

Lecture One Spirituality, Self-Identity, and Place

Lecture Notes Fall 2022

Nature, Wilderness and Civilization

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I. Introduction to Robert C. Solomon.

<https://aesthetics-online.org/page/RobertSolomonRdS>

Robert C. Solomon died on January 2(2007), just after coming off a plane in Zurich. He was not quite 65 years old. His extraordinary vitality, which several of his friends had once again enjoyed at the American Philosophical Association just five days earlier, meant that his death was a great shock even to those who knew that he suffered from a congenital heart malformation and had been told early on that he was unlikely to live long. Thus warned, he packed his life with work and joy as if indeed each day would be his last.

Bob Solomon had been for over three decades based at the University of Texas (after stints at Princeton, Pittsburgh, UCLA), where he was Quincy Lee Centennial Professor of Philosophy and Business. But he seemed to be incessantly travelling. You were likely to find him just about anywhere in the world, giving talks, participating in and often organising seminars, helping younger scholars, teaching and learning from all. He once remarked that he got an invitation every week to some conference on emotions. He can't have accepted them all, but it seemed that way. And at those conferences he was usually the rightful star. His 1976 book on *The Passions* was responsible, more than any other, for igniting what became a huge firestorm of philosophical interest in the emotions and their place in art, life, politics and business.

Bob's first philosophical love was for Sartre and existentialism. This passion never left him, and was for him a very real guide to life as well as the focus of much of his scholarly work. But although the existentialist approach is generally not over-friendly to science, Bob helped to found and was a key participant in the richly interdisciplinary International Society for Research on Emotions (ISRE) through which he, with what began as a very small number of other philosophers, exchanged ideas with psychologists, neuroscientists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and other emotion researchers. He read widely in all these areas, and assimilated a great diversity of approaches from which he never ceased to learn. He could be sharply critical, but no one minded, because you knew that the criticism was bred in a passionate concern for understanding more than merely from the drive, which he also relished, to win an argument. He was always fun, always stimulating and exciting to talk to. It was also always a very good idea to follow him, in whatever city in America, Australia or Europe you found yourself with him, to the restaurant he chose to dine in.

As a teacher, Bob was something of a legend. One of his former students recalled that in UCLA in the late 60's the enrolment in an "advanced seminar" he taught

swelled to 500 students. He wrote songs, too, and appeared, as himself, but anime, in at least one movie, Richard Linklater's charmingly philosophical *Waking Life*.

With all that travel, all that talk, all that eating and drinking, all that teaching, we all wondered: where did Bob find the time to write forty-odd books and four times as many papers? Insomnia helped, and the lifelong conviction that he had so little time. But above all it was his sheer passion for life, for love, and for life and love examined. Memorable, too, was his great love for his wife and collaborator, Kathleen Higgins, which shines forth from his many writings on love in recent decades. And judging by the great outpouring of tributes on the ISRE Listserv and the "[guest book](#)" set up by the Austin *American Statesman*, many feel, as I do, that Bob's greatest distinction was that he knew how to live, and that he was among the kindest and most generous man we have known.

II Robert C. Solomon's definition of spirituality

A. The purpose of writing this book:

This is not to say that spirituality is not at home in organized religion. Of course it is. For billions of people one is unimaginable without the other. But I am sure that I am not alone in thinking there is also a home for spirituality outside the walls of the world's established religions, in the individual soul, some might say. But it is just such concepts as individual and soul (plus spirituality, of course) that I want to scrutinize here. Nevertheless, my search in this book is for a **nonreligious, noninstitutional, nontheological, nonscriptural, nonexclusive sense of spirituality**, one which is not self-righteous, which is not based on Belief, which is not dogmatic, which is not antiscience, which is not other-worldly, which is not uncritical or cultist or kinky.

"But spirituality, at least, is **not primarily a matter of beliefs (although it certainly involves beliefs). It is rather a way (or a great many ways) of experiencing the world, of living, of interacting with other people and with the world.** It involves a set of practices and rituals, not necessarily prayer, or church services, or meditation, or prescribed rituals of purification but any number of ways, whether individual or collective, of thinking, looking, talking, feeling, moving, and acting.

B. The difference between Religion and Spirituality/The difference between Philosophy and Spirituality

C. Spirituality and Passion

(1) Love "It is one of the passions that makes life worthwhile and it is above all the passion that enlarges the self and gets us in touch with a larger, more luminous cosmos, as evidenced by any number of love songs as well as some of the great

philosophers of ancient times.” Passion lasts for a very long time, even a lifetime, and it may implicate and include any number of other emotions.

The author tries to defend his view against the following opposite.

- A. Some people are naturally more spiritual than others;
- B. Spirituality is transient.
- C. Passion is what sweeps us away or grips us.

(2) Reverence: recognition of our own moral limits, acknowledging that there are concerns that transcend our own self-interest. It presupposes a commitment to the goodness of the world, a goodness that may be infinitely multifaceted and pluralistic but that we nevertheless recognize as being much greater and more powerful than we are.

(3) Trust. It is not an attitude we take toward another person: having trust in the world is thus construed as a certain sort of attitude. To trust in the face of uncertainty and lack of control, to accept whatever happens, is authentic trust. To insist on certainty and control-is to refuse to trust.

III Who am I? Perspectives from Philosophers

1. Reason and Self-Identity

- (1) Socrates: Unexamined life is not worth living;
- (2) Descartes: I think, therefore I am;
- (3) Aristotle: Reason and Flourishing;
- (4) Kant: Reason and Dignity

2. Emotion and Self-Identity

Rousseau: Emotion, Existence and Self-Identity

3. Relationship and Self-identity

Confucianism: Human Relationship and Self-Identity

IV Who am I ? Perspectives from Place and-self-identity

A. *Wilderness and Self-Identity*

- (1) 1964 Wilderness Act
- (2) American transcendentalism and Wilderness Appreciation
- (3) Emerson, Thoreau, and John Muir
- (4) Documentary about John Muir: <https://vimeo.com/185430445>

B. *Agriculture, Place and Self-Identity*

1. Paul Thompson The Agrarian Vision: Sustainability and Environmental Ethics.

(1) **What is a place?** “Place is thus a component of worldedness of our ordinary common lives; we inhabit or visit places, and the places where we work, play, and live constitute our experience of the world. Place is thus a characteristic of the lifeworld, while space is a characteristic of objectively present reality.

Twentieth-century German philosophy and sociology introduced the term lifeworld to indicate the domain of life-as-lived experience and to distinguish it from conceptualizations of spatial reality necessitated by the formulas of the physical sciences.”

(2) **Embeddedness.** “If people are bodies rather than disembodied subjects, there is every reason to believe that embodied experience situated in specific contexts or at specific places is significant and worth looking into.”

(3) **Soil, food and self-identity.** “But it is also true that soil contributes to national identity through the cultivation (literally) of a national cuisine. In eating the foods and drinking the wines derived from one’s home soil, one accumulates a base of experience that, like the haunts and rambles, binds one to one’s countrymen through common memories.”

“Eating or not eating and sharing or not sharing food are material practices within which community is implied or denied. The meal is the earthly home in which the spiritual value of community dwells on a daily basis.” (p. 153)

(4) **Memories and the self-identity.**

“Communities of memory are reinforced by communities of the body. People who are community integrated because they share common memories of a certain sort are doubly integrated because their bodies come from the same source. Such people are mutually constituted at both the physical and mental level. The strongest sense in which this dual constitution can be rendered metaphysically is identity: you are what you eat. Yet it is precisely this strong sense of constitution in terms of identity that seems to go far beyond what is meant by ordinary metaphors.” (p. 149)

C. Absolute place in City and Self-Identity

(1) **Space and self-identity.** “Anthropology has shown us how the space occupied by any particular “primitive group” corresponds to the hierarchical classification of the group members, and how it serves to render that order always actual always present. “ “The members of archaic societies obey social norms without knowing it-that is to say, without recognizing those norms as such. Rather they live them spatially: they are not ignorant of them, they do not misapprehend them, but they experience the.

(2) **The origin of absolute space.** “It is a fragment of agro-pastoral space, a set of places named and exploited by peasants, or by nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoralists. It continues to be perceived as part of nature. Its mystery and its sacred character are attributed to the forces in nature, even though it is the exercise of political power therein which has in fact wrenched the area from its natural context and even though its new meaning is entirely predicted on that action.”

(3) **Space and Meaning.** Absolute space cannot be understood in terms of collection of sites and signs; to view it thus is to misapprehend it in the most fundamental way. Rather, it is indeed a space, at once and indistinguishable mental and social, which comprehends the entire existence of the group concerned (i.e. for our present purposes, the city state.” “Absolute space assumes meanings addressed not to the intellect but to the body, meanings conveyed by threats, by sanctions, by a

continual putting-it-to the test of the emotions. This space is lived rather than conceived, and it is a representational space rather than a representation of space.”

D. Outerspace and Self-Identity: Overview Effect in Outer Space

<https://vimeo.com/55073825>



The Overview Effect is a cognitive shift in awareness reported by some astronauts and cosmonauts during spaceflight, often while viewing the Earth from orbit, in transit between the Earth and the moon, or from the lunar surface. It refers to the experience of seeing firsthand the reality that the Earth is in space, a tiny, fragile ball of life, “hanging in the void,” shielded and nourished by a paper-thin atmosphere. The experience often transforms astronauts’ perspective on the planet and humanity’s place in the universe. Some common aspects of it are a feeling of awe for the planet, a profound understanding of the interconnection of all life, and a renewed sense of responsibility for taking care of the environment.