

The Archeology of Truth and the Return of Philosophy. Article one.

The river of truth flows through the canals of delusions.

— Rabindranath Tagore

1. Messages of Personal Stories

Self-pity has a distinctive flavor. A significant part of the teachings of genuine spiritual teachers, theater directors and psychotherapists largely consists of developing the ability to sense this distinctive flavor of self-deception. If you start the game of self-pity and blaming somebody or something else when facing a change or a challenge, you sense it with your whole being, you feel the change of energy. It is sad and funny at the same time.

Read the statements below - which are often presented as the 'Golden Rules of Success' - and listen to yourself. Notice your feelings as you read through them.

1. *Don't worry about what other people think of you.*
2. *Always think positively because thoughts are material.*
3. *Do not judge and do not criticize others.*
4. *You must learn to forgive and to be compassionate.*
5. *Do good without expecting good in return.*
6. *The world around you is the work of your soul.*
7. *Be content with what you have in the present.*
8. *Be different, think out of the box, be a rebel.*

When I hear statements like these, I notice two types of reactions in my perception. On the one hand, I understand these statements, partially accept them and can recall a lot of situations when they appeared to be true. On the other hand, I notice feelings of surprise, irony and even considerable resistance. I *am surprised* because I feel that the authors of these statements don't seem to recognize that there are situations when different rules may apply. It doesn't take much imagination to come up with contexts in which the following, opposite statements are also true.

1. *Take into consideration what other people think about you.*
2. *Do not forget about current issues that bother you.*
3. *Make adequate critical judgments and stand up for your opinion.*
4. *Learn to tell people when they make you feel uncomfortable.*
5. *Rely on the support of people you were good to in the past.*
6. *The world around us is a collective work of all living beings.*
7. *Change the world for the better, plan the future for yourself and your loved ones.*
8. *Go with the collective; the results of collaboration are usually more stable.*

No matter how appealing a statement or a principle sounds (including this statement), there is a situation in which it doesn't work. Should we grow and develop? Yes, sometimes. Is wisdom a quality of a leader? Yes, sometimes. Is God love? Yes, sometimes. Is everything possible? Yes, sometimes. Do we have to be compassionate? Yes, sometimes. Will beauty save the world? Yes, sometimes. $E=mc^2$. Yes, sometimes. Seek and ye shall find? Yes, sometimes! In some situations these principles are perfectly valid, whereas in other situations opposite principles work, so the former will only impede us. Even a broken clock shows the correct time twice a day.

In this way you can examine almost any statement that is claimed to be universal. Sometimes it is appropriate to worry about what people think and sometimes it is appropriate to counter their opinion. There are times to be a conformist and times to be a rebel. Sometimes it is important to be patient and sometimes it is important to rebuff. You don't need to go too far to find examples. When I hear a statement that proclaims only one of two opposites to be true, I feel agreement and indignation at the same time, because the statement is partially true and partially false. One part of me appreciates the other person's interest and willingness to share his or her experience, but another part of me feels disrespected - don't I have the right to live my own life and make my own unique choices?

This resistance is connected with the fact that somebody is telling me how I should be and what I should do. If you listen to anybody (from the Pope of Rome to a local electrician) carefully, you will find that his or her speech is quite filled with normative judgments. But on what grounds do these people use imperative statements to tell us how to live, without making any connection to our specific situation? The internet, leadership books and a lot of spiritual literature abound in these obtrusive 'be', 'don't be', 'do', 'don't do', 'you should' and 'you shouldn't', and thoughtlessly play with permanence, by the frequent use of 'really', 'always' and 'only'.

Let's look at the bigger picture: what did those people actually want to say and what do these statements say about them? How can we help our loved ones and ourselves to make wise decisions? The kind of guiding 'advice' we saw above speaks about the inability of a person to see the situation more widely, to take into account the uniqueness of each person, the multitude of people's experiences and the variety of circumstances. It's not a question of finding the right words only; it's a question of the ability to comprehend language and to find more mature cultural expressions of love and care.

When is it necessary to make such statements at all? When should we say 'Don't worry about what other people think'? This question calls for our attention when we already feel anxiety about relationships between others and ourselves. This anxiety is already there and it forces us to pay attention to it. Our personal interests contradict the opinions of others (or, to be more specific, our interest in others) and we start feeling doubt and uncertainty. We have to urge ourselves not to worry, not to feel! To relieve this tension we have to formulate our attitude to the conflict, interpret or experience it. In other words, we speak about what hurts or touches.

Sometimes I ask myself: why, out of the whole multitude of experienced phenomena, did an author of a statement choose to convey his surprising discovery that we should not pay attention to others' opinions? Is it because he or she played the 'good boy' or 'good girl' for too long and, when he or she couldn't take it any longer and finally dared to transgress the boundaries, now shares this wonderful discovery with the rest of the world? Or maybe he or she hasn't even transgressed the boundaries yet, but feels that this step is necessary and is looking for support. In either case, the author is still experiencing the painful situation of 'I'm feeling trampled on by others', is identified with his or her history, and as a result gives advice on how to fight an imaginary enemy to redress the balance.

Why did the author choose to recommend only one of the two equally valid options ('pay attention to what others think' and 'don't worry about what others think') for expressing a possible attitude to a specific disturbing situation, when he or she has to make a choice? Even worse, why does he or she raise the status of his or her choice to that of a universal rule? Why doesn't he or she say 'Respect others' interests and opinions but do not betray your own vision'? Probably because he or she speaks about him or herself, speaks through his or her own pain, through the prism of his or her own circumstances. He or she lives in the reality of multiple resentments and relationship problems. It seems that unable to set clear enough boundaries, he or she has become tired of other people.

Behind delusive mottos and 'rules' of success lie real and painful situations of choice that have not been resolved yet and continue to disturb a person involved in them. If a situation had been successfully lived

through, an author would not suggest that we believe in universal laws, or rely on beliefs and concepts, without taking our actual situation into account. People share their personal revelations with the best of intentions, but often fail to realize that these understandings are themselves the product of their own, particular set of experiences and contexts, and so should not be taken as a universal rule, as gospel.

People long to share their stories, but they often manage to convey only snatches of painful revelations, pretentious maxims preceding the end of yet another act. As a rule, instead of saying 'I don't know how to live through my pain' people often say 'We should enjoy life'. Thus people give us rich material for psychotherapy though they are guided by their best intentions.

These unconscious motives were thoroughly scrutinized by postmodernist philosophers. An author of the above statement unconsciously identifies with the idea of disobedience and fear of dependence so his advice has an unconscious repressive trend. Without being aware of it, he tries to convey the following message: 'I followed other people for so long that I got sick of it'. In the same way other messages stated in isolation from their complements or contexts sound like disturbing signals from their authors trying to conceal their involuntary faintheartedness:

1. *I do not know how to express my complaints in some situations.*
2. *I am afraid of obsessive thoughts and unresolved problems.*
3. *I cannot keep my cool during arguments; I am afraid of conflicts.*
4. *I am afraid of expressing my pain and protecting my boundaries.*
5. *I'm afraid of being rejected by other people.*
6. *This world's imperfection hurts me.*
7. *I am tired of pursuing unachievable goals.*
8. *I am afraid to confess how much I want to be accepted.*

Moreover, when in our inner world we give a simple 'Like' to a harmless catch phrase, we reject an opposite meaning and dive into a hypnotic trance without being aware of it. The Internet, popular spiritual and business books, various seminars and our small talks all swarm with these lulling ideas:

- *In this world nothing is impossible. →*
There are many impossible things in this world, but I am afraid to admit it.
- *The most important thing in any situation is to be yourself. →*
Any situation is also a chance for transformation, but I don't want to notice it.
- *We see only what we want to see. →*
We are also conditioned by our physiology and culture, but it is not important to me.
- *The meaning of life is to serve other people. →*
Another meaning of life is to be joyful and happy but I cannot enjoy it because of guilt.
- *Go forward against all the odds. →*
I can learn from obstacles, I can pause and adjust my goals, but I pretend to know everything.
- *Everyone creates his or her own reality. →*
We also live in a common reality, but I am obsessed with another idea.
- *Our goal is to be in service of conscious evolution. →*
Our goal is also to enjoy our own unconscious feelings and irrational impulses, but I'm often afraid of them and need external guidance in life.
- *There is life but there is no one who lives this life. →*
I feel the urge to hit the author with a bamboo stick and ask him or her who is hurt!

Years of spiritual and psychotherapeutic practice taught me to hear both messages, the obvious one and the hidden one. Sometimes you just can't help hearing it. Sometimes you can't help seeing an image or a scenario a person is experiencing. However, it is not so much a matter of words people say as a matter of the tensions they express. In other words, it is not the people who do the talking but the actual tensions, disturbing contradictions, all the things that matter to us. It is the agitation that speaks through us. Otherwise, why would we worry about it at all? A Zen answer is: 'We do care'. In a conflict like this we often side with only one aspect and express a one-sided attitude to the tension. In this way, the world easily gets divided into the good and the bad, good selflessness and bad self-interest, good courage and bad caution, good acceptance and bad criticism, etc.

It is not even a question of what we prefer when we make a judgment. Any preference is one-sided, which means it is partially true and partially false. Now I would like to draw attention to something that precedes any partial choice, to the tension of choosing. Whether we notice it or not, any judgment is preceded by a moment of choice of interpretation, a borderline state of uneasiness, awkwardness and doubt, when we feel excitement but haven't decided yet what caused this state of anxiety. It is an internal conflict, in which we haven't chosen our side yet. It is a moment when possible interpretations of what is happening still potentially coexist, and I can experience the reason of anxiety in various ways.

Is my feeling of tension in a situation involving other people caused by their conformism or my lack of respect? Is the fact that a graduate student cannot find a job caused by a poor education system or his or her personal failure? Is a boring job a problem of an employer or low self-esteem of employees? Is getting fired a loss or an opportunity? Is ineffective politics caused by immaturity of elected representatives or by passivity of electors? In the mountains, do I feel my own power or the power of the place? Who or what caused the ecological problems – corporations or our unconscious consumption patterns? Do we live in a complex, absurd and changing world or do I not put enough effort and interest to recognize it?

Many great people said that one of the main ingredients of success is the ability to comfortably cope with a state of uncertainty and make a choice in this state relying on intuition and feelings. They didn't substitute their choices with dead rules, but remained alert and had their doubts. Below we will discuss what feelings are, how to understand them, how to rely on them, how to find the truth in a disturbing situation and how to put the wisdom of the heart into words. But right now, I offer an outline of Western philosophy that will help us to trace the search for the truth in the known history.

2. Philosophic Interlude

The method I applied to the statements above is the one of postmodernist deconstruction. It is capable of breaking down any dead opinion and bringing us back to the borderline state of choice. We return to ourselves and ask: 'Why do I think that one thing is objectively worse or better than the other thing?' This is where postmodernism reaches its end, leaving us alone, face to face with our question, fragmented judgments and the uncertainty of choice, without offering any practical answers.

Postmodernism itself was preceded by broad philosophical currents of both classical and modern periods. The classical period was characterized by a traditional notion of truth, oriented towards regulations and dogmas, and permeated with faith in authorities. The truth was whatever had worked before. Sensory perception was an important component of truth of that period. It was a period of naïve realism, of the idea that phenomena of the visible world exist independently of human perception and cognition, that the Bible contains all the most important truths, and that the experience of ancestors is the most solid ground possible.

People of the Renaissance felt the need to uphold the truth based on their individual opinions. It had previously been believed that there were some absolute truths and laws of the universe that could be studied and described. However, Kant demonstrated that we could not see the world 'as it is', outside of

human perception and interpretation. We can only see that which is refracted by the subject's structures of perception, senses and mind. We not only perceive reality, but we partially construct it. Reality is a result of our creative work.

New truths - that we can interact with and gain personal insight into - gradually replaced the old myths and traditional beliefs. During this historical period individual beliefs and depths of understanding were brought to the forefront. Subjective impressions were deemed to be more important than perceived objects. The originality of personal vision seemed to be the ultimate criteria of maturity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, modernism (be that impressionism in painting, stream of consciousness in literature, psychoanalysis in psychology, enthusiasm in music) changed the landscape of virtually all fields of culture and art. Modernization became a synonym for changing ethical make-up.

In fact, modernization also implied a shift from faith to practice, from religion to proof, from tradition to progress. After Kant, the progressive part of humanity became cautious of truths that were based solely on tradition or authority. The modern requirement to provide experimental data in any field from science and culture to spirituality came into play. A statement is true if, after repeating an experiment that proves it, I have no doubts about it.

According to Kant's acute insight, modernity means that if someone found you praying in your own house, you should feel embarrassed.

You have most probably outgrown the cultural dark ages and entered the enlightened modernity if hearing yet another set of 'rules of success' makes you ask a question: 'How can it be verified?'

Modernists continued to believe in absolute truth, even though they no longer regarded it as objective. Postmodernists went a step further and came to the conclusion that truth is neither objective nor subjective, that it is shaped and imposed by culture. All judgments and objects of perception are products of impersonal linguistic systems and cultural networks. Whether we take others into consideration or act counter to them, our judgment is not ours, it is formed through a vast network of unseen interpersonal structures that talk through us.

When Nietzsche said 'There are no facts, only interpretations', he became the first postmodernist philosopher. He pointed out the existence of multiple perspectives, from which the world can be viewed, and interpreted. Nietzsche insisted on the absence of an independent criterion that could prove one perspective to be more valid than the other. This opened the Western world to a multitude of discourses and a plurality of opinions. If all perspectives are equally valid, and of equal value, all that is left for us is to deconstruct and question any subjective statement (the way we did above).

Postmodernism considers the idea of universal truth to be a fabrication. In many respects truth is a fleeting and changing phenomenon, shaped by history. It is imposed by culture and limited by psychology, deformed by language and distorted by politics. Therefore, it is always completely relative. Absolute truth simply does not exist. Foucault demonstrated that many truths are constructed according to the interests of those in power and are a hidden form of social oppression. Only naïve or power-thirsty people are capable of believing in an absolute and universal morality or truth, and such a belief is considered to be the crudest form of cultural ignorance in the postmodern world.

The formula ' $2+2=4$ ' is not unconditionally true, because two rabbits plus two foxes will not necessarily equal four animals, but most probably two full foxes. We can endlessly try to make contexts, concepts and meanings more accurate. Postmodernism demonstrated that any experimental data is relative, because it is a product of interpretations, conventions, fashion and changing scientific paradigms. It promoted the necessity of cultural and interpersonal validation. The truth is what we agree to believe to be true.

We can paraphrase Kant's statement and say that postmodernity means that if a friend of yours found you believing in any universal truth (scientific, spiritual, moral, esthetic or any other), value or principle, you should be embarrassed.

In our example, it means that if you cannot perceive any aphorisms without irony, if you want to mock their author, tell him to speak for himself and his own story and ask him 'What leads you to want to impose your interpretations and partial truths on others?' then you've entered the postmodern age.

However, postmodernism is also not flawless. If modernists gradually became disappointed in their 'absolute' ideas, postmodernists became completely disoriented. Indeed, if nothing is better than something else, how can we make choices and decisions? The distinction between high and low dissolved in the base embrace of popular culture. The depth of modernism was ridiculed. Not only did originality and sincerity lose respect, but they also became objects of irony. In the West by the end of the twentieth century, a person who sprayed graffiti on walls could be considered as much of an artist as someone whose paintings were exhibited in art galleries. Nietzsche's prophecy that cynicism and nihilism would be the main characteristics of the postmodern consciousness became the reality.

At the same time, postmodernism served as a good spiritual injection for Western society. In fact, it showed that no concept could be absolutely true (including this statement). Judgments cannot express the truth. This realization made attachment to beliefs shameful and devaluation of values liberating. If you are obsessed with an idea, if you make strong statements outside of particular subject and context, you should feel embarrassed in front of developed people who are aware of the language relativity.

Postmodernism made a considerable contribution to our disidentification with the rational mind. However, it could not accomplish the task of subsequent conscious integration. Fascinated by 'nothing sacred' revelations worthy of Zen patriarch Bodhidharma, postmodernism lost sight of love and care and turned into a meaningless refuge for narcissism. Postmodernism denied the mind while remaining in the mind, it excluded the mind without being able to transcend it.

You probably understand what it means, if you have already noticed that the statements like 'Don't worry about what other people think' and 'Take into consideration what other people think' are equally true (the truth cannot be defined solely by words). Nevertheless, you realize that it doesn't negate the necessity to deal with current daily tasks involving you and people around you. Activity requires clear moral and behavioral guidelines.

As we have just seen, a statement is almost meaningless by itself, it can be true and it can be false. In other words, 'good' and 'bad', 'good' and 'evil' are only different perspectives on the same phenomena. In logic, it is expressed through Tarski's indefinability theorem, which in particular demonstrates that for any statement we can find two contexts, one of them making the statement true and the other making it false. For example, a dead deer is a joy for a hunter's family and a tragedy for the family of the deer. In other words, it is quite difficult to ascertain a truth outside of a living experience of a particular subject. It is floating. There is nothing to rely on. This is why the postmodernist 'world as text' is lifeless. According to Nietzsche's provocative statement, 'God is dead', which means the notion of God is dead, but not the actual Source.

The regrettable mistake of postmodernists is that they consider all phenomena as text outside of certain experience. It is quite hypocritical to first separate the text from the author and then declare both the text and the author dead from the point of view of linguistic analysis. If we deconstruct the father of Postmodernism Jacques Derrida's belief that 'the world is text', radical Postmodernism will collapse. This collapse actually took place at the end of the twentieth century and it made us realize the necessity to resurrect the author. However, we had to reconsider the question of authorship since postmodernists brought out clearly that the truth is not subjective (it is not a matter of individual preference/opinion).

The postmodernist belief that relativity is universal also attracted critics' attention. In fact, it means that neither experimental data, nor its interpretation, is real. The very possibility of choosing different interpretations is declared to be real. It is not your words or thoughts that are important, but the reason why something is of interest to you, why it makes you express your judgment. Mature postmodernism gradually returned to the question of meaning for the one having an experience. In a sense, in the society of late postmodernism people become each other's psychotherapists and this idea is reflected in TV characters like Dr. House.

Thus, the classical notion of 'objective absolute truth', the modernist notion of 'subjective absolute truth' and even the postmodernist notion that 'there is no absolute truth' turned out to be invalid. Integral philosopher Ken Wilber attempted to find a way out of this complicated situation. He proposed to look for the truth in the idea of evolutionary hierarchies of complexity, initially proposed by the late structuralists. It is presumed that we tend to unconsciously single out and value things that we deem more complex. Stone is less complex than bacteria, bacteria is less complex than animal, animal is less complex than human.

Wilber insists that some things are better, truer and more beautiful than other things. He evaluates, criticizes and imposes a hierarchical order on phenomena, claiming that evolutionary hierarchies are free from culturally conditioned judgments. Wilber emphasizes that these differences are natural and states that the ability to express more care and compassion and to take into account a bigger number of perspectives is naturally better.

According to Wilber, you have entered the integral age if, as a result of pondering whether you should worry about what other people think, you start to consider multilayered contexts, take into account multiple perspectives and are guided by the idea of serving evolution. In other words, you manifest evolutionary consciousness. To a certain extent, it is a more progressive way of looking at things, but you are still dependent, still carried away by belief in a certain idea and look back at the authoritative opinion of researchers of development. You are also firmly stuck in the mind, because when you differentiate you simply analyze complexity, lacking more precise moral and ethical instruments.

If development means growth in complexity, then complexity and depth are better than simplicity and surface. However, this absolute assertion that Wilber made doesn't stand the postmodernist test of interpersonal justification and can be deconstructed just as easily as any other conceptual statement. Great numbers of highly developed people refuse to believe the idea that complexity is objectively more important than simplicity and demonstrate convincing examples of non-linear character and ambiguity of increase in complexity. Besides that, developmental structuralism is simply statistics based on a hypothesis, so it cannot be considered a reliable ground.

The idea of evolution can be useful when considering existing ancient 'cosmic habits' and nested hierarchies (such as atoms, molecules, cells, organisms, etc.). It is directed towards the past, implies making judgments by analogy and almost never works for problems of present and future, when we need to find a solution in an unfamiliar situation that has not yet been described by evolutionary researchers. Just like any other mental concept, it fails on at its boundaries.

No conceptual idea that needs to be believed in can take root on the scorched earth of attachments left behind by postmodernism. Just like Nietzsche said, the God of conceptual belief and mythic values is dead. Even the idea of the independent existence of a subject is discredited. Next stop: radical transformation that will show the truth outside of the mind!

To get there, let's notice that the statements 'You should take into consideration what other people think' and 'You should not worry about what others think' are meaningful not only inside a linguistic context or a cultural context, but also in a context of related experience. Behind each statement, there is a narrative, a story of pain, joy and hope.

The author of the second statement may have been afraid of disappointing his boss or family for many years. As a result, he got into a situation of unbearable dependence. Finally, he found a way to break free from such attachment to other people's opinions and learned to protect his own interests. It could be a man who was not able to get married for a long time because he listened to his mother's advice. In the end of his hero's journey, he proclaimed that one should not worry about what other people think.

In this case, we understand that the proclamation is based on the man's pain and a decision born out of hesitation and uncertainty. In the same way, if a person neglected his family, friends or a partner for a long time due to being carried away by a spiritual search or by developing his business, he could end up alone in a complicated situation that required building new relationships with utmost care. This man's journey could end with proclamation about how important it is to take into consideration what other people think.

This approach allows us to touch something that feels more real. These scenarios reveal living stories of transformation that can be understood, and that cause a compassionate resonance. We stigmatize art as untrue if it doesn't excite us, if it doesn't resonate with us, if it doesn't touch our feelings. The key question 'Should I worry about what others think or not?' can be answered with two instructive stories that end with transformation of their main characters. Each of them faces challenges, worries and doubts. In both stories, they find a solution in a meaningful experience that brings balance and relief.

None of these extreme statements defines the truth, but the contrast between them can point out something that was missed by all previously discussed schools of philosophy, an impulse that prompts us to make a judgment. Note that in the process of transformation both characters go through a certain moment of emptiness, a borderline state when one belief has already been shaken but the other belief has not become a part of their reality yet. This is the moment of disidentification, when a person is taken over by a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety, a sense of despair and disorientation, irritation and surprise, agitation and bewilderment, excitement and confusion, passion and uneasiness. This state is usually associated with pain and suffering and is the most important motivational factor that helps us to let go of our attachment to an old idea and choose a new understanding.

At the same time, this excitation itself is not a concept but the condition and the basis for all concepts. Anxiety is not a product of the mind but anticipates all notions and discriminations within the mind. Excitation does not state anything, but we cannot disagree with it. We don't have to believe in it and it is impossible to deconstruct it. It is a culturally invariant state inherent to sentient beings. It is both subjective and objective and it is not a concept. We can perceive it, but the subject and the object inside it are not divided yet; the excitation precedes the appearance of the one who is excited and the realized impulse.

I also call this state a 'tension', emphasizing the fact that it doesn't have any emotional tint yet, that it has not become either inspiration or anxiety. It is also not a physical sensation, because it would be a judgment about the source of a tension. The words used here are not definitions but rather pointers to that ineffable something that we all are familiar with. We go to the theater and cinema, do sports, find new interests, and play all kinds of games to feel this vibrating state of excitement and uncertainty that we associate with being alive.

This state precedes any differentiation and corresponds to 'presence' or the natural state in Eastern philosophy. In European philosophy this tension is usually called 'existence' or individual being, and a school of philosophy that deals with the non-conceptual truth that appears in the gap between two borderline states is called existentialism.

Existentialism explores the experience of worry, anxiety and a moment of choice of interpretation in a situation of tension. For example, I meet a man who has a much slower speed of reaction than me. Before there is a statement ('I am too fussy' or 'He will not move at all') there appears the tension of contrast between our speeds and the freedom to choose how to judge the situation, how to conceptually discriminate.

Existentialism reminds us about a person's responsibility for the interpretations he chooses to make. It points out that it is a person who creates values and meanings in a situation of choice. The most important discovery of existentialists is that tension precedes interpretation. Excitation (Sartre's 'anxiety' or Steiner's 'inspiration') precedes choice. To use Heidegger's wording, 'a thought gives a word to existence', or, in Sartre's words, 'existence precedes essence'. In other words, the author is resurrected, but he is not a subject or an object anymore, he is the very existence that causes excitation!

Existentialism in a broad sense means that if you feel sorry for yourself and try to justify unsatisfactory choice by reasonable explanations you betray conscience, deny the truth and should feel embarrassed.

You are also not a stranger to existentialist ideas if, when looking at yet another list of 'golden rules', or feeling any other kind of anxiety, you tend to ask 'Why do I invest my time in it?' or 'What I have not done that it touches me so much?' In addition to that, you know that the feeling of soul comfort, relief and open-heartedness is a better criterion for a wise solution to a particular situation of anxiety than ideas of right and wrong.

Being a philosophy of freedom, existentialism anticipates life without relying on universal concepts and rules. However, it was not able to clearly describe what should replace them. How to be empty of beliefs and to act in the world according to one's inner truth without betraying one's freedom and sincerity? When faced with those difficult questions of meaning and morality, which society demands any philosophy should answer, existentialists offered to listen to the voice of conscience, which for them meant taking complete responsibility for one's choices. But what does it mean from a practical point of view?

Existentialists pointed out excitation, existence or the feeling of being alive as an important non-linguistic and non-conceptual aspect of perception that lies at the basis of any experience and is directly connected to the truth. Meanwhile, they had no idea how to use it to connect mind and no-mind, the rational and the irrational, the conceptual and the non-conceptual, essences and existence. Having touched the transcendental base of existence, they couldn't see how it shapes itself into the manifest world and as a result of it were not able to link tension and choice.

Existentialism resurrected the idea of absolute truth but encountered another obstacle. The absolute truth had to be connected with relative truth, which meant it had to be expressed by the means of language. This problem remained unsolved for a long time. For example, Karl Jaspers came to the conclusion that silence is the only possible form of expression in the face of transcendence, as demonstrated by Buddha as one of great existentialists. He considered answers to existential questions as revelations of a deeply individual nature that can be expressed through an act of creativity.

Thus existentialists became brilliant writers and psychotherapists, highly sensitive to the truth and having intuitive understanding of borderline states and internal contradictions. For example, Camus and Sartre were awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Their books touch one's soul deeply and convey the atmosphere of speaking to one's own conscience. They emphasized the experience of being and the ability of a subject to feel and choose. Just like postmodernists, they deemed interpretations illusory and fleeting, while seeing tensions and freedom of choice as real. Thus, existentialists contributed to our understanding of the truth the necessity of taking into account excitation and freedom of choice.

We can see that European philosophy has gone a long way in revealing different aspects of the truth. All schools have made important and valuable contributions to understanding of our nature.

- **Classical epoch:** the Truth is absolute, objective and based on past experience.
- **Modernism:** the Truth is absolute, subjective and is constructed in the course of an experiment.
- **Postmodernism:** the Truth is relative, depends on a context and is defined through consent.
- **Existentialism:** the Truth is again absolute, ineffable and is based on contemplation.

However, we still have to find out what the living truth really sounds like. Western philosophy hasn't found the words to explain conscience and express true wisdom. We may need a new language, in order to describe the ineffable.

3. Searching for the Truth

As we've seen above, the means of language and the mind alone cannot guide us to the Truth. Any judgment we make ('this is good and this is bad', 'this is right and this is wrong') somewhat suppresses the legitimate importance of the opposite meaning or of an aspect of being. Various schools of philosophy have been scrutinizing this problem for the last two decades. Rules cannot give irrefragable answers about wise behavior and especially about moral dilemmas.

Does that mean that we are doomed to meditate, keep majestic silence and not make any judgments, as some 'spiritual' leaders recommend? However, ignoring pressing issues and the challenges of life has little to do with wisdom. It is important to learn to express our care through action and at the same time to make sure that we do good, create beauty and spread the truth.

Let us consider a particular situation which we will try to find absolute truth in and then express it in relative terms. As an example, we can take the same problem of whether we should take into consideration what other people think. Let's suppose that you and your partner don't see eye-to-eye on a question that requires a coordinated response from both of you. You each have different views of the situation, so at some point a tension arises. You are mature enough to start communication, listen to each other and try to find a solution that will satisfy both of you. But how do you know that you have found a solution in the process of discussion?

If you feel the characteristic sense of resentment, it means that some of your interests have been infringed, and the tension in connection with the situation and your partner remains. If you feel guilty (blaming others or justifying yourself), you probably press too much and the tension remains again. In many cases, after arguing for a long time we manage to find a solution that is not connected with feelings of guilt, resentment, arrogance or being humiliated. We like this state because in it disturbing tension has been transformed into confidence and satisfaction. It is a full and grateful state of presence that gives us relief, inspiration and energy. There is no heaviness of justification or bitterness of necessity in it.

Notice that we don't choose to feel guilt or resentment. We just feel them as a kind of built-in reaction when we think about one or the other way of behaving. Usually, such feelings are magnified if we make inharmonious decisions, justified by rational arguments. After a while, we subconsciously sabotage and betray (if we feel resentment) or get betrayed (if someone has a grudge against us). We get stuck in a circle of life lessons and commonplace stories until we come back to the moment of choice, apologize and firmly express our personal position. If we listen to our feelings and are guided by them when making decisions, no reason is left for serious painful consequences.

Although we are used to looking at this kind of situations as conflicts between you and your partner, this is not the source of the problem. Each of the participants in the conflict finds himself/herself on a boundary between two contradicting interests within. On the one hand, there is a desire to express one's own vision, to do everything one's own way. On the other hand, there is a desire to save close relationships, to express respect to the partner. If we indulge our personal interests, if we 'don't worry about what other people think', the pain of rejection and loneliness comes promptly, whereas indulgence towards collective interests, the strategy of 'worrying about what other people think' usually begets humiliation and dependence. Indulgence towards one or the other doesn't prove to be an advantageous strategy in any exciting situation.

So what should we do? How can we find a basis for moral decisions? The answer could be as follows:

*You can **FEEL TO WHAT DEGREE** you should take into account other people's opinions and support relationships and to what degree you should adhere to your own vision! Find a liberating balance between these two contradictory interests that will allow you to feel neither guilt nor resentment but gratitude to your partner for participation and the joy of a personal contribution.*

The important difference between this guideline and all previous ones is that it doesn't tell you explicitly what behavior is right. The suggestion to feel guides you to a possibility of finding your soul equilibrium and a decision that corresponds to it. This guideline differs from both literal rules of 'doing it right' and vague advice to 'listen to the voice of your conscience'. It is not a dead stereotypical rule. It contains an important message about the necessity to take into account both one's personal and one's collective interests. You can do it the other way as well but then you will at least realize that the possibility of balance remains open while the tension in relationships exists.

Do I claim that I know the truth? Do I know how to behave when dealing with other people? Yes and no. I share the knowledge of important aspects of such behavior with you, but I do not exclude the possibility that it will not work in your unique situation. There is a place for you in this formula! It is not just a text; it offers you a way out of our usual understanding. The meaning of this message cannot be separated from living experience. It also leaves a space for mystery. I don't know where resentment and guilt come from, but they disappear when a balance of interests is achieved.

In other words, the exact balance that defines harmonious decisions arises in the gap between the personal and the interpersonal, and is perceived by means feelings. It is amazing, but there is probably no other way to understand if a certain result satisfies us. Concepts don't work because we listen to our inner voice anyway to check if these concepts are valid. We check what we feel when we ponder on a decision. Through feelings we know if we are relieved, if we feel proud or humiliated, vanity or envy.

I will not name the One that whispers the direction to balance, but we tend to trust unconditionally the feeling of expansion and relief as the best criterion of a solution to a disturbing or challenging situation. If the uncomfortable anxiety disappears, the answer is found. You can compare it with adjusting the volume in a music player. Normally, we don't think which level of volume is right. We turn a handle until the sound stops bothering us and starts to please the ear. We naturally trust this comfortable relaxation. But when it comes to more complex interpersonal questions, we often rely on rules and concepts even if we feel strong tension or an unpleasant aftertaste, as a result of the decision. We have to believe in somebody else's ideas when we cannot understand and trust our own feelings.

The formula suggested above passes the modernist validity check because it contains a reference to an experiment that lets you make sure it works for you. It also passes the postmodernist validity check because it doesn't claim to be universal. You and I feel balance differently and I don't impose my interpretations of situations. This formula is not intended to persuade you that a certain judgment or ideology is valid, it points to something that lies beyond the concepts, language and rational cognition.

There is no hidden domination or manipulation here, because I don't know which of your behaviors will pass the validity check of soul equilibrium. A sense of harmony and a tension between interests are simultaneously personal and impersonal because they anticipate the arising of subject and subjective opinions. This understanding also passes validity check of the classical epoch because people were always been guided by their feelings; the only thing that is new about it is a renovated explanation of the phenomenon of feelings.

The guideline of feelings will also pass the existentialist validity check. This tense uncertainty or naked openness in which we remain until we find a proper solution is the very existence, the borderline anxiety or the feeling of being alive. If we properly take both interests into consideration and balance them there is no need for justifications. On the contrary, our feelings of inspiring confidence and healthy pride for the decision we've made are signs of connecting with our inner truth.

A decision verified by feelings cannot be unconscious because its arising is preceded by a moment of pause, of silent meditation, contemplative questioning and a micro-revelation from the transcendent. In this sense, feelings are amazingly spiritual. This approach is the basis for humanism because shadow projections and hostile forces do not arise either inside or outside of one's self. You don't have to protect or justify yourself because you express love and care towards all interests.

Existentialists looked for an opportunity to catch a momentary experience or, in Sartre's words, 'to catch the consciousness at the crime scene', not letting it become reasoning or even a rudimentary form of conceptual thinking. In their opinion, only in this case an experience becomes a 'viewing window' through which one can see the 'real' world. In fact, we completed this task when we showed this gap in perception space between individual and collective interests as having made a resonance with existence itself. We included the timeless and the irrational in the equation using instruments of language.

You might remember a quote from the Tao Te Ching, 'The Tao that can be expressed in words is not the eternal Tao'. Our formula also satisfies Lao Tse's criterion. In fact, we do not express the truth in words; we only create the conditions for connecting to it. We point to the opening where we can feel the degree of importance of each interest in the given situation. In a certain sense, it is the same method of transcending the mind used in Zen koans, but here it is expressed in simple terms. Intellectually speaking, it is a language transgression.

Openness to feelings directs us to a special perspective, purified from attachments, from which we can see both individual and collective interests as our own, and at the same time we are not any of them. We observe the interests from the point of view of a witness and yet feel if there is a tension remaining between them. A wise action implies choices that ensure their harmonious coordination and integration. We are and still remain that ineffable 'I' that feels the extent of rupture and chooses which side (none or both of them) to stand on.

'FEEL!' is an awakening mystical formula that allows us not to transcend the mind itself but to transcend one's attachments to certain of its forms. It is the action that connects the heart and the mind, ground and discrimination, vibration and its reasons. It is not about bodily sensations (though they become keener) and pre-rational forms of mental grasping, but about recognizing and experiencing a contradiction, the transcendence and resolution of which requires the work of a soul. Feelings are one of the least understood phenomena in our perception precisely because they are hard to explain through the mind. In a sense, when you feel you don't know and when you know you don't feel.

How long can you stand still and just feel?..

Openness to feelings can also be described as presence. In appeals to maintain awareness we commonly hear the attitudes of duty, fear of losing awareness and a lack of joy in life. This approach to presence implies effort and the necessity of concentration, whereas true presence is effortless, it is relaxation, freedom and openness. The more we relax, the more energy we allow in, the fuller and deeper we feel. As we let go of our right to differentiate, understand, and choose, we let the energetic ocean of bliss and ecstasy that permeates all space with its pulsation appear within our perception.

To feel is to care!

The word 'presence' is actually not very apt because it doesn't bear enough respect for absence. For this reason, presence is often confused with indifferent observation and deadly peace which is fundamentally wrong. True presence is also openness to the unknown, to all sources and channels of perception; it is letting go of the known and letting in the exciting. It is the readiness to respond with care and attention to arising tensions. This is why we are most fully present when we are open to

absence, to our lack of knowledge. One of the ways to do it is to get in tune with the phrase 'What is missing in the present moment?', 'What am I not feeling at the moment?' or 'What is wrong?' which literally turns you into a naked nerve. This double meaning combines freedom and fullness, the transcendent and the immanent and expresses the notion of 'feeling'.

To feel is to allow oneself to enjoy the fullness of the present.

Experiencing even a most mundane truth is directly connected with vibration and bliss. We have been suppressing our feelings and making them taboo for too long. Without the necessary degree of gratitude, respect and balance they tend to turn into anger, fear and painful mistakes. From early childhood, many of us associate them with forbidden fruits and punishment. Most religions also seem to apologize for life, for the right to enjoy. Meanwhile, awakening implies the return to feelings. In Buddhism, the nature of mind and the highest wisdom is considered to be the union of emptiness and bliss, clarity and energy. It is true for both the highest realization and ordinary awareness.

We have the full right to let ourselves vibrate and tremble, get excited and shiver, be embarrassed and joyful, play with the immense fullness of creation to the extent that allows maintaining fullness of love and gratitude to all interconnected parts, maintaining consideration which can also be felt!

The philosophical notion of 'truth' was first introduced by Parmenides, who initially defined it as a criterion of conformity between existence and thought. Plato defined truth as a trans-empirical idea cognized by the soul. Ancient Greek philosophy in general tended to consider truth as gnosis, a mystical, esoteric knowledge passed down from above. Modern philosophy began to consider truth as an episteme or accurate information about an object, a subject of agreement and the result of the application of a method. Nowadays, many dictionaries present epistemology and gnosiology as synonyms. However, there is a fundamental difference between these notions. Episteme (scientific knowledge) by its very definition is opposed to the true gnosis (revelation), sophia (wisdom), a sense of harmony and balance.

To a certain extent this state of affairs was caused by the Church's attacks on Gnostics. Scientific approach naturally rendered the search for absolute truth impossible, as was explicitly pointed out by postmodernism. However, we feel when we are insincere and often cannot hide and silence the inner voice of our conscience. We feel that science doesn't have answers to questions of meaning. Philosophy, as love of wisdom, implies the return to the wisdom of the heart, the knowledge of balance and harmony. Psychology, as the knowledge of soul, implies a return to the understanding of soul.

According to the understanding of ancient peoples (and Eastern philosophy), the absolute Truth is a spiritual knowledge. Thus, the suggested formula solves the problem by explicitly pointing to the relation between heart and mind, existence and thought, feelings and concepts, excitation and contradicting interests. Two main precepts inscribed in front of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi were '*Know thyself*' and '*Accept due measure*' ('*Nothing in excess*'). In a sense, this article explains their meaning.

Adopting this approach of feelings makes it possible to investigate the question of moral behavior, of making decisions, while being more fully in chime with one's conscience. The word 'conscience' comes from the verb *conscire*, where *con* is 'with' and *scire* is 'know', 'with knowledge'. It can describe the degree of mutual tension between our contradicting interests that should be taken into account within moral action. Therefore, if you feel resentment because your interests are neglected, morality helps you to be more persistent and firm when stating your position and expressing your feeling of discomfort. On the other hand, if you feel arrogant and uncomfortably guilty, morality directs you to express more understanding and openness towards others. A gracious balance of interests is achieved when you don't feel heaviness, fear and aggression either towards other people or towards yourself.

For example, you check into a good hotel but the manager gives you a room that hasn't been properly cleaned. You feel annoyed and offended by such an attitude towards yourself. In this case, the individual interest is the desire to have a clean room and be respected as a guest. The collective interest is the desire to maintain good relationships with the manager and make a good impression. The choice not to complicate the situation and not to create problems for other people will be immoral if it leaves an unpleasant aftertaste ('No luck for me this time', 'I'm probably asking too much'). The choice to express anger towards negligent staff and demand a new clean room can also be immoral if it is connected with arrogance or hostility to the staff ('It's their fault', 'They have no right to treat me like this'). Blaming oneself as well as blaming others is a signal of an existing tension, imbalance or unfinished action.

The trick of moral behavior is to express the degree of one's discomfort while maintaining respect to oneself and other people, without blaming and labeling others and stifling one's self-respect. The balance and proper action can be found if we listen to our feelings, to something in the very depth of ourselves. Initially we can't choose to feel or not to feel, but we can choose our attitude towards the feelings! Having achieved balance, we feel dignified, equally respecting ourselves and other people.

In other words, when we meet the manager the next day in the hotel hall, we don't have to hide our eyes and feel embarrassed when asking for a favor which he is not obliged to give. However, if a person we are trying to communicate with doesn't hear us and our resentment is building up, it is a moral duty to inform him or her about our discomfort as loudly as possible while maintaining the atmosphere of respect to collective interests. Thus, we can define morality or sincerity through a degree of sensitivity to, and active trust in, one's feelings. People who are able to listen to their feelings and understand their message are usually less inclined towards religious or scientific dogmas, connect with cosmic order and higher fairness.

Bearing in mind everything that has been stated above, we can paraphrase the rules from the beginning of this article in a way that allows us to connect them with the truth.

1. You can **feel to what extent** you should take other people's opinion into consideration and to what extent you should follow your own vision and uniqueness.
2. You can **feel to what extent** you should have only positive thoughts and to what extent you should think about current issues.
3. You can **feel to what extent** you should not judge others and to what extent you should make critical judgments, protecting your own interests.
4. You can **feel to what extent** you should forgive and to what extent you should let people know that they make you feel uncomfortable.
5. You can **feel to what extent** you should do good without expecting it in return and to what extent you should trust others and rely on friends' support.
6. You can **feel to what extent** your world reflects the work of your soul and to what extent it reflects the rules of creation and contribution of other beings.
7. You can **feel to what extent** you should be satisfied with what you already have and to what extent you should desire more and plan your future.
8. You can **feel to what extent** you should be a rebel and think out of the box and to what extent you should take into account society and the ability of others to understand you.

Now you can feel how the nature of these statements has changed. Now they are more expansive, friendly and inclusive. Now they anticipate integration and decrease separation. In fact, they remind us of the necessity to take both of our opposing interests into account when a situation causes tension. We don't discard mind and rationality but compliment them with the heart, with the ability to feel ruptures and find a soulful balance of opposing interests.

At some point behind this formula you will recognize the initial state, vibrating resonance and inexpressible connection between individuality and community. In fact, the very question whether we should align ourselves with the opinions of others already contains anxiety and hidden desire to be accepted by others and at the same time to realize our potential. Behind the statement there is existence and judgment expresses the tension of existence. In a certain sense, it is an expression of the challenge of love. Our every desire cries for care and attention, disturbing us with burning trembling and exciting shivering that touches our souls. A degree of personal development is defined by the ability to pause and make integral decisions that nourish both interests with love, without ignoring or giving exclusive preference to any of them.

Kant pointed out that the moral impulse always leads to the conclusion that moral ideas of good and evil are not defined by rationality but granted from above. The belief in rules and maxims takes us away from the ability to feel the healing balance. However, it is not something negative. We can feel to what extent we should rely on rules and to what extent we should check them with our feelings. The existential anxiety/excitement, the degree of discomfort/ecstasy, the intensity of feelings determines the necessity of taking them into account. We change when a degree of tension does not allow us to ignore changes ('reality' or 'what is') any longer.

You might imagine that if we release tensions and worries we risk becoming boring and dull. However, taking something into account means paying attention to it, being aware of it but not necessarily harmonizing it. You can play with tensions (to generate and intensify them) until you feel a disturbing discomfort. It seems that all of us are guided by our own individual sense of balance and harmony. In this sense, we find our own unique destinies and follow our purposes through trust in our feelings. In fact, even when it comes to the question of trusting one's feelings I will give the same advice: we should feel and choose to what extent we trust our feelings and to what extent we rely on 'our' common sense.

Ultimately, I do not appeal you to be universally more compassionate or sensitive, more developed or awakened; I do not tell you what is the 'right' thing to do according to Vedic, Christian or Integral principles, as there would not be much wisdom in it. I remind you about the possibility to listen directly to That, which can bring you more love, joy, relief and happiness. We have the right to play our own games and pain has the right to bring us back to reality when we lose our selves/souls in the game. Until we feel discomfort we do not have the desire to be more aware, wiser and to harmonize the situation (in fact, discomfort IS a desire of harmony). In this sense, knowing about feelings will be relevant when you want to slow down and find a wise response to a disturbing challenge.

In this article, I've partly pointed to the direction in which you can go in your own search for the ultimate Truth. In the next article we will go all the way together and build an integral model of experiencing and cognition, a natural philosophy that connects the absolute Truth and the diversity of relative truths.

To be continued in the Article 2...

May 2013

Oleg Linetsky
Odessa, Ukraine
Oleg.Linetsky@gmail.com