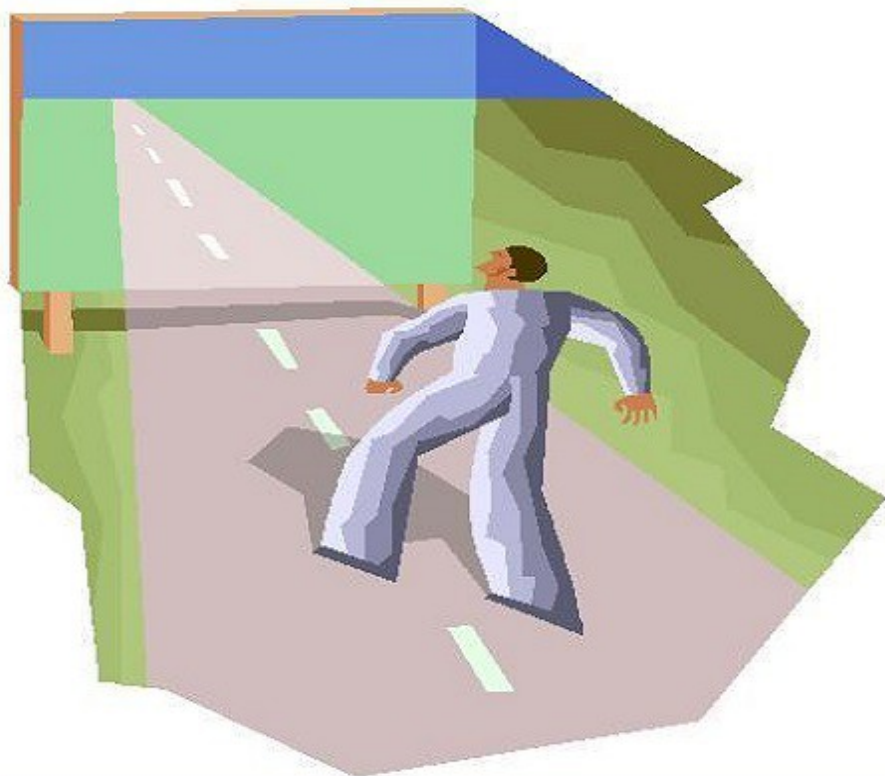


THE ILLUSORY TRUTH

John O'Loughlin



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CDM Philosophy

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PREFACE

Also divided, like *Between Truth and Illusion* (1977), its immediate forerunner, into three parts, of which the first is by far the longest, this companion volume to the aforementioned example of my so-called dualistic philosophy expands on the theories outlined before, abandoning the more literary and even discursive approach of the previous book for a kind of essayistic-cum-aphoristic concision in which I began to develop an almost existentialist awareness of the extent to which many so-called truths are founded upon illusory concepts and, to that extent, are not really 'true' at all.

John O'Loughlin, London 1977 (Revised 2022)

PART ONE: APHORISTIC ESSAYS

The Philosopher as Man, not Machine: How often should a philosopher actually allow himself to think, if he is to remain a relatively sane, active, healthy individual, and not degenerate into some kind of impersonal thinking machine? Should he go out of his way to think objectively when there is no apparent necessity for him to do so (as, for example, when he isn't officially working), to drive his thought patterns over the bounds of moderation to such an extent that he defies the urge to variety in life and is eventually consumed, like Nietzsche, by an obsession with thought, becomes saddled, as it were, with a plethora of intellectual superfluities?

Undoubtedly, a man who regards himself as a thinker must think sometimes. But an over-fastidious approach to thinking, an over-obdurate inclination to think at any cost could very soon render him anomalous, foolish, trivial, stolid, boring, and unbalanced – to name just a few things. For whether or not the most thought-obsessed people realize it, there is more to life than thinking, and a need certainly exists in people for adherence to a given physiological situation – as, for example, in refraining from thought when the need to do so is patently obvious.

If, therefore, a so-called thinker is to avoid becoming an intellectual crank, he must respect his periodically natural inclination to thoughtlessness and not endeavour, by contrast, to continue thinking when the energy or requirement to do so is no longer there. Otherwise he may subsequently degenerate, if he doesn't suffer a mental breakdown, into some kind of intellectual freak – in other words, into someone who imagines that he ought to think as much as possible, no matter *what* the circumstances, in order to remain a philosopher, a man of genius, a cut above the common herd. Philosophy, however, refuses to take such nonsense seriously! For the true philosopher always goes his way as a man, *not* as a thinking machine.

Two Types of Thinker: It is wrong to assume that a man obsessed with thought is necessarily a thinker, a philosopher, a genius. For when a man is compelled to think out of habit from fear of not thinking, of not appearing

to be enough of a thinker in his own eyes, there is a reasonable chance that he is less a philosopher than a dupe of his own illusions, a slave of a mentality which assumes it necessary for a thinker to think as much as possible, regardless of the subject or context, if he is to remain a philosopher and not degenerate into an average mind. The idea of thinking, in such a head, is ultimately more important than *what* is actually being thought about.

For it must be admitted, from the converse standpoint, that a genuine thinker – a man, in other words, who thinks not merely for the sake of flattering his ego or filling a vacuum but, more importantly, in order to discover something new about the world he lives in and the best methods of adjusting himself to it – will always stop himself thinking beyond a certain length of time simply because experience and common sense will have taught him that that is the best course to follow if he is to remain relatively natural, sane, perceptive, lucid, and mentally resilient. As a thinker, in this context, he will know that his chief duty is towards himself, and not only for himself but inevitably for the sake of other people as well; that his intelligence should therefore be used to his advantage – as, unfortunately, is rarely the case with the other type of thinker, a type who, obsessed by the urge to think, is essentially a pathological phenomenon, scarcely a man of wisdom. For philosophy should have earnest connections, after all, with the art of living wisely.

Thinking Should Be Difficult: It is just as well that, for the vast majority of people, so-called objective thinking is so difficult, that even those of us who habitually regard ourselves as 'thinkers' are normally compelled to fight and sweat for our deepest thoughts. Were this not the case, were we not the hard-pressed slaves of thought, it is highly probable that thinking alone would preoccupy us, and to such an extent and with such intensity that we would be left with little time or inclination for anything else.

Indeed, those of us who make a daily commitment to putting thoughts on paper are only too aware of how difficult serious thinking really is, and consequently of how pointless it would be for us to complain against this fact or to criticize ourselves for not thinking well enough. Yet if work were always easy, if brilliant ideas invariably came to us without any difficulty, what challenge would there be in doing it? And how many of us would

really care to have above-average thoughts flowing through our heads all day anyway, thoughts which never allow us to rest but, as though prompted by a psychic conveyor-belt, continue to plague our consciousness from morning till night?

If, as Bergson contended, the brain really *is* a limiting device, an organ which, in addition to storing verbal concepts, usually prevents us from thinking too much too easily and too continuously, then it is just as well that it actually works, that we aren't subjected to an unceasing barrage of brilliant and highly irrelevant ideas all day, but are forced to put some effort into extracting any worthwhile thoughts from it. Was this not the case, I rather doubt that I should have found either the time or the inclination to record such seemingly gratified thoughts as these!

A Justification of Boredome: If man is protected against his thoughts by generally finding it difficult to think (by which I mean to think objectively, constructively, and continuously – in other words, above the usual plane of subjective considerations, incidental fragments, brief recollections, disconnected words, casual street-sign readings, intuitive insights, etc., and beyond the moods or situations when thinking of one kind or another comes most naturally to him), then one might justifiably contend that he is protected against too much mental and physical inertia by the intermittent prevalence of boredom, that scourge of the idle.

To most people, particularly the more intelligent ones, boredom is a distinctly disagreeable condition, an emptiness usually leading to self-contempt, which suffices to goad them into doing something absorbing, into losing and rediscovering themselves in some preoccupation, some form of activity or stimulant. Now if boredom had absolutely no place in their lives, if mere existence sufficed to content them (as appears to be the case with a majority of animals), what do you suppose would happen? Do you suppose, for instance, that they would really *do* anything, would, in fact, be capable of living at all? The prevalence of hunger, thirst, lust, changes in the weather, etc., would doubtless oblige them to satisfy their respective physical needs as quickly and efficiently as possible. But, having done so, what would they then have to live for afterwards?

Without boredom there would have been no civilization – no art, science,

religion, politics, philosophy, music, sport, travel, evolution. In fact, without boredom there would probably have been nothing of any consequence whatsoever. For boredom is akin to an eternal whip!

Ultimate Justice: Whenever something happens it happens for a good reason. Once a cause is committed to an effect there is no turning it back. There is no such thing as an accident which should have happened but didn't. A near-miss is a near-miss and not an accident, even if the potential of an accident existed for a time. An accident which should happen will always happen if the circumstances demand it.

Therefore whenever a person secretly or openly condemns nature for its apparent injustice, for the fact, let us say, that lightning struck a tree and killed someone sheltering beneath its branches, or that a flood swept over a town and killed people and damaged property, or that a volcano erupted and spilled molten lava down onto some nearby townsfolk – whenever, I say, a person condemns nature on these and similar accounts, understandable though his condemnation may be, he is unwittingly turning his back on justice, on the justice of a world which would seem to be saying: This cause is bound to have a specific effect; if people are in the way of it, then that is their fault. 'A' must lead to 'B' whatever the consequences or, put mathematically, $2 \times 2 = 4$ and not 5, 6, or 7. If you happen to be sheltering beneath the branches of a tree when lightning strikes it (and the lightning couldn't help arising), then you must suffer the consequences. If, by any chance, you sometime happen to be in the path of oncoming lava, you must now accept the fact that it wasn't necessarily destined to kill anyone but will only kill or maim people if they are rash, unfortunate, ignorant, or brave enough to dwell under a volcano's shadow. To suggest that the eruption shouldn't occur would be as unreasonable as to suggest that mutually attractive men and women shouldn't fall in love, or that 2×2 shouldn't equal 4, or that a poison berry shouldn't prove highly detrimental to its eater. For whenever something happens, it does so for a good reason.

An earthquake, for example, which has to occur because secretly engendered by some planetary necessity which, unbeknown to man, simultaneously safeguards and maintains the overall stability of the planet, is not by any means guaranteed to occur in close proximity to human

dwellings. But if it does so, one ought to bear in mind that (1) it had to occur in consequence of a combination of subterranean planetary influences; (2) the people killed and/or injured by it will normally represent only a tiny percentage of the total human population of the globe, a percentage which will either die or suffer injury as a sacrifice, so to speak, for the overall welfare of mankind in general; (3) these same people might not have been afflicted by it had they built their dwellings elsewhere, or if technology had evolved an efficient early-warning system which could pinpoint the anticipated place of the quake and thereby give inhabitants there sufficient time to abandon their dwellings and move to the nearest safety zone.

Like molten lava, hurricanes, floods, typhoons, and lightning, the earthquake kills indiscriminately, but it only kills what is in its way. Hideous as these things usually are, a majority of us would probably prefer the occasional emergence of potentially death-engendering planetary phenomena to the wholesale destruction of the planet itself brought about by a gigantic explosion in the bowels of the earth. Large-scale explosions fostered by man are undoubtedly dreadful enough. But experience of a gigantic 'natural' explosion which ultimately tore the entire planet apart would be far worse! For where the elements rule, the elements decide.

If earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, etc., were not necessary, they wouldn't happen. Admittedly, science can give man the advantage of anticipating them and even of directing the force of various outbreaks of natural violence into a particular area or spot, as with lightning conductors. But a civilization which got to a point of trying to prevent the emergence of such phenomena could eventually find itself paying the price of frustrating a series of comparatively minor disturbances by subsequently bringing upon itself the horrendous devastation of a major one. For sooner or later a phenomenon which has been frustrated or repressed too long will explode with a force that would have made the force of its previously unchecked explosion seem relatively harmless.

Now what applies to the external world of nature doubtless applies no less to the internal world of the psyche, where neuroses and psychoses are the price one must occasionally pay for one's sanity.

No Escaping Evil: To a certain extent every age turns a blind eye towards most of its chief evils. One of the main reasons for this is undoubtedly helplessness, but others also include indifference, laziness, societal hostility, class rivalry, moral hypocrisy, ignorance, lack of imagination, and – probably most common of all – the inborn inclination of a majority of people to take matters more or less for granted.

Knowing this to be the case, however, one should nonetheless endeavour to attribute a reasonable justification to this string of evils (whatever they happen to be and wherever they happen to flourish). For not only do they constitute a very common, perennial, and ineradicable element in the life of a nation at any given time but, more importantly, they also constitute a very worthwhile element in the protection of that nation's psychic equilibrium, since without its evil side it would have nothing good to boast of, and therefore be unable to exist. Paradoxical though it may seem, it is important to note that evils of one kind or another will always exist, no matter what the gonfalon, for the good of the people. The assertion, however, that they don't exist when it is patently obvious they do, is in itself a clear example of a particular kind of evil which is fairly constant among certain individuals and institutions in every age.

Granted, then, that an age may be justified in turning a 'blind eye' to most of its chief evils, in pretending them not to exist and quite often in not knowing of their existence, it nonetheless has to be said that under no circumstances would it be justified in categorically *denying* their existence, in asserting them to be a figment of the popular imagination, since such an absurd attitude would amount to a veritable refutation of all life. It would, in fact, amount to something gravely unjustifiable in a world where antitheses are ever the mean!

The fact, however, that society is relatively integrated in every age stands to reason. For no matter what the situation, no matter how bad things may appear, good and evil must always co-exist in various degrees and guises, according to whether a nation is at peace or at war, even if a number of the standards concerning the respective criteria of good and evil are constantly being changed or modified in order to meet the ...