how we will approach the stars when the

time comes?

We have made a excellent start in this direction already. While Buzz Aldrin was silently quoting the Bible on the surface of the Moon, NASA was busy littering its surface with discarded equipment that is still there and will be there, unchanged, untouched, in thousands of years, waiting for someone to clean it up. Before men even put foot onto the red sands of Mars, Elon Musk has already made space his private junkyard by trashing his Tesla Roadster between the stars.

Let's hope that the progression to holothetic consciousness will happen as a matter of historical necessity, because otherwise I wouldn't bet that we will ever arrive there on our own.

Notes

1 Marc Miller & Jerome Kirk (1992). Marine environmental ethics. *Ocean & Coastal Management* 17 (1992), 237-251.

2 If you're interested, "octopuses" is recognised by Google as a valid form of "octopus," but is obviously wrong, since the word is Greek. "Octopi" is wrong for the same reason: that would be a Latin-style plural, but the word is not a Latin word. "Octopodes" would be the correct Greek plural, but one sounds like an insufferable bore when using that in conversation.

Brentyn J. Ramm

How to Recognise Pure Awareness

I am aware of the room, these words, my bodily sensations, feelings, thoughts. These are objects of awareness. But what is this awareness? Awareness is one of the greatest mysteries we face. Why should it exist at all?

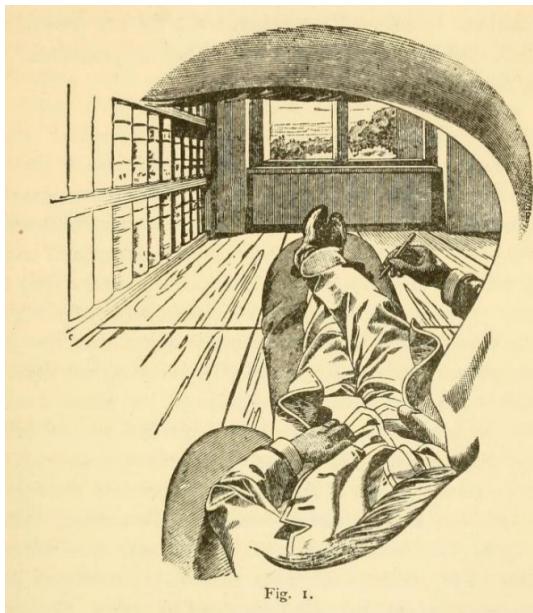


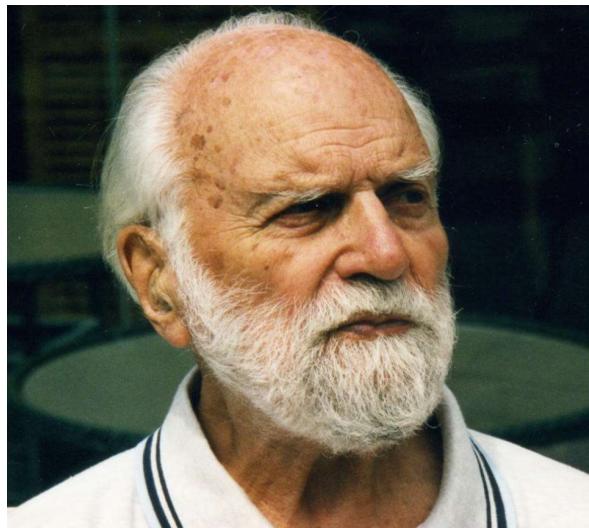
Fig. 1.

I will refer to the experience of ‘awareness itself’ as a *pure awareness* experience. Most people, aside from those familiar with spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, have never heard of pure awareness, let alone believe that there is such a phenomenon. They think that consciousness is just the qualities of experience such as

seeing the pinkness of the water lily and smelling its sweet fragrance. According to many meditative traditions this is to miss the essence of consciousness. It is to focus on the contents of awareness, while overlooking awareness itself. There is a growing interest amongst philosophers and scientists in pure awareness experiences reported by contemplatives. A recent example is a study by Alex Gamma and Thomas Metzinger which surveyed the characteristics of pure awareness experiences in 1,400 meditators.
1

The recognition of pure awareness is particularly important in Tibetan Buddhism as it is Buddha Nature itself. As it is described in the Tibetan Book of the Dead:

This brilliant emptiness is the radiant essence of your own awareness. It is beyond substance, beyond characteristics, beyond colour... The instant of your own presence is empty, yet it is not a nihilistic emptiness, but unimpeded radiance, brilliant and vibrant... Your own awareness, a vast luminous expanse, clarity inseparable from emptiness, is also the Buddha of unchanging light, beyond birth and death. Just to perceive this is enough. If you recognize this brilliant essence



Douglas Harding (1909-2007). Used with permission of The Sholland Trust.



Meditation from the First-Person Perspective.
Image licensed from Remains, 2015.

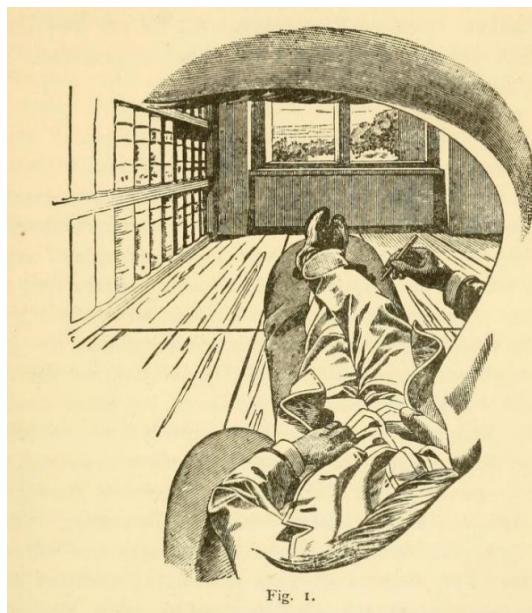
of your own awareness as Buddha Nature, then gazing into it is to abide in the state of enlightenment. 2

This awareness is empty like all phenomena because it lacks its own inherent existence. It is not

merely nothing, however, because it is luminous, which is another way of saying that it is awake and alive. This awareness lacks colour and all other qualities. It is colourless, shapeless, featureless and silent. It is described as pure and transparent — a clear light. It is as vast and boundless as the open sky. 3 Francesca Fremantle refers to it as ‘luminous emptiness’. 4

Given the importance of pure awareness in Buddhism, the question is — how does one recognise it? Generally, it is thought to become manifest in deep meditative states, when all thoughts, and in fact all objects of awareness, have completely ceased arising. All that remains is a self-luminous awareness. However, how this realisation of pure awareness is meant to have practical benefits off of the meditation cushion is uncertain. There may be some psychological benefits that carry over into everyday life, but surely recognising it in the midst of everyday activities would be even more beneficial. Furthermore, the notion that pure awareness is the essence of consciousness, suggests that it must be implicit in every experience of the world, so there seems to be no reason why it could not be recognised in everyday experience.

A unique approach for recognising pure awareness in everyday circumstances was pioneered by the philosopher and mystic Douglas Harding. He is most well known in spiritual circles for his classic *On Having No Head* which presented his unconventional approach to self-inquiry. 5 The Headless Way is a contemporary spiritual practice based upon Harding’s methods. The key to this method is noticing that you cannot see your head. Instead of a head, I seem to be looking out of a vast unbounded gap. The goal of the ‘headless meditation’ is to bring your attention back again and again to this void — this spot that is empty in some sense, yet also full of the scene.



Ernst Mach's Self-Portrait. *The Analysis of Sensations* (1914). Public domain.

The significance of the ‘headless’ experience for Harding can be understood in the context of his broader philosophy. Harding was brought up in a strict fundamentalist Christian sect, the Exclusive Plymouth Brethren, in which literature was banned except for the Bible, Brethren writings, and the minimum of school books. Neither could he go to the cinema or theatre. He broke away from the Brethren at the age of 21.

Harding trained as an architect and worked in India in the 1930’s and 40’s. But his heart wasn’t in architecture, rather his burning question was: What am I? He was influenced by relativity and he realised that what he was for others depended upon the distance from which he was observed. From a few feet away he appeared human. But as the observer retreated, he appeared as a city, a continent, a planet, a star, a galaxy. As they approached, he appeared as a human, cells, molecules, and with further ap-

paratus as atoms, particles, and finally virtually nothing. What he really wanted to know was what was at the centre of these layers of appearance. What was he at zero distance?

Finally, one day during his research he came across a self-portrait by Ernst Mach drawn from the first-person perspective. In the picture, there was no head. Harding suddenly realised that from his point of view he wasn’t looking out of a head. At zero distance he was ‘nothing’. The mysterious centre of things (their fundamental nature) wasn’t somewhere out there, rather he was already at it — he was looking out of it. However, this wasn’t a mere nothing because it was awake and contained everything.

Douglas Harding’s philosophical work, which he wrote from outside of the academy, is not well known in academia.⁷ Though Harding’s approach is clearly ‘phenomenological’ in a broad sense of this term, unlike the highly abstract and technical work of Husserl, Harding’s work instead focuses on concrete first-person experience. His approach is perhaps most similar to the form of experimental phenomenology found in Gestalt psychology, which uses apparatus within experience (such as drawings) to demonstrate Gestalt effects. Harding also developed apparatus to explore experience, but his focus was to use them to assist in attending to the spot one is looking from.

I will guide the reader through a couple of Harding’s first-person experiments and try to show how they enable one to recognise ‘awareness itself’, as it is described in contemplative traditions. Please note that you actually have to do the experiments, not just read about them, otherwise this article will not make any sense.

Before proceeding, I will try to clear up a couple of possible misconceptions. The exercises are



Pointing outwards and inwards. (Image by the author)

not about imagining that you don't have a head, but rather noticing what you are looking out of in your direct experience, when common sense assumptions are set aside. It is also certainly not the claim that 'you' the person does not have a head. Others see your head from where they are and you also see it in a mirror. Importantly, neither is the point to deny your third-person identity, like in some spiritual practices, or to try to get rid of the sense of self. Your personhood is a valuable part of your identity and allows you to function in the world. This being said, your personal identity is not your central reality (right where you are), at least this is the claim we will be testing.

The Pointing Experiment

The first experiment uses a pointing finger to direct your attention.

Look at your finger and notice its colours, shape, textures, wrinkles. Now with this thing, by pointing, direct your attention to a far wall. Notice the colours of the wall. Now point to the floor. Notice the patterns, colours and textures. Now point to your foot. Once again you are pointing at a shaped and coloured thing. Point at your leg. Another thing with shape and colour. Then your torso. It has a shape and colour, perhaps movement from your breathing. Now

point at where you are looking from. From your present experience is your finger pointing at an object, a thing? Does there seem to be a head or face here? Any eyes? Any colour, shape, movement? Is there anything here at all or is it just an open space? Is it true to say that this space contains everything on show — your finger, hand, arm, body and the room? Does it also contain 'facial' sensations and floating 'nose' blurs? Is there anything visually outside of this Gap, or is it as open and boundless as the sky? Rather than a mere emptiness, isn't it also awake to itself and the scene? Could you call this an unbounded transparent awareness?

The Mirror Experiment

For this experiment you will need a mirror. Look into the mirror and take notice of your current experience. Going by what's given now (not by what you believe, remember or imagine) how many faces do you see? Are you face-to-face or is the setup face-to-no-face? Notice that the face in the mirror is small and some distance away, not on your shoulders. It is also facing the wrong way. Study the face. Notice the details of its eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks. It is a coloured, shaped thing with wrinkles and other imperfections. As a thing, it excludes other things. It is constantly changing, and is a little older each time you see it. Now bring your attention to where you are looking from — what it is like to be you at zero distance? Are there any eyes here? Mouth? Cheeks? Colours? Wrinkles? Imperfections? Movement? Is your side opaque like that face or is it transparent? Is there anything here to exclude things? Is there any change here? Are there any personally identifying characteristics where you are looking from? Any gender? Any age? Any species? Would you call where you are looking from a dead void or is it alive

with awareness? Could you describe this as a ‘luminous emptiness’? Is there any dividing line or boundary between this aware-gap and the face? Don’t you disappear in favour of that face, and indeed all faces, not to mention the given world?

These experiments are modern meditation techniques. The goal is to turn attention 180 degrees from the objects of awareness to who or what is experiencing these things. Although the method is novel, the results are consistent with contemplative traditions such as Tibetan Buddhism, Zen Buddhism and the Advaita Vedanta, which all describe your ‘true nature’ as colourless, shapeless, soundless and changeless.

Although awareness is distinguishable from the world, in fact opposite from it in every way, this does not make it separable from the world. Being distinguishable in experience is not the same as a metaphysical duality. Relative opposites like black and white exclude each other. This transparent-silence, on the other hand, by lacking all qualities in itself is absolutely united with the world. Paradoxically, in some sense, the awareness *is* the world. Is this how it seems to you? To take a concrete example, when conversing with a friend, their face is mine. My own face never gets in the way. They also have my face. We trade faces in conversation. In a sense, everything is a mirror held up to me. Although it has been called ‘luminous emptiness’, couldn’t we equally say that the given world itself is self-luminous?

The claim for testing is that the ‘nonduality’ of self and world, rather than being a concept we have to try to understand or take on faith from a spiritual teacher, describes one’s everyday, pristine perceptual experience. All we need to do is to look to see if there is a head blocking up the centre of our world. The vast literature on ‘nond-

uality’, while of course useful, consists of a great deal of mythology and conceptual baggage, and hence can represent yet another and even more subtle distraction from noticing one’s direct perceptual experience.

The Headless Way is a direct and demythologised approach to self-inquiry. In most spiritual traditions, teachers and sacred texts are treated as authorities. Douglas Harding, by contrast, perhaps partly as a reaction to his own highly restricted upbringing, never tired of saying ‘dare to be your own authority!’ Rather than taking the claims of spiritual teachers and religious texts on faith (or the claims of common sense for that matter), test them by their own experience. Just as importantly, for Harding, spiritual claims need to be consistent with reason and science if they are to be taken seriously. The Headless Way can hence be considered to be a form of empirical or rational spirituality.

The spiritual literature, not to mention numerous websites and blogs, also invite us to get caught up in theories and concepts about ‘nonduality’, and even worse to argue about them. This is like electing to study a restaurant’s menu, and to debate about the way it is written, instead of enjoying the meal. Noticing that your face does not get in the way of the world is a simple non-intellectual practice for noticing the setup of the lived perceptual world. Of course, this isn’t to say we shouldn’t philosophise about the experience. I’m certainly guilty of doing this. We can do both. Rather the point is, as Ken Wilber is fond of saying, to not mistake the map for the territory. [9]

This awareness is apparently unlike any objective phenomena investigated by traditional science. Third-person science observes things from

the outside. Since it only looks outwards, it overlooks what is actually observing. Douglas Harding's first-person science, with the aid of apparatus such as pointing fingers, tubes and mirrors, shows how to look inwards to recognise awareness itself — at least, that is the claim for testing. First-person methods are still highly controversial within science and philosophy, yet surely a rigorous first-person investigation of consciousness is needed to provide a complete empirical picture of the world and most importantly to provide insight into what we are.

Significantly, the recognition of pure awareness does not seem to depend upon having experience in traditional meditation techniques. The results, at least in my experience, are intriguingly similar to what contemplatives and mystics describe as Emptiness, no-self, True Self and Buddha Nature, amongst many other terms. Yet rather than being an esoteric or mystical experience, the recognition of pure awareness is entirely ordinary and natural. It is at once a mystery and yet what you know most intimately because it is what you are in this very moment. [10]

Brentyn J. Ramm is a Humboldt postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Psychology and Psychotherapy at Witten/Herdecke University in Germany. His research focuses on using first-person experimental methods to investigate conscious experience (experimental phenomenology). He completed his PhD in philosophy at the Australian National University in 2016. His honours in philosophy was at the University of Queensland. Before this he completed a PhD in cognitive psychology at the University of Queensland in 2006.

Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/brentynramm>

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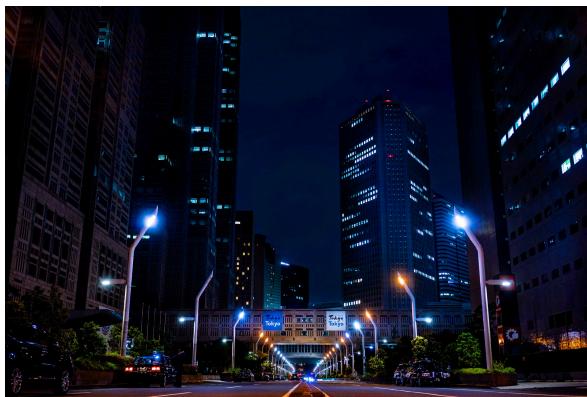
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What Is a Smart City? And is it a good thing?

From waste water treatment to synchronised traffic lights, the idea of smart infrastructure is not new. Still, it's difficult to define what makes a city smart, and it's even harder to tell whether the move towards smart cities will be beneficial to all or not.



Defining “smart”

Smart cities are everywhere nowadays... but they are not quite as new as one might think. If we consider “smart” to mean something like “technologically augmented,” then of course every city is smart. Cities are in their very essence technological products. Streets and means of transport are technologies, as are water and food distribution, waste collection and disposal systems. Modern cities also incorporate power generation and distribution and many types of communication infrastructure: from post offices to telephone networks to glass fibre cabling. A

city cannot exist without technology. So when we call a city “smart,” something else, something beyond a basic technological infrastructure, must be meant by that word.

According to Wikipedia (Deakin and Al Waer 1), a smart city is characterised by:

- The application of a wide range of electronic and digital technologies to communities and cities.
- The use of ICT to transform life and working environments within the region.
- The embedding of such Information and Communications Technologies in government systems.
- The territorialisation of practices that brings ICT and people together to enhance the innovation and knowledge that they offer.

It's interesting to look closely at what they are saying here. Two of the four characteristics are purely descriptive (the application and the embedding, points 1 and 3). The other two include a particular aim or goal (“[in order] to...”): The use of ICT and the territorialisation (what a word!) are not unconditionally part of smart

cities, but only insofar as they achieve particular goals.

But if we look closer at the goals, we find that they are disappointingly narrow, almost trivial: the aim of ICT deployment is to “transform life,” with no mention as to how we’d wish life to be transformed. The “territorialisation” (what a word!), on the other hand, has only the goal of enhancing innovation and knowledge. This is a very technocratic vision. Not much of a humanist manifesto.

Business Dictionary (businessdictionary.com) defines smart cities so:

“A developed urban area that creates sustainable economic development and high quality of life by excelling in multiple key areas; economy, mobility, environment, people, living, and government. Excelling in these key areas can be done so through strong human capital, social capital, and/or ICT infrastructure.”

This is interesting in its emphasis on excellence. High quality of life is the ultimate goal and this is reached through the means of excellence in various key areas. The last sentence is puzzling, in that it allows a smart city to not employ any information technologies. If a city achieves high quality of life through excellence in the key areas based on human and social capital (whatever this is meant to mean in particular) then this would be a smart city. So, presumably, ancient Athens or Miletus would have to be considered smart cities, while Detroit, no matter how much ICT they employ, would not be considered a smart city (there is even a Wikipedia page on the “Decline of Detroit”).

And the European Commission says:

“A smart city is a place where traditional networks and services are made more efficient with the use of digital solutions for the benefit of its inhabitants and business.”

Note that here also there is a goal towards which the smartness of the city is directed. Interestingly, this approach is rooted in the past: “traditional” networks are by definition a necessary part of the smart city, and the smartness only has the role of making these traditional networks more efficient. So a city which develops entirely new networks through technology and abandons the old ones would not fall inside the scope of this definition.

More importantly, there is an unspoken assumption in there that increased “efficiency” (in what?) will necessarily bring about “benefit” for the city’s inhabitants.

But is this true?

We already have many very efficient systems of goods production and distribution, for example. Amazon is very efficient. Just-in-time supermarket re-stocking is very efficient. In communications, mobile phones and WhatsApp messages are very efficient. Yet every single one of these extremely efficient systems has been in the news for causing human misery. The efficient Amazon delivery employees don’t have the time to go to the bathroom. The efficient food supply chains break down when people try to shop more toilet paper than algorithmically predicted. And the efficiency of our communications systems has robbed employees worldwide of their free

time, forcing them to respond to messages whenever these arrive, and extending the actual working time of many to more than 16 hours a day.

So it is not obvious that making “traditional services and networks more efficient” is going to be benefiting the smart city’s inhabitants and businesses.

Smart cities are not new

If a smart city is one that incorporates ICT (information and communication technologies) to improve the lives of its citizens, then cities have been smarting up for over a hundred years now. The telephone, invented in 1876, is a communications technology that has surely improved our lives. The TV is another, although here many would question the degree of improvement that it has brought us.

Since the mid-sixties, and more commonly in the 1970s, European cities have been adjusting traffic signals to produce synchronised “green waves” that would let cars (or bicycles, in some cases) drive through the city without stopping. In many places, bus schedules are now delivered by mobile app, which displays the location of the bus in real time. Electricity and information networks are managed with computer technology and surveillance cameras cover every major street and station in most developed cities.

It is important to realise that smart cities are not a thing of the future: they are already all around us. Singapore, Zurich, and Oslo were listed as the world’s smartest cities in the 2021 Smart City Index 2.

Singapore, with an ageing population, uses video consultations with healthcare professionals and wearable monitoring devices to monitor patients remotely. Sensors measure the cleanli-

ness of streets, the numbers of pedestrians and cars on particular spots during the day, and many other data points on the everyday behaviour of its citizens 2.

Oslo has not only committed to allowing only electric cars into the city from 2025 on, but they also scan car licence plates throughout the city, allowing the government to follow particular car journeys and to create profiles for street usage.

In New York, the police department has tested software that predicts crime based on historical data, terrain modelling and other collected information 2. And so on.

Problems with smart cities

The obvious problem with these technologies is that often they are developed and adopted without sufficient public consultation or even without the public’s knowledge. Did the citizens of Singapore ever explicitly agree to have the numbers of pedestrians in public places counted by hidden cameras? Did Oslo citizens agree to have their licence plates scanned all across the city? Did New York’s citizens agree to be suspected of committing a crime just because they live in a particular neighbourhood?

And there are many other problems caused by smart cities.

In a short overview paper “Reframing, reimagining and remaking smart cities,” Rob Kitchin, who seems to be behind every second publication on smart cities, identifies a full page of “promises and perils” of smart city technologies. But even the “promises” sometimes look like perils:

[Smart cities] will tackle urban problems in ways that maximize control,

reduce costs, and improve services, and do so in commonsensical, pragmatic, neutral and apolitical ways through technical solutions.³

Is it possible to solve the problems of a city in a “neutral and apolitical” way through “technical solutions”? Is such a promise not entirely misunderstanding what politics and social living is about? Is not every technical solution obviously also a political solution at the same time? Is the illusion of unpolitical technological fixes not necessarily a starting point for a techno-dictatorship that will eventually endanger human freedom, dignity and choice?

Notes

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2 NEC New Zealand. Online: <https://www.nec.co.nz/market-leadership/publications-media/which-cities-are-smart-cities-5-examples-of-smart-cities-around-the-world/>

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Violence intolerance

The Oscars Slap is now far enough in the past to have slipped off our Twitter and Facebook feeds and to have firmly become a part of that unsexy class of events that have been talked about too much and that no-one wants to hear mentioned ever again. Just the right time for us philosophers to enter the discussion.



The Academy Slap

I'm not a cinema person. I prefer to enjoy my favourite movies from the peace of my own sofa, rather than being forced to sit upright without moving for two hours in the company of a hundred munching strangers. And I certainly prefer to endlessly re-watch the movies I've known and loved for the past thirty or forty years of my life rather than sit through something that came out last month and that, most likely, will be a waste of time. I'm not saying that old movies have all been brilliant. But, as the law of nature goes, 90 percent of everything is crap, and it's much easier to filter the crap

out of old movies (mostly because all the bad movies are simply not available in any form any more, while the good ones have survived). With today's movies, one would have to sit through every single one in order to discover which ones are worth it – and I prefer to leave that to others.

This is a somewhat laboured attempt to explain why I neither care for the institution of the Academy Awards nor for the particular people involved in the recent Oscars' slap. I have no knowledge who these people are and take no sides based on any movie preferences. For all I care, the Academy could host their awards on the back side of the Moon.

But, like everyone else, I couldn't escape the Guardian, Youtube and Twitter bringing the events to my computer screen. And I thought that, as philosophers, perhaps we should have an opinion on what happened there. After all, Daily Philosophy is supposed to apply philosophy to life, and here is real, glittery, glamorous, violent life in all its glory.

So what does philosophy have to say?

The black hole at the centre of philosophy

When I started to research the topic, I read much of what had already been published on the event. Many of the contributions were too simplistic to satisfy the philosophical mind, being essentially expressions of rage, anxiety and disappointment

rather than reasoned responses. Other contributions I found unsettlingly incomprehensible:

Smith's physical reaction to such a joke on behalf of his wife, also presents problems of physical assault and patriarchal ideals of protection and fragile masculinity. However, there are greater racial nuances to the analysis and commentary of the situation that touch on themes of Black womanhood and presentation of femininity, as well as white supremacist standards for public performantism and systemic hypocrisy. Discussing the altercation requires a greater understanding of the way white rage overshadows greater structural implications ... [and so on]

This is from Milkee Bekele in "The Mac Weekly". This article actually has a good point later on, but I fail to see the relevance of mentioning "white supremacist standards for public performantism" and "white rage" in the context of one black man slapping another, and "performantism" isn't even a word according to Google and my own computer's dictionary. ("Performantism," without the "n," is, but that is something different).

Being somewhat puzzled by this (and many similar) contributions, I tried to see what professional philosophers would have to say. Cut to the unadorned white query box on Google Scholar: we're trying to find the right keywords to research that event. What do we search for?

Obviously, it would be in vain to try "Oscars," "slap" or any words describing the particular event. If there will be any scholarly papers discussing it, they will be published and indexed

some time next year. Scholarship often resembles not so much standing on the shoulders of giants, but sitting astride a wandering glacier, waiting for it to arrive somewhere useful.

So we will have to make do with similar, analogous events. What keywords would come close?

"Domestic violence" is all about violent behaviour within families, with an emphasis on gender dynamics. I scanned a few papers on that, but nothing seemed to describe a fight between two grown men in a public venue.

Next I tried "ethics workplace violence," figuring that, somehow, the Academy Awards are a kind of workplace for actors. But again, the dynamics of typical workplace violence have little in common with the situation at the Oscars.

"Public violence" leads to political topics like violence of the state, violence against migrants and so on.

"Ethics of dueling" seems promising, but the results are all about "dueling discourses" and "dueling loyalties" rather than actual, literal duels. "Ethics of duels" has the same problem. The only hit that seems vaguely relevant is about "Duels and the right to life." Although Mr Rock might have been surprised by the event, and perhaps even somewhat in pain for a few minutes, the slap was hardly life-threatening, so this does not seem relevant either.

What would actually be relevant? Bar fights! Fist fights! Pub fights! So I tried this next: "Ethics of pub fights." Nothing. "Ethics of bar fights." Nothing. "Ethics of fist fights." That brought up one article on the "Ethics of cockfight, botfight and other fights" and another on the "Ethics of mixed martial arts." Interesting, but it seems a stretch to describe the Oscars' slap as a mixed martial arts fight.

It turns out that there is a huge, black hole at the very centre of academic philosophy: apparently not a single philosopher has ever written anything that Google Scholar knows about on the ethics of two men publicly slapping each other over an insult. An event that certainly must be thousands of times more common than abortions and euthanasia cases has got no academic coverage at all!

So here is my call to all my colleagues who are reading this: *Let's write an edited collection on the philosophy of everyday violence.* Not family or gendered violence, not violence against children or workplace violence, which have all already had their share of treatment; but insults, pub fights, duels, brawls. We would do humanity a great service. Seriously.

It's a shame that some academics are writing their hearts out about "Spanish Organ Music in the Early 17th Century," a paper that got a full 13 citations since 1962 (!), while nobody has ever examined something as common as a slap between quarrelling adults. Write me a message if you'd like to be part of an edited volume on that.

Facts? What facts?

I am not eager to get into the facts of the case. For one, it has already been discussed to death and you probably know all the facts. And on top of that, we are philosophers. Need I remind you that the sharpest tool in the philosopher's toolbox is not the *fact* but the cunningly deployed *counterfactual*? As a profession, we are thriving on counterfactuals.

It is a long and proud tradition: Aristotle, father of philosophy, set the tone by stating that men have more teeth than women, a non-fact

that could not have been too hard to empirically falsify. Bertrand Russell:

"Aristotle could have avoided the mistake of thinking that women have fewer teeth than men, by the simple device of asking Mrs. Aristotle to keep her mouth open while he counted." 1

(If you're wondering who Mrs Aristotle was, here is my article about Aristotle's life that will shed some light on this question.)

So let's not bother too much with who the two people were, their names and their relationship. What is important is just this: one man very publicly insults another's wife over a disease that affected the wife's hair. The husband of the wife slaps the offender in response and offers a verbal appreciation of the other man's character. That was all. This is a scene that must be playing out at least once a week in every single pub in the world. So why was the public reaction so devastating and, one might say, so strangely one-sided?

It would seem as if one could equally well think that the slapper was right. After all, the slapee had started it all by making a tasteless, unfunny and very public joke about the medical condition of another person. This surely is not something that we would want to excuse. And this is not even mentioning that the person with the medical problem was a black woman, which brings us back to toxic masculinity and unrealistic expectations directed at the appearance and behaviour of women. It is hard to think of something more tasteless and deplorable that someone could say into a live TV camera than what the original offender said. But the public reactions to the slap very rarely mentioned this.

Why?

Violence intolerance

They say that the increased incidence of allergies in recent years is, among other things, made worse by our habit of sterilising everything in our homes. Children grow up in environments that don't allow their immune systems to develop fully, simply because they are not exposed to enough pathogens in their childhood years. Could it be the case that our collective attitudes towards various forms of violence are also disturbed by environmental factors?

Because there is certainly something remarkably weird in the reactions to the slap.

On the day after the event, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences issued a statement saying that "the Academy does not condone violence in any form." But this seems to be, at best, grossly hypocritical.

Hollywood is an environment that over decades supported, emboldened and shielded people like Harvey Weinstein and Bill Cosby. But these are only the most prominent names. Ever heard of child actor manager Martin Weiss? Actor Jeffrey Jones, who allegedly forced a 14-year old to pose naked for him? Director Victor Salva? There is a dedicated Wikipedia page on sexual abuse in the American Film industry that contains many dozens of names, most of whom have been happily clapping along and smiling to the camera at some Academy Awards session or other. Statistically, it would be weird if none of those present this time will ever be convicted of sexual violence in the future.

Given this track record of the Academy's former members, it sounds strange to hear the Academy distance itself from violence in this tone of moral indignation. How many of those witnessing the slap in that auditorium are them-

selves perpetrators of domestic violence? How many take part in sex parties that involve exploitation of sex workers? How many exploit, underpay and harass workers on film sets? How many have links to Trump, Putin, Russian millionaires and other circles that are involved in world-wide violence? How many are drug users, fuelling street gang violence and financing death squads and terror in the countries where their drugs are produced? How many have three or four cars in their garages in addition to a private plane, being responsible for significant CO2 emissions? According to a source:

Private jets have a disproportionate impact on the environment. In just one hour, a single private jet can emit two tonnes of CO2. The average person in the EU emits 8.2 t CO2 [equivalent] over the course of an entire year.
Transport & Environment

And then: How many of the Academy's members owe their wealth to movies in which people get killed, attacked, maimed and mutilated? According to the Guardian, here is the list of the "**top 10 deadliest Hollywood movies**":

1. Guardians of the Galaxy (2014) – 83,871 on-screen deaths
2. Dracula Untold (2014) – 5,687
3. The Sum of All fears (2002) – 2,922
4. The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King (2003) - 2,798
5. 300: Rise of An Empire (2014) – 2,234

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- 6. Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers (2002) – 1,741
 - 7. The Matrix Revolutions (2003) – 1,647
 - 8. The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug (2014) – 1,417
 - 9. Braveheart (1995) – 1,297
 - 10. The Avengers (2012) – 1,019

Obviously, Guardians of the Galaxy is in a league of its own. But even the lowest body-count movie on this list brings it to over 1,000 deaths. With a run time of the “Avengers” of 143 minutes, that’s seven dead human beings for every minute of harmless movie enjoyment, created by the same people who don’t condone violence in any form.

The plank in your own eye

I don’t understand how our relationship to violence really works. But it is obvious that something is broken, deeply irrational and in need, at least, of some analysis.

On the one hand, in most developed societies, **we are fiercely intolerant of the slightest sign of violence in the home, at work, on an awards presentation show on TV**. On the other hand, **our world is incredibly (and increasingly) violent**, especially so in the US. Since 2009, there have been 288 school shootings in the US, while Canada and France had only two in the same period, and Germany one. From 1970 to 2020, school shootings have increased every single decade: from 163 to 218, 265, 353 to 426. The storming of the US Capitol in 2021 was a show of violence that was rare in its mind- and point-

lessness. And recently, the newspapers have been filled with images of civilians’ corpses from the streets of Ukrainian cities.

If we are going to talk about toxic masculinity, why do we not talk about Putin’s toxic masculinity, or Trump’s? For some weird reason, we seem to have developed an obsession with the smallest and most insignificant acts of violence, while at the same time being more and more desensitised to the pervasive violence that engulfs our lives from all sides.

The Bible has, as it often does, good and unheeded advice on violence and tolerance. “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone,” and “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” (both NIV).

Instead of looking at our own failings, we have, especially in the times of social media, learned to focus on the splinters in others’ eyes in order to distract from the planks in ours.

Is violence always bad?

In a BigThink article, Jonny Thomson tries to apply Kantian ethics to the slap:

But what about a subtler maxim, something more tailored to what Smith did at the Oscars? Perhaps we could draw up a maxim like, slap an otherwise healthy person, in a way which leaves no permanent damage, if they deeply offend a loved one? If so, some might argue this could be universalized. In fact, it might be a world we would like. Many people very well might approve of a society

that physically punishes people who cause harm to our loved ones.

(This is only part of the discussion and does not represent the final conclusion of that article.)

In a Monash University Lens article, the authors rightly point out that **we don't always need to be polite and smile.**

When the delegates of the United Nations recently walked out on Sergei Lavrov when he tried to address them in a speech, this was certainly impolite but also quite appropriate. Even violence, in the form of protests against dictatorships or in the service of a higher cause, like in a climate demonstration turned violent, can sometimes seem justified. Except if we were radical pacifists, we wouldn't condemn the Ukrainian fighters or the Allied soldiers in the Second World War because they reacted with violence to the Russian or German attacks. Violence and the use of force can be morally right under the right circumstances. Whether the particular slap at the Oscars qualifies as justified use of violence is another question — but it *is* a real question and not a foregone conclusion.

A very long time ago, I read a scifi novel by Stanislaw Lem, “Return from the Stars” (1961). I still remember it well. In it, a crew of

astronauts return from a long flight at near light-speed, with the result that for them only 10 years have passed, while on Earth 127 years have gone by. The returned astronauts are confronted with a totally different society than the one they left a decade ago. In the new world, which now is their present, people have been strangely pacified. Through a procedure called *betrization*, they have had all their aggressive impulses removed, and human populations now seem to the astronauts more like sheep than actual human beings: unable to assert themselves, unable to even take risks or value adventure.

Like the Ludovico Technique in Clockwork Orange, the *betrization* treatment achieves what might seem, from a utilitarian perspective, a positive result only by removing something that we would consider an essential part of the human condition: the ability to be free in choosing one's means of expression, the ability to make moral choices, the ability to exercise one's moral autonomy.

And, yes, also the ability to be violent when circumstances demand it.

¹ Russell, B. (1950). An outline of intellectual rubbish. Unpopular essays, 71-111.

Future Cities for Transhumans

Future humans

What will it be like to live in a future smart city?



I was recently reading about smart cities, and I found a fascinating paper of four Finnish authors 1. It was so different from the dry stuff one usually finds in philosophy papers and so much to read and to think about that I just have to share it here.

The authors begin with the insight that smart cities and transhumanism pose similar questions. Future *humans* will incorporate technology that will interface with the body's biology to provide new functions. At the same time, future *cities* will incorporate technology that will interface with both the citizens and the infrastructure to provide new features to city life, new ways to move around, to communicate and to access services.

This creates a situation in which transhuman beings and cities will likely co-evolve. They will adapt their interfaces to each other, maximising the benefit for both, while reducing friction in everyday life. And so, if we want to understand future smart cities, we will have to study them together with future augmented humans, as one complex functional unit.

Now if we think of technologically augmented humans, what kinds of abilities can we imagine having as cyborgs or transhumans that we don't have now?

The Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom (now at Oxford) classifies the improvements into three groups: bodily, cognitive and emotional 2.

Although Bostrom mentions only the "healthspan" as a central bodily feature, certainly other abilities also belong here: the ability to fly, perhaps, to breathe underwater, or (less ambitious) better senses (like better vision or hearing) or even entirely new senses. For example, the ability to "see" harmful radiation or infrared light, making it possible for us to see the warmth signatures of others after they have left, or to detect humans in the dark. There are already enhanced humans with such abilities, and we will talk later in this series about them.

Cognitive skills would involve perhaps a brain interface to a knowledge database like Wikipedia or to instant messaging apps. We are

pretty close to that already, with our networked mobile phones always within reach and ready to access the infinite wealth of information on the Internet.

It is funny how we get used to these almost magical abilities. When I was growing up (and the same will be true for many of you), no mobile phones existed and no Internet. If one wanted to know something, one had to ask one's teacher or parents, and if that failed, go to a public library and start searching through long boxes of little cards.

A few days ago, my children found some funny caterpillars in our little rooftop garden and wanted to know what these are. Within minutes we had not only identified them, but knew everything about their life-cycle, what they like to eat, how many eggs these butterflies lay and which plants they prefer to lay them on. And we had found beautiful, colourful photographs of every single stage in the life of these butterflies. An hour later, my daughter was off creating a presentation on these butterflies for her primary school class and sending the pictures of our caterpillars to her friends on WhatsApp. One may be critical of technology (and you surely know by now that *I am*), but it is indeed a wonderful extension of our human ability to learn and to be creative that a small child can, within an hour, go from seeing a strange, hairy worm in the garden to educating a whole class of other kids through a self-made, researched presentation. Whatever wrong things technology has done, it has also enabled every child (...who can afford access, reading skills, food and leisure; yes, I know...) to be a little David Attenborough, and that is surely wonderful.

But I'm digressing. Bostrom also mentioned

emotional enhancements. It's harder to imagine enhanced emotions than it is to imagine a better, more functional body. Bostrom defines enhanced emotional life as "the capacity to enjoy life and to respond with appropriate affect to life situations and other people." How can this capacity be technologically enhanced? Treatments for depression and other negative mental conditions are one possibility. But also:

We may seek to reduce feelings of hate, contempt, or aggression when we consciously recognize that these feelings are prejudiced or unconstructive.

While today we have to train our emotions using difficult meditative techniques, we can imagine how in future it might be possible to remove undesirable emotions technologically. Whether this would be a good idea is another question and the discussion brings *Clockwork Orange* to mind or Stanislaw Lem's "Return from the Stars" (also mentioned in yesterday's post, in case you missed it).

Smart cities, transhuman cities

What does all this have to do with smart cities? Bodily enhancements will likely include technologies that will make it easier for us to walk (artificial legs, perhaps?) or fly. Transporting one's body and possessions from place to place has always been one of the main activities of human beings — and to facilitate transport has also always been one of the main roles of city infrastructure. If one is able to travel fast and without tiring on cyborg legs, or able to fly or jump from roof to roof, then the whole transport infrastructure of cities will need to be rethought.

The authors of the Finnish paper now create three different thought experiments: mental models of what it would be like to live in three different future cities. One where the citizens are physically, one where they are cognitively, and one where they are emotionally enhanced. And then they provide first-person monologues describing the subjective experience of two future citizens in each one of the three places: one positive, utopian; and one negative, dystopian experience.

Let's have a look. Here is the transhuman citizen of the emotionally augmented city speaking:

I love my city and I want to participate in making it a better place to live in for everyone. For this reason, a few years ago I joined an NGO that, together with city officials, organises "emotional requalification programs" in several neighbourhoods. These programs aim to improve the mood of citizens by reshaping the urban environment. Basically, thanks to the emotional mapping operated by the municipality we are able to identify critical areas, where the mean-mood of the citizens reaches critical levels of depression, anxiety or fear. This happens often in neighbourhoods with a significant percentage of low-income households and immigrant residents. 1

The citizen goes on to describe how the benevolent government organises meetings and activities to improve the mood of the citizens, how they organise games for the public and how they restructure streets and highways to make them more emotionally resonant. This leads to a discipline called "urban emotional design" that combines different fields of study, including the manipulation of hormonal levels of the citizens, to create an optimal emotional experience.

The dystopian version, on the other hand, is equally fascinating.

The person who presents their case have moved into this city from another place after a long period of unemployment. The speaker is depressed and they find it difficult to rent a place to live, because landlords are worried about the mean happiness of their houses and city neighbourhoods and they don't want to rent a home to someone who is suffering from depression. They finally find a place in a depressed neighbourhood, which, because of its low happiness index, is avoided by other citizens. Most residents of this area are depressed. On the streets there is only junk food on offer. And many residents are addicted to antidepressants and other medications. The city mayor is trying to increase the happiness mean of the city and encourages companies to get rid of unhappy employees.

Similarly imaginative and gripping are the other four imaginary case studies.

In the physically augmented city, happy citizens can fly through a three-dimensional network of infrastructure. The old streets have disappeared and have been replaced by parks and wildlife zones. Canals and urban forests have replaced parking lots and slums. Street crime is non-existent, since everyone can overlook the whole city from above.

In the negative vision, the obsolete streets have been replaced by more shopping malls. Every little bit of unused space has been claimed for commercial developments. The population density is unbearable, with no space to breathe and relax.

In the cognitive enhanced utopia, citizens carry sensors for additional information that is attached to every building, tree and lamppost. Citizens can attach their own memories and stories to everything and others can see and read these stories, creating a rich, living museum of personal experiences out of every street.

In the dystopian version, all this infrastructure is used – what else? – for commercial advertising and tourism.

To compete with other capitals of global tourism, the municipality started an aggressive campaign of rebranding. The city became flamboyant, a baroque accumulation of content, a theme-park on steroids. The overstimulated visitors and tourists wander around constantly flooded with new stimuli to make up for their brief attention span. ... So, these new hyper-stimulating neighborhoods are now populated mostly by people that do not live there.¹

Utopia or dystopia?

What I found so fascinating in this article is how the positive and the negative outcome both arise out of exactly the same assumptions about the infrastructure. What makes the difference is only a small variation in how humans and regulators relate to these cities: whether the citizens participate actively in creating a happy place, or whether they leave their city in the hands of corrupt administrators and landlords.

In a sense, what makes the difference between utopia and dystopia, the paper seems to say, is something largely intangible – and something that is not sure to be there when we need it.

Like in Capra's "It's a Wonderful Life," it seems like it's not the world itself (or the technologies involved) that are good or evil; but that it could sometimes be the work of a single person that makes the whole difference between a happy, flourishing community and one that is terrorised into submission and suffering.

Often, the authors seem to suggest, it is the participation of the residents themselves that makes all the difference. This is an interesting claim. If the citizens are the decisive force in how utopian or dystopian our future turns out, then it's not so important any more to talk about whether particular technologies are good or bad. Much of technoeconomics would be obsolete, and a much greater value would have to be placed on the development of democratic values, of participatory community structures, on the development of emotionally healthy adults, on compassion and empathy as the basis for social living.

It would also mean that we would come uncomfortably close to accepting quotes like this here, which I find deeply repugnant, but I want to quote it anyway because it illustrates the problem of this approach:

"The rifle itself has no moral stature, since it has no will of its own. Naturally, it may be used by evil men for evil purposes, but there are more good men than evil, and while the latter cannot be persuaded to the path of righteousness by propaganda, they can certainly be corrected by good men with rifles." (Internet quote)

This is from a website with gun quotes and attributed to someone whom I neither want to know nor want to give more recognition by naming here. If we accept that technologies are neutral, we may end up with a neutral position in the gun control debate, which does not seem like such a good idea.

And then: if we believed, as the authors of the Finnish paper suggest, in the power of communities to shape their worlds, would this really be a reason for optimism? We can look at what we human beings have been doing until now with the blessings of the incredible technologies that we already control today: Firearms, nuclear power, genetic engineering, computers, the Internet, artificial intelligence, space technology.

No doubt we have found some good uses for each of those, but for each one of the good uses a multitude of destructive, idiotic and dangerous

ones come to mind. We have always used technologies not only to safeguard human dignity and to ensure the flourishing of all life on Earth; but much more often, it may seem, we have been driven by greed and by the lust for power to employ these technologies in ways that destroy the world and enslave human beings, all around the globe.

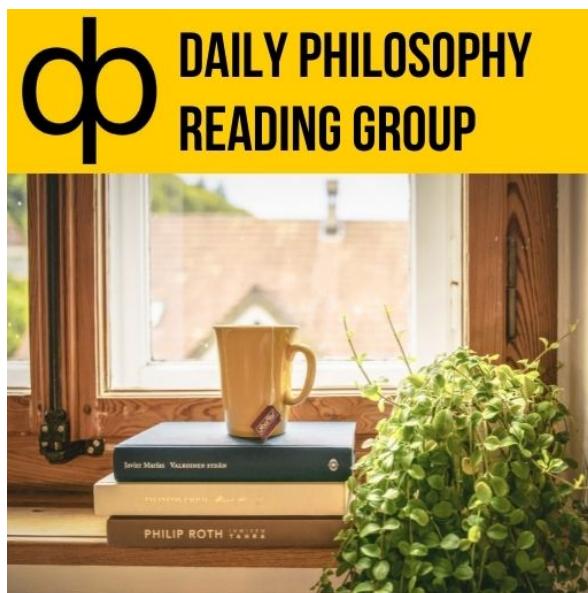
How high is the chance that this will be different with those transhuman technologies of the future?

Notes

1 Thibault, M., Buruk, O. O., Buruk, S. S., & Hamari, J. (2020, July). Transurbanism: Smart Cities for Transhumans. In Proceedings of the 2020 ACM Designing Interactive Systems Conference (pp. 1915-1928).

2 <https://www.nickbostrom.com/posthuman.pdf>

Epicurus Reading Group #1



Dear Reading Group members, thank you for coming here! This is the first post of our new reading group. In the coming weeks, we will read a relatively short, classic work of philosophy together. If this goes well and you are interested in continuing, we can continue this group with other books.

It is not so much a traditional “reading group” that meets via video or in person at a specific time; this would be a bit difficult with all the different time zones we’re in. But **please do tell me if an actual, online, weekly meeting would be important to you**, and I will try to arrange it anyway. For the moment, I thought we could start simply by all of us reading the same text at the same time and then commenting on it (and

on each other’s contributions) in the same place: right below this post.

There is no formal participation in this group; everyone is welcome to read with us and to comment or to just ignore this group. **If you don’t want to receive these reading group emails at all, you can unsubscribe from them separately** from the rest of Daily Philosophy. Just click [here](#) to see and change your account settings.

Make sure to unsubscribe *only* from the reading group, so you still receive the rest of our Daily Philosophy articles.

If, instead, you want to participate, please now go **down to the discussion area and post a few sentences about yourself and your background**. It’s nicer if we all introduce ourselves a bit before the reading group kicks off!

Epicurus: Principal Doctrines

In the coming 4 sessions of this reading group we will read the main work of the philosophy of happiness of Epicurus, the Principal Doctrines. Epicurus wrote many works (Diogenes Laertius, from whom we know most about Epicurus, lists 44 books!). But for his theory of happiness, we only need three works:

- **The Principal Doctrines** is a collection of 40 sayings that summarise the whole of the Epicurean philosophy of life.

- **The Letter to Menoeceus**, who was one of Epicurus' students, is one of three Epicurean letters that we have. It is a less systematic and slightly more superficial text than the Principal Doctrines, but covers essentially the same ground.
- Finally, the so-called **Vatican Sayings** are a collection of 81 quotes that were discovered in the Vatican Library in 1888. Some of them are almost identical to some of the Principal Doctrines, but others cover also different topics. We will occasionally refer to the Vatican Sayings when we discuss Epicurus.

Both the Principal Doctrines and the Letter to Menoeceus we know only because the 3rd century AD author Diogenes Laertius quoted them in full in his work "Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers," which also contains source material from many other Greek philosophers.

Thankfully, **all these sources are available in English and anyone can read them for free** on the Internet. Here are the links:

- Principal Doctrines, tr. Hicks
- Letter to Menoeceus, tr. Hicks
- Diogenes Laertius, Chapter on Epicurus. This one includes the Greek text (click on "Load" top right to see the Greek).

The Hicks translation is a bit weird at times, but it's easily available and seemingly free of restrictive copyrights.

- Julia Hannafin offers a different translation of the Principal Doctrines without stating who the translator is.
- Epicurus.net has another translation of the Principal Doctrines, again without translator information.

- Finally, Erik Anderson offers his own modern (2006) translation. This one is interesting because it divides the text into eight sections that cover different topics.

Erik Anderson's grouping

Erik Anderson divides the text into the following sections:

1. The four-fold cure for anxiety (Doctrines 1-4)
2. Pleasure and virtue are interdependent (5)
3. Social and financial status have recognizable costs and benefits (6-8)
4. Through the study of Nature, we discern the limits of things (9-13)
5. Unlike social and financial status, which are unlimited, peace of mind can be wholly secured (14-21)
6. Happiness depends on foresight and friendship (22-30)
7. The benefits of natural justice are far-reaching (31-38)
8. So happiness can be secured in all circumstances (39-40)

I propose to read the text over 4 weeks like this:

- Starting Monday, April 25: Doctrines 1-8
- Starting Monday, May 2: Doctrines 9-21
- Starting Monday, May 9: Doctrines 22-30

- Starting Monday, May 16: Doctrines 31-40

I will post the text (in the Hicks translation) together with a short introduction every Monday. This first Monday (today) is just for the general introduction to the reading group. **On each following Friday (April 22, April 29, May 6, May 13, May 20) and over the weekend, I will be present in the discussion forum,** where we can then talk about the text in something resembling real-time. Of course, feel free to post your comments any time, but during the weekends the probability will be higher that I and others will be looking at the forum more often and that more direct discussions can take place. At the end of the weekend, I will then summarise

the discussion and we will prepare for the next Monday.

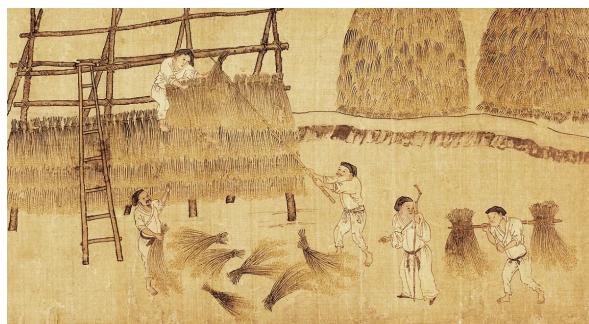
If you'd like to have a Zoom meeting in addition to the forum discussions, then tell me in the comments to this post and we will arrange a day and time that suits all who want to participate. I can tell you that I am in the GMT+8 time-zone, so if I'm to be present in the reading group, we could meet either after 22:00 GMT (which would be 6 in the morning for me), or around 14:00 GMT (which would be 22:00 here). I'm okay with both time frames.

Thanks again for coming along on this journey, and I hope that we will all have fun reading Epicurus together!

– Andy

Ian James Kidd

Shénnóng and the Agriculturalist School



In Chinese philosophical history, celebration of simple styles of life close to nature is typically attributed to the Daoists. Within the *Dàodéjīng*, sophistication is a main cause of a violent world that has ‘lost the Way’. Rituals and cleverness feed a superficiality and hypocrisy that was absent in the simpler societies that existed long ago in the past. Zhuāngzǐ, too, constantly calls our admiring attention to the unconstrained spontaneity natural to the creatures most of us we treat so dreadfully. Daoist texts also see nature as a model for authentic human conduct – rivers that symbolise constancy, say, and the night skies that intimate the mysterious *Dào* (‘Way’) holding sway over the world. The artificiality celebrated by the Confucians and other schools is contrasted with simple ways of life lived closer to nature praised by Daoists.

This tidy picture of Daoist praise of spontaneity and simplicity *versus* the overactive, corrupting

artificiality of Confucianism is clearly too simplistic. There is clear variation within and between those rich philosophies. The *Dàodéjīng* is sympathetic to statecraft in a way that Zhuāngzǐ is clearly not. Confucius sees ‘rituals’ as vital to authentic moral practice but hated superficiality and hypocrisy. Daoists and Confucians would concur in the critique of the bureaucratism and harsh moral ethos of the Legalists. Moreover, we should always take care to avoid attractive but simplistic dualisms – nature/culture being a case in point.

A more interesting reason to demur before crediting Daoism as the Chinese philosophy focused on simpler, more natural life-styles is the availability of alternative candidates. Perhaps the best is the Nóngjiā, an agrarian philosophy inspired by the thought and example of the legendary sage-king, Shénnóng.

The ‘divine farmer’

According to Chinese tradition, the earliest humans had a dreadful life.

They were constantly vulnerable to wild animals, storms, and starvation and struggled to subsist – a precarious ‘state of nature’. Consistent with similar myths in other cultures, they were saved from this dire state by sages who introduced innovations like writing, technology, and organ-

ised forms of culture. Institutions arose which gradually transformed human life. Chinese tradition includes Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors – one of whom, Shénnóng, the ‘Divine Farmer’, taught people the arts of agriculture, such as crop planting and the domestication of animals.

Shénnóng is credited as a sage, a person of profound wisdom who helped transform human life and practice. According to legend, Shén-nóng was not a unifier of the sort admired by Kǒngzī or the bureaucratic overseer the Legalists thought could enforce social order.

Shénnóng ruled a decentralised empire of tiny fiefs – small, local communities bound together by a trust rooted in mutual acquaintance and shared work. There were no ministers or laws and – if the legends are believed – it was a time of peace and prosperity. Uncontaminated by desires for elaborate goods and free from the cynicism born of lack of trust in distant leaders, people lived simpler, happier lives. It is a world of natural and moral order where the people spontaneously act rightly and all things flourish:

What grows up through spring and autumn is not to be injured or obstructed; carefully tend what is beneficial in the land, so that the myriad things complete their growth; do not snatch away what benefits the people, and the farmers will work in accord with the seasons (*Huainanzi*, Ch.6)

According to Shénnóng, rulers had a limited number of very simple functions, mainly concerning agriculture. A ruler should teach people agricultural arts, inspect their fields, and keep a grain store (dispensing it in bad years, storing it during good years). Here we see the

germ of themes taken up by other schools: the *Dàodéjīng* vision of sage-rulers who work with natural processes and ‘fill the bellies’ of the people, say, and the Mohist and Legalist emphases on the importance of state overseeing of agriculture. If teaching agriculture and stocking granaries seems dull, we ought to recall how devastating famine could be – tens of thousands could die.

The simplicity of this conception of the ruler is still rooted in a philosophical vision of a flourishing human life. A school emerged devoted to developing the ideals expressed in the legend of Shénnóng – the Nóngjiā, the School of Agrarianism or, more poetically, ‘the School of Tillers’.

The School of the Tillers

The Nóngjiā were one of the reputed Hundred Schools of Thought which flourished within China from the 6th century to 221 BCE. Many of these were named for the occupations – tillers, diplomats, militarists – central to their concerns. Here we should recall Kǒngzī’s critical remarks on ‘vessels’ – people specialised in a specific craft or trade – and his related conviction that a morally excellent person is no limited ‘vessel’. The art of living requires expansive generalism, not narrow specialism.

A distinguished scholar, A.C Graham, describes the Nóngjiā as unique, ‘the one school which reflects the aspirations of the peasants’. These included being able to live and work in peace, unhurried and able to labour according to their own ways, without intrusive control by distant rulers. Left to till the earth in peace, people naturally tend towards ways of life characterised by an unforced trust in others and an appreciative care for the natural world. For this reason, Shénnóng’s

legend and example are ‘ancestral to all Chinese utopianism’.

A book, *Shénnóng*, is now lost, although some of its contents were described, however accurately, in a later syncretic text, the *Huainanzi* (c. 139 BCE). It reports the book had chapters on law, teaching, numbers, and ‘prohibition’ – the latter urging humans not to obstruct the natural processes which ensure balance and growth in the world. This has two aspects. On the negative side we should resist and condemn the drives to complexity – manifested in ambitions to impose ‘order’ onto things which feeds aggressive, myopic stances on the world. On the positive side, we should teach people to realise simplicity in their desires, goals, habits, and ways of life. Farming offers clear images: a good farmer understands the natures and needs of animals, accords with natural rhythms of the seasons, and appreciates what the land is able to sustainably yield.

The Nóngjiā agrarian vision of small self-sustaining and peaceable communities of proto-environmentalists might be attractive. It inspired the agrarian movements of Europe and North America and resonates with many themes in anarchist and environmentalist thought – like a focus on sustainability, localism, and a minimal state. But attractiveness and practicability are quite different things. A.C. Graham speaks for many commentators in judging Shénnóng political theory as a ‘combination of the practical and the naïve’. Certainly, it is very easy to romanticise an agrarian life of toil in the fields and few of those who admire those ideals actually pursue them. Elsewhere, though, Graham is more sympathetic. What we see in the ‘Way of Shen-nong’ is a political and moral ideal clearly distinguishable from Confucianism, Mo-

hism, Legalism, and Daoism. Of course, this is not *very* sympathetic: coherence is a low bar to meet. There are other qualities to consider, too. Is the Way of Shen-nong also compelling, practicable, and so on?

Graham nicely describes the general character of the Shénnóng vision of life:

The Shen-nong ideal is of a world of village communities where a man’s word can be trusted by his neighbours without the need for oaths and covenants, where only idle hands make mischief and disputes are better settled by local custom than by calling in the law, under leaders who work their own land and are obeyed because everyone can see the point of their decisions (*Disputers of the Tao*, 69-70)

What might be more philosophically relevant are not the arguments or doctrines of the Nóngjiā. It is the moods and feelings that it expresses — nostalgia for a simpler life, the appreciation of moral innocence that is no sooner realised than lost and that nourishing feeling of ‘at-home-ness’ that Roger Scruton called *oikophilia*. Nostalgia and a sense of lost innocence and a sense of belonging to a place one has caringly cultivated – all these reflect sentiments and needs that go deep with human beings.

Innocence

A simple agrarian life devoted to hard work, modesty and perseverance and the absence of complicating artifice may be attractive. It might also be unsustainable given the way that the

world has come to be – the metaphor of innocence is appropriate since it refers to something which once lost cannot be regained. Our innocence cannot be consciously appreciated. It can only be lamented once it is lost, prized in those who still possess it, then meditated on as an ideal.

In Chinese history, the sort of simple agrarianism which the Nóngjiā esteemed was doomed to be displaced by the social and technological developments they made possible (including major agricultural advances during the Spring and Autumn period, 722-481 BC). Soon, older social and economic arrangements were replaced by larger and more complex enterprises. One consequence was a reliance on ever-more complex ‘covenants’ – formalised agreements which replaced informal relations of trustful acquaintance.

Another was a hugely expanded role, in human life, for self-conscious calculations of profits which added potent incentives to exploitative-ness. We see a clear legacy of all this in Daoism. Zhuāngzǐ and the anonymous authors of the *Dàodéjīng* were acute critics of the perverse drive in human beings towards complexification. We can read the *Dàodéjīng* as a lamentation of our ceaseless march toward ever-more expansive systems of artifice. Our natural sense of spontaneity is eroded and our capacity to experience the ‘ten thousand things’ in all their richness and integrity – a catastrophic narrowing of our ‘heart-minds’ that dooms us to ever-more violent and unstable ways of living. Animals become ‘meat-on-legs’. Forests become timber and rivers become water-power suppliers. Farming becomes a mass conversion of beings into matter. Modern-day industrial agriculture – with

its CAFOs and other horrors – are what eventually results from the relentless indulgence of those drives.

One can consistently condemn these developments and experience a genuine longing for the simpler ways of life which preceded them, even if they also regard those ways are nowadays untenable. A small number will retain older, simpler ways of life, but most won’t. Internalisation of the expectations of an artificial society comes to define our sense of how a life should be – convenience, easiness, and availability and obliviousness (a neighbour recently asked me what ‘seasonal produce’ meant). ‘Growing one’s own’ for most of us may be nice – tomatoes from the allotment, chillies from the window-box. But this isn’t a realistic alternative to the resource-intensive food systems integral to the infrastructure of the Global North.

Appreciation of the simplicity of the Nóngjiā ideal will modulate into a poignant realisation that we cannot return to that way of life, either practically or morally. We cannot regain our more innocent ways of experiencing ourselves and the world and its creatures. We are now too cultured, too complex, too irreversibly sophisticated. Perhaps this is why scholars like Graham describe the Shénnóng agrarian utopianism as describing a ‘stage’ in a process of cultural development: a formative stage through which we pass on our inexorable way to ever-more complex forms of life.

A key question is what lessons for the conduct of life a person ought to draw from these historical narratives. In academic literature on agrarianism, two central themes are ‘nostalgia’ and ‘innocence’. I think these point to one deep moral conclusion to draw from the legend of Shénnóng.

Toil

We know very little about the Nóngjiā. A few of their texts survived the 213 BCE Burning of the Books, mainly their farming manuals. Otherwise, they are known to us only by their influence on other more-enduring schools.

Certainly, pastoralist utopianism itself had a long afterlife in Chinese history. In many cases, celebration of the virtuousness of the peasantry was a strategy for condemnation of cultured elites. Mao's Cultural Revolution (1966-77) was a time of massacres, destruction of artefacts, ransacking of cultural sites, and the purging of 'dissidents'. One specific aim was an assault on education: millions of scholars were forcibly relocated to the countryside to work the land. The ideal of rural utopia became the reality of violent dystopia (though we should beware claims that agrarianism was responsible for so-called 'oriental despotism').

An enduring philosophical lesson of the Nóngjiā might be a deep ambivalence about our history and current state. The celebration of an earlier stage of moral innocence can induce feelings of nostalgia and longing that can feed deep disenchantment with the world as it has come to be. But a wiser approach is to affirm the moral realities of the world and find ways to accommodate to them. Perhaps Nóngjiā philosophers would have urged us to seek whatever forms of trustful relationships might still be available to us. They may also urge us to attend more closely to whatever of our customs remain, rather than insouciantly dismiss them. An acute sense of nostalgia for what is lost need not lapse into agrarian fantasmatism. Nor need recognition of the virtues of the farmers of Shénnóng's world obscure the painful slog of a life working the land. Indeed,

what occurs over time is an increase in the moral toil integral to human life.

Zhuāngzǐ at one point reflects on Shénnóng's world:

In Shennong's time people laid down tired and got up wide-awake. They knew their mothers but not their fathers and lived together with the deer. They farmed their own food and wove their own clothes and had no idea of hurting each other. This was the high point of power (*The Book of Zhuāngzǐ*, ch. 29)

Life subsequently got harder. Exhaustion, uncertainty and increasing interdependence created novel temptations and risks. Our simplicity and innocence gave way to conscious sophification – a natural process of growth that a society of farmers would appreciate. One scholar remarks that this account of the moral history of humankind is misanthropic and suggests the Nóngjiā point is provocative: we should locate optimal virtue in '*pre-human experience*' and appreciate that 'becoming human signals a decline'.

What Shénnóng helped to initiate was a long process of cultural development which constantly generates new possibilities for collective moral failure. The sensible approach is to try to attain a clear-sighted vision of our moral condition, one that avoids romanticisation of what we were, denialism about what we have become, and utopianism about what we may become into the future.



Ian James Kidd is a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Nottingham. He previously worked at the universities of Durham and Leeds, teaching philosophy of religion, philosophy of science, and Indian philosophy. His current research interests include misanthropy, the ideal of moral quietism, and themes in south and east Asian philosophy. His website is

www.ianjameskidd.weebly.com.

Editor's Note

For some obscure (to me) technical reason, this version of the article does not display the Pinyin third tone mark. Sorry about that. The full article, including the third tones, is available online at daily-philosophy.com. – Andy

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Epicurus Reading Group #2: Principal Doctrines 1-8

Text: Epicurus, Principal Doctrines 1-8



Epicurus Reading Group #2

In the following, the first translation is Hicks (H). The second is Erik Anderson (A). I just put both here so that we can compare them. After the two translations follow my notes and a few questions to think about. If you'd like to think about the text yourself first, before you read my comments, just jump from translation to translation and don't read what I wrote after the Epicurean texts. You can come back and read these passages later, after you've finished reading the original doctrines. Have fun!

1

H: A happy and eternal being has no trouble himself and brings no trouble upon any other being; hence he is exempt from movements of anger and partiality, for every such movement implies weakness.

A: A blessed and imperishable being neither has trouble itself nor does it cause trouble for anyone else; therefore, it does not experience feelings of anger or indebtedness, for such feelings signify weakness.

This is a weird way of beginning a treatise on happiness... After all, if we were happy and eternal beings, we wouldn't need to read Epicurus.

My guess: Epicurus thinks that the fear of the unpredictability of the gods is one of the reasons for what he will call, later on, the "trouble in the soul." Pain in the body and trouble in the soul are, for him, two reasons for fear and anxiety in human beings. By insisting that gods don't "bring trouble upon any other being," Epicurus tries to establish that we don't need to fear the gods. Compare with the notion of the Christian God as all-loving, and of Allah as most merciful. And since we don't need to fear them, we can aspire to let go of our anxieties and be happy.

If we remember what happened to Socrates, who was killed among other things for disrespecting the gods, it's understandable that Epicurus does not want to say that gods don't exist at all. So he casts them as all-benevolent, which neatly avoids denying their existence, yet takes care of our fear of them.

But there's something else, too. The last sentence of the Letter of Menoeceus is: "For people lose all appearance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings." So Epicurus thinks that we will ourselves be as serene and happy as gods if we try to embrace the blessings in our lives in the way Epicurus teaches.

2

H: Death is nothing to us; for the body, when it has been resolved into its elements, has no feeling, and that which has no feeling is nothing to us.

A: Death is nothing to us, because a body that has been dispersed into elements experiences no sensations, and the absence of sensation is nothing to us.

Here is Epicurus treatment of the other source of human anxiety: the fear of death. Epicurus was an atomist, so he believed that all things are composed of small units, the *atoms*, which fly around and combine to form the things we can see. When we die, these atoms fly apart and form new things. Since the fear of death must be based on some kind of sensation (fear of pain, fear of hell etc), if there is no sensation because the body's atoms are gone, then there can be nothing to fear after we die.

This argument has the problem that one can still be afraid of death even if one is not afraid of what will happen *after* death. One reason to fear death would be to fear the *process* of dying, for example, which we *will* experience. Another is that we will miss out on life and experiences after

our death. Or we might fear what will happen to those who depend on us after we die.

What do you think? Does Epicurus' argument here sound convincing to you?

3

H: The magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. When pleasure is present, so long as it is uninterrupted, there is no pain either of body or of mind or of both together.

A: Pleasure reaches its maximum limit at the removal of all sources of pain. When such pleasure is present, for as long as it lasts, there is no cause of physical nor mental pain present – nor of both together.

Epicurus has a very simple picture of how pleasure and pain work in this paragraph: they are opposite ends of a spectrum. Our experience of pleasure and pain happens along one dimension, one line. When we go towards pleasure, we automatically go away from the pain end of the spectrum. And the opposite. *What do you think? Is this really the case? Or can we experience pleasure and pain at the same time?*

Another thing to see here: Epicurus says that the "magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit" when all pain is removed. So there can actually not be any *positive* pleasure ever! Just removing all pain results not, as we would think, in a neutral state of indifference – but in a state of maximum pleasure!

What do you think about this? Is it plausible? Why do you think that Epicurus says that?

4

H: Continuous pain does not last long in the body; on the contrary, pain, if extreme, is present a short time, and even that degree of pain which barely outweighs pleasure in the body does not last for many days together. Illnesses of long duration even permit of an excess of pleasure over pain in the body.

A: Continuous physical pain does not last long. Instead, extreme pain lasts only a very short time, and even less-extreme pain does not last for many days at once. Even protracted diseases allow periods of physical comfort that exceed feelings of pain.

Obviously, this is a somewhat dubious claim. It's a bitter irony of fate that Epicurus himself died of kidney stones, a simultaneously very slow and extremely painful way to go. Modern medicine, one could argue, has made things worse, giving more people than before the opportunity for prolonged suffering at the end of life.

5

H: It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking, when, for instance, the person is not able to live wisely, though he lives well and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life.

A: It is impossible to live pleasantly without living wisely and honorably and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and honorably and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any one of these is lacking (when, for instance, one is not able to live wisely, though he lives honorably and justly) it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life.

This has an almost Aristotelian ring to it. The ancient Greeks were suspicious of pure pleasure, and even Epicurus felt that he must somehow connect the pleasant life with wisdom and justice (or virtue, as Aristotle would have it).

It's interesting, though, that the connection between pleasure and virtue goes both ways: "It is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living pleasantly." This seems strange. In the tradition of Kant, we generally accept that there is at least the possibility that some people might live wisely and justly without living pleasantly. One might perform one's duty, for instance, and thus be just, honourable and virtuous, without actually having a lot of fun doing so.

What do you think? Is Epicurus right here? Do you agree that living justly entails, in some way, that one also lives pleasantly? Tell me in the comments!

6

H: In order to obtain security from other people any means whatever of procuring this was a natural good.

A: That natural benefit of kingship and high office is (and only is) the degree to which they provide security from other men.

This sounds all quite strange, so here is another translation:

[Epicurus.net:] In order to obtain protection from other men, any means for attaining this end is a natural good.

Here is the Greek (sorry if some characters are missing in the file; the full version is available online – Andy):

Ἐνεκα τοῦ θαρρεῖν οἵ νηρώπων, οὐ κατὰ φύσιν [ορχὸς καὶ βασιλείας] γαθόν, οἵ οὐ ποτε τοῦθο οὐδέ τοῦ παρασκευάζεσθαι.

The “[ορχὸς καὶ βασιλείας]” (of high office and kingship) seems to appear only in some versions of the text and might have been a marginal note rather than part of the text (that from a footnote of Hicks). Only Erik Anderson translates it at all. We'll just go with the Hicks translation, since it seems to make more sense.

So what does it mean that security from other people is a “natural good?”

My guess: As we will see later, Epicurus classifies the desires into “natural” (necessary and non-necessary) and “vain.” It might be that he wants to establish that safety is a natural desire, rather than a vain one, so that we are allowed, following his system, to care for our safety. Later, in doctrine 28, he will say: “Nothing enhances our security so much as friendship.” If the desire for security were a vain one, then it would be questionable whether we need friends. By establishing that what friends can give us (safety, security) is a natural good, friendship also, automatically, becomes natural and good.

Or is there another way of understanding this passage? Do you have any better ideas?

7

H: Some people have sought to become famous and renowned, thinking that thus they would make themselves secure against their fellow-humans. If, then, the life of such persons really was secure, they attained natural good; if, however, it was insecure, they have not attained the end which by nature's own prompting they originally sought.

A: Some seek fame and status, thinking that they could thereby protect themselves against other men. If their lives really are secure, then they have attained a natural good; if, however, they're insecure, they still lack what they originally sought by natural instinct.

This passage connects to the previous one. If security is a natural good, then we are justified in seeking it. But how can we attain it? Some will try to obtain security by becoming famous or rich. But actually, this is not a promising way to go about it, Epicurus thinks. And if becoming famous or rich won't help us achieve the goal of living a more secure life, then we are not justified in seeking these things. It is just irrational to seek fame and fortune if these don't improve one's security.

Epicurus does not clearly say whether he believes that fame and fortune achieve the goal of

making us more secure or not. He leaves it to the readers to draw their own conclusions.

So what do you think? Do fame and riches make us more secure in life? Is this security sufficient justification for seeking to be rich and famous?

8

H: No pleasure is in itself evil, but the things which produce certain pleasures entail annoyances many times greater than the pleasures themselves.

A: No pleasure is a bad thing in itself, but some pleasures are only obtainable at the cost of excessive troubles.

For me, this is one of the core statements of Epicurus. Here, he tries to set himself apart from those who are against all pleasures and who think that suffering and deprivation are somehow noble and desirable ways to spend one's life. At various times, Christian groups have, for example, proclaimed that all pleasures are evil and that a God-fearing person must abstain from enjoying them.

Epicurus disagrees. To him, it is still true that pleasures are an essential component of a good

life (see doctrine 5 above). His point is not that we should avoid pleasures. Quite the opposite: "No pleasure is in itself evil," that means, no pleasure is evil just because it is a pleasure (as opposed to a bitter duty, for example).

The problem with pleasures is a practical one: "Some pleasures entail annoyances many times greater than the pleasures themselves." What does this mean? Think of a shiny new sports car. Epicurus would not (perhaps surprisingly?) say that there is anything wrong with the sports car as a source of pleasure. But in order to be able to buy it, I need to work for a long time everyday, I need to get an education, perhaps to work in an area that I don't like but that pays well (accounting, say, as opposed to philosophy), I will perhaps neglect my family and so on. In the end, I will obtain the car, but the price that I will have paid for it, in terms of the missed time with my family, my suffering at work etc, will be "many times greater" than the pleasure that I can extract from that car.

But this invites us to think further: What of all the material goods we have have really been worth the time and effort to obtain them? Can we name any?

That's it for this week! Thanks for reading!

The Principle of Double Effect

Should we teach philosophy to young people when accounting would be better for them? Are we evil when we choose to drive a car? Is it right to accept the small risk that comes with mandatory vaccinations? And what if the fire department floods your home? Meet the doctrine of Double Effect.



Naughty and nice

I've just come from a class teaching philosophy students. It was a good class. They learned something useful ... or did they?

Employment statistics for philosophers are a little hard to come by, but let's assume for the sake of this argument that the cliche is right: a philosophy degree will cause you to end up unemployed or serving fries in a fast-food joint. Then, what I just did in the past two hours was to knowingly diminish my students' chances of getting a good job and having a happy and successful life

in the future. Assuming that I knew that they'd earn a lot more as accountants, why isn't it immoral to keep teaching them philosophy instead? I am effectively robbing them of a better future, even of a specific amount of money for every month in the future where they won't be earning an accountant's salary. Am I a thief?

There are many cases like that. Say, your house is burning and the fire department comes along with their water hose and they flood the place. After they are gone, you discover that they ruined your computer, which contained the only copy of that spicy memoir you had just finished, not to speak of the Picasso on the wall that they also destroyed. Destroying someone's work and prized possessions is surely an evil action. So were the firefighters evil men?

Or look at Covid vaccinations. Every vaccine and every medicine, however well tested, has some small probability of causing adverse effects. Some people, very few in the grand scheme of things, do die from vaccines that are given to them. So when the government is forcing a population to get vaccinated, they can be statistically almost certain that a small number of recipients of that vaccine will be harmed or even killed. If they insist on the mandatory vaccination, are they not committing murder?

And what about me driving my car to work? The pollution from my engine's exhaust, together with the particles that my brakes and tyres leave

on the streets, are a major source of roadside pollution that kills millions every year. I know that, even as I step into my car. And I still drive that car to my office. Am I doing something morally bad?

The doctrine of Double Effect

Cases like these have interested philosophers since ancient times. It so happened that it was a medieval Catholic philosopher, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), who first gave a relatively clear description of a case like that in one of his works. He is asking the question whether one may kill another person in self-defence and writes:

I answer that there is nothing to prevent one act from having two effects, of which only one is intended by the agent and the other is outside of his intention. Now, moral actions receive their character according to what is intended, and not from what is outside of the intention ... Therefore, from the act of a person defending himself a twofold effect can follow: one, the saving of one's own life; the other, the killing of the aggressor.

Such an act, therefore, insofar as the conservation of one's own life is intended, is not illicit, since it is natural to every being to preserve its life as far as possible. Nevertheless, an act which proceeds from a good intention may be rendered illicit, if it is not proportioned to the end intended.

Hence, if one uses greater violence than is necessary in defending his own life, his act will be illicit. But, if with due moderation he repels the violence offered him, his defense of himself will be licit ... Yet, since it is unlawful to kill a man except by public authority for the common good, ... it is, therefore, wrong for a man to *intend* to kill another as a means to defend himself. (Summa Theologica, II-II, q. 64, a. 7 c; emphasis by me)

So here things get a bit more complex. A man may kill another while defending himself, but he may not *intend* to kill the other. If the aggressor's death is only an unintended consequence, even if it can be foreseen, then it is fine to defend oneself, even if this means to kill the aggressor. If, on the other hand, one *intended* to kill the aggressor (rather than just to defend one's own life) then the action would be immoral.

This has later been picked up by various other authors, both within the Catholic tradition and outside of it, and has become a well-known and much-disputed principle of ethics: the Doctrine of Double Effect.

The idea is that an action can have two effects, just as Thomas Aquinas explains it in the passage above: one is the intended effect, the effect we are aiming at with our action. The second is the unintended effect. It may be foreseeable, but as long as it is not intended (and a few other conditions hold), we cannot be held responsible for that unintended, second effect.

What other conditions?

Means and ends

One is that the bad effect must be strictly a *side effect*, not a *means* to the good end.

For example, in many wars (and one might clearly disagree with the practice) it is said that a small number of accidental civilian victims have to be accepted as “collateral” damage as long as the warring parties aim to target only other combatants. Here, the accidental civilian victims are *not* a necessary part of the attempt to target the enemy.

On the other hand, in the Second World War, the Allied forces bombed German cities in order to discourage the population from fighting on. Bombing civilians in this case was the whole point: a means to the end of ending the war. As good as that end may be, it is not permissible to use the deaths of innocent people as means.

The same applies to the other cases we mentioned above. If a few vaccine recipients die as a side-effect of a vaccination drive, then this is an unintended side-effect. As long as it is outweighed by thousands of saved lives due to the vaccine, one might argue that these cases don’t make the vaccination evil. But let’s say I am an anti-vaccination campaigner and I am looking forward to using these deaths for propaganda purposes. I *want* people to die so that I can make their deaths public and in this way achieve my political goals. Now I am using them as means to my ends. In this case, I would be doing something wrong.

Weighing good and bad

In order for my action to be permissible, the (intended) good effect must clearly outweigh the

(unintended) bad effects. A few deaths in a vaccination campaign that will save thousands of lives might be seen as an acceptable price to pay. On the other hand, causing the same few deaths because one wanted to save money in the development and testing of the vaccine is clearly not right. One must achieve an overwhelmingly good result in order to justify the bad effects of one’s action.

If multiple effects are possible, we would also think that one must try, as much as possible, to minimise the harm done. If I have the choice of two vaccines, one of which is known to be safer than the other, then I cannot use the doctrine of Double Effect to justify using the less safe one.

The action itself

And, finally, I have to make sure that the action itself is a good, or at least a neutral action. I cannot justify robbing or killing someone with the good consequences that this will bring about; at least not using the doctrine of Double Effect.

In July 1944, a number of conspirators attempted to assassinate Adolf Hitler and thus bring the Second World war to an end. Although the ultimate intention was a good one, such an action would not qualify as Double Effect, because the action itself, assassinating another person, is not a good or neutral action. It is generally seen as a morally impermissible action, and therefore does not fulfil the criteria for a Double Effect justification.

So the actions that can be justified using Double Effect arguments must be themselves good or neutral: driving my car to work, teaching my students philosophy.

The doctrine of Double Effect

The principle of Double Effect says that an action that has two effects, one morally good and the other morally bad, might be justified if:

- The action is in itself good or at least indifferent;
- Only the good effect is intended; the evil effect might be foreseen, but it must not be intended;
- The good effect may not be produced by means of the evil effect; and
- The good effect must clearly outweigh the bad consequences.

Sometimes a fifth condition is added to these: that we must do what we can to minimise the harm caused by the action, even if *some* harm is inevitable.

Let's now look back once again at the examples mentioned at the beginning of this article.

When I am teaching my students philosophy, the action of teaching philosophy is good or indifferent, but it is certainly not in itself morally bad. My intention while teaching them is to make them into better, more educated people, which is a good effect. Even if I know that they might end up unemployed, it is not the unemployment that I *intend*. I merely foresee it. The good effect (the philosophical education of the students) is not produced by means of their unemployment. And, finally, becoming an educated and philosophically-minded person outweighs the bad effects of unemployment (one hopes), especially since young people can always find another, more lucrative occupation, even if they have a philosophy degree.

In the same way, when the fire department extinguishes your house fire and ruins the Picasso on the wall, putting out the fire is a good action in itself; the intention is not to destroy the artwork, but to save the house; the destruction of the Picasso is not the means by which the house is saved from the fire; and putting out the fire (and saving the other artworks in the house) outweighs (one would hope) the damage done – at least this is what the firemen can be expected to assume when they are called to a fire without knowing what exactly is inside the house.

But is it right?

The Double Effect doctrine is one of those classic arguments in philosophy that immediately seem to make sense and to solve almost every problem. From teaching useless subjects to bombing civilians, Double Effect considerations seem to provide just the right advice in every case, the one that agrees most with our moral sense.

But is the Double Effect doctrine really the best way of judging what's right?

One of the earliest examples of how it can go wrong was provided, unwittingly, by another Catholic philosopher, Cardinal Cajetan, Thomas de Vio (1469–1534). Joseph T. Mangan writes 1:

He [Cajetan] maintains that to intend to kill an innocent person as an end in itself or as a means to an end is contrary to all rights. But to kill an innocent person per accidens, by doing something that is lawful and necessary, as one does who is administering a public office, is not contrary to natural law, divine or written law.

Cajetan makes this assertion when he is explaining how a judge can condemn to death a man who from private knowledge he knows to be innocent, although the evidence in the court indicates the man as guilty.

Read that last sentence again: It is morally *right*, according to the Cardinal, to condemn to death a man whom the judge privately knows to be innocent, just because public office and court evidence say so.

Another problem is that intentions are private: like every other mental state, they are only available to the agent themselves and not to anyone else. In addition, we are often enough mistaken about our own goals and intentions, which is, after all, the starting point of psychoanalysis. So when a general in war orders the bombing of a military installation in a city centre, do they intend to destroy only that installation? Is the demoralising effect of the expected, collateral civilian deaths really only foreseen but not at all intended? And can even the general himself reliably judge their own intentions in a situation of war, after having seen their comrades killed, their friends wounded, their country occupied?

One classic illustration of the principle of Double Effect is, once again, the trolley case. I'm sure most readers have heard of this: a trolley is out of control, racing towards a fork in the tracks. Unfortunately, where the trolley is heading, five workers are standing on the track, working away, oblivious to the fact that they will be dead in a few seconds, run over by the racing trolley. But you are standing there, able to reach a switch that will direct the trolley towards the other side of

the fork: to a place where the trolley will only kill one person. Should you flick the switch?

This case fulfils all the criteria for a Double Effect defence: You'd be doing something indifferent, flicking a switch, changing the track of a trolley. The intention is to save the five, not to kill the one. The saving of the five is not produced "by the means" of killing the one. The death of the one worker is just a side-effect of redirecting the trolley. And, finally, killing one rather than five clearly minimises the harm done.

The problem is that in this case we don't seem to actually need the doctrine of Double Effect in order to reach the conclusion at all. If we are utilitarians, we will naturally prefer to save five instead of one, no further justification needed. And if we are, say, Kantians, we will insist that all lives are equally valuable and that we cannot trade one for five – and that, therefore, any attempt to minimise the deaths will be immoral.

This is because at the core of the doctrine of Double Effect is that idea of "minimising harm," and judging that is left to the agent and their own value systems. Is bombing a city minimising harm? Is bombing a military target minimising harm? Was bombing Japan with the atomic bombs minimising harm?

And is it even providing real value to anyone to learn about philosophy?

For Cardinal Cajetan, the court proceedings had more value than actual justice. One could argue that all the clattering mechanics of the Double Effect calculation only serve to obscure that, in the end, we are making a judgement based only upon our own intuitions about what is really valuable and what constitutes benefit or harm.

So perhaps I should ride to my office by bike, after all.

ies, 10(1), 41-61. Available in Google Scholar.

Notes

- 1 Mangan, J. T. (1949). An historical analysis of the principle of double effect. *Theological Stud-*

Cyborgs: Who is afraid of our transhuman future?

Cyborgs are not new. For many decades, people have experimented with implants that provide new experiences and capabilities to the human body. But what exactly does it mean to be a cyborg?



What is a cyborg?

A cyborg (“cybernetic organism”) is commonly understood to be an organism that is composed not only of biological parts but also of technological, artificial components that enhance the function of the organism in some way. Like all definitions, this can be understood in a wider or narrower sense and it can be easily stretched beyond its breaking point.

A man with a bullet or a knife stuck in them would clearly not be a cyborg because the artificial implement does not enhance their function in any way – quite the opposite. But what about a person with a tooth filling? Without the filling, the person would be in pain and, eventually, lose

a tooth, which would diminish their functioning in the long run. With the filling, they keep the functionality of their dental apparatus intact. Indeed, one could imagine receiving a tooth implant that is even better than a natural tooth. Say, one that is not affected by bacteria and does not ever decay.

We already have many such technological improvements available and in widespread use: prosthetic limbs can be constructed to be stronger than natural ones. Ford factory workers can strap into an exoskeleton that gives them additional strength to move heavy components. Transport and logistics company DB-Schenker has extensively tested exoskeletons for its warehouse workers. Hearing aids and glasses are commonplace conveniences. Google Glass, although not commercially successful in its first iterations, is a working system that gives the wearer additional abilities. Google:

Glass can connect you with coworkers in an instant, bringing expertise to right where you are. Invite others to “see what you see” through a live video stream so you can collaborate and troubleshoot in real-time.
(Google Glass website)

Whether one sees these devices as proper cyborg prosthetics is a matter of definition only.

Some would say that a cyborg prosthetic must be incorporated into the wearer's body, must be *part* of that body, not something that can be removed and put aside. But this seems perhaps excessively narrow-minded. Is there a real difference between wearing traditional glasses for one's myopia versus wearing contact lenses, versus having an artificial lens inserted into one's eye? It seems like these are just different degrees of integration rather than qualitatively different things.

In an article for CNN Style, Viktoria Modesta, Neil Harbisson and Amal Graafstra write:

If an implant is designed well – in other words, it's frictionless, management-less and you give it as much thought as you do your kidneys (in other words, none at all) – then it's part of you. It's not a tool that you've picked up like a smartphone, it's actually changing your capabilities as a human. That's philosophically, fundamentally and, as I'm sure we're destined to see, legally different from any tool. (CNN Style: "How technology is changing what it means to be human")

But technological human augmentation can easily be taken further than just improving our physical strength or restoring the lost abilities of our senses. Since at least the 1970s, various activists have experimented with enhancing their bodies in ways that had not been seen or imagined before.

The most prominent of the first generation of cyborgs is probably Professor Kevin Warwick, also

known as "Captain Cyborg." Since 1998, Warwick has implanted various chips into his body that directly interfaced his nervous system with external computing equipment. This allowed him to open doors and switch lights on simply by entering a room. Other additions made it possible for him to control a robotic arm with the nerves of his own arm.

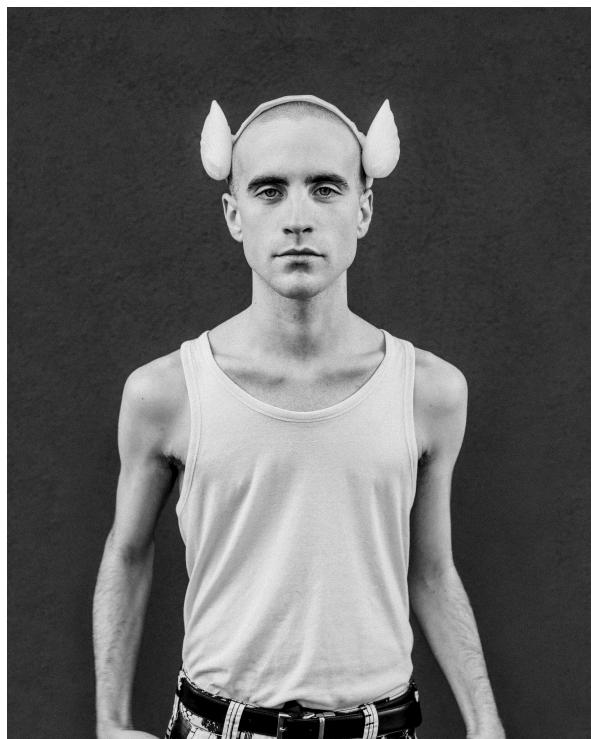
Warwick's experiments were mostly aimed at researching how the human body would react to neural interface implants. His work led to a better understanding on how we can construct neural interfaces that could benefit, for example, accident victims with prosthetic limbs or other patients.

In contrast, a new generation of cyborg-hackers, mostly artists, try to aggressively extend our understanding of what it means to be human by adding senses and abilities to the human body that we have never had before.

Meet Neil, Moon, Manel and Joe



The most prominent of the Spanish art-scene cyborgs is probably Neil Harbisson. Now 37 years old, he still has a boyish charm, is very articulate and an inspiring speaker. Born with a rare condition that makes it impossible for him to see



Manel de Aguas with fins.

colour, Harbisson installed an “antenna” permanently into his skull at the age of 20. The “antenna” holds a sensor in front of his head, at eye-level, that translates the colour information it sees into sound of various frequencies that Harbisson can hear and interpret. In this way, he is not only able to see colour, but also to see frequencies of light that we cannot see: infrared and ultraviolet. By interfacing the system to the Internet, Harbisson can receive colours from remote places. In 2014, he was planning to interface to his own satellite (I don’t know what happened to that project) and so to have a “third eye in space,” as he said in an Al Jazeera interview (Youtube link).

Artist Moon Ribas, co-founder of the Cyborg Foundation (with Neil Harbisson) has been experimenting with her own enhancements. While

Harbisson can claim that his antenna is a prosthetic device that helps him compensate for a medical condition he was born with, Ribas does not have (or perceive the need) for such a justification. Art is reason enough for her to devise various cybernetic implants.

In 2013, she connected an implant in her feet to online seismographs, thus “feeling” remote earthquakes that happen anywhere on Earth. As part of a performance, an audience can watch her dance in sync to remote, unfelt but real earthquakes. If there happens to be no earthquake at the time of the performance, the dancer will sit still and wait.

Ribas added other senses to her repertoire through external devices, not implants, thus making it questionable whether she can rightly be classified as a cyborg. She experimented with glasses that allow her only to see colours but not shapes, and gloves and earrings that can sense movement. With these earrings, she was able to measure that the average speed of pedestrians in Oslo and Rome is about 2 km/h lower than it is in London. A newer version of the earrings also gave her the ability to sense movement in 360 degrees around her.

Cyborg artist Manel Muñoz (born 1996) implanted two “weather fins” into his head.

The fins are sensors that can sense atmospheric pressure, humidity and temperature and that can also inform him about his elevation over the ground (through changes in atmospheric pressure).

In 2017, he co-founded the Transpecies Society, an association that gives voice to people who do not identify as being 100% human and raises awareness on issues they

face. The association, based in Barcelona, offers workshops specialized in the design and creation of new senses and organs. (Wikipedia)

Who's afraid of cyborgs?

Looking at these few examples (and there are many more), one can see a whole range of both motivations and ways of expressing cyborg identity.

From Warwick, who was driven by an academic's curiosity, to Neil Harbisson, who became a cyborg initially out of a wish to have equal access to our world of colours, to Manel Muñoz' weather fins, cyborg activists cover a wide spectrum. From cases that are clearly attempts at therapy to cases of pure, largely pointless enhancement, everything doable is being done.

Looking at elf-like Manel Muñoz, dressed in bright white with his cute fairy-ears attached, one is tempted to smile at the meaninglessness of these prosthetics. But there might be a darker side to it all.

In a future that will likely be defined by large-scale unemployment, as robots take away more and more jobs, the competition for the few remaining positions will become harsher. If governments don't manage to switch to a basic income economy in time, we could see widespread poverty and suffering.

In a world like that, having new, cybernetic senses could be a crucial distinguishing feature. Hearing ultraviolet or even gamma radiation could soon become an entry requirement for jobs in the atomic industry. Being able to register movement in 360 degrees would be an invaluable asset for every car driver. If such proce-

dures became common, it would not take long until insurance companies would jump on the train and demand that such implants be fitted to anyone who wants to get a driving licence. Wikipedia-access implants could easily become mandatory for applicants for teaching jobs. Why risk that your secondary school biology teacher gets some minor fact about the anatomy of frogs wrong when you can have teachers who can live fact-check everything on the Internet? And so on.

It is possible that we are heading into a world where these enhancements will be perceived less and less as optional, and increasingly as requirements for particular occupations and roles. But will everyone be able to afford them? Will one have to take a loan, to be repaid over a decade perhaps, in order to install the internal GPS module that a sailor's job requires? And when the technology in one's head becomes obsolete, will one need to replace it, using yet another loan? Will we have to write into our CVs not only what we have learned and done in our lives, but also what enhancements we have installed in our bodies? And how will our children compete in their final exams with kids who have the latest memory enhancement unit installed?

There is a qualitative jump that occurs at the moment when an external functional support becomes an implant.

When I take a job at a university, my employer is required to provide me with an office, light, a computer, so that I can do my work. But when I can see in the dark with an IR sensor, when I can access the Internet and thought-type documents in my head, then these external supports become obsolete. Instead, it is now *my* responsibility as the candidate for this job to have the right implements in place. Since they are part of my body,

they are part of myself. Having them on offer is as much my own responsibility as it is to offer my employer a fit body or a logical and educated mind. The employer's obligation to support me by providing the right conditions for my work is being slowly, imperceptibly eroded: when the external supports become implants, they become *my* problem, the employee's problem. And not

having them becomes a failure of myself, a lack, a disqualifying disability.

Cover image: DB Schenker website. Image of Manel de Aguas with fins: Wikipedia. Neil Harbisson interview: Image by Parentesis99, CC BY-SA 4.0, [Link](#).

Epilogue

And that was it again, the fourth edition of our monthly, printable magazine. I hope you enjoyed it!

If you encountered any errors or other problems with this file, please be so kind to write me, so that I can make it better. I'm always grateful for your comments, suggestions and criticism!

Thanks again for your support and have a great, thoughtful May!

— Andy

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