

WALKING WITH DEATH, WALKING WITH SCIENCE, WALKING WITH LIVING: PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS AND HAPPINESS

Frances Gray

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the consequences of acknowledging that we are the dead walking with the dead. I argue that if we take the view that life frames death, rather than the view that death frames life, then we must refigure our living as ethical creatures. Using Aristotle's notion that we become virtuous by practising virtue, I argue that happiness, thought of in terms of ethical living, should temper our attitude to death as the inevitable end we must all encounter. Acknowledgement of our dying and our death enhances the ethical imperative to live virtuously and to promote human flourishing. I adopt a Buddhist reading of death and dying to interpret the Aristotelian perspective.

KEYWORDS: Death, Flourishing, Ethics, Aristotle, Buddhism

I sit, writing, in a stolen land. History has caught up with the thieves who officially refuse to acknowledge their theft. So I begin by acknowledging the theft; and by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land people, this country, where I sit, writing.

My acknowledgement should be seen in the context of what I argue in this paper, since Aristotle's philosophy has been articulated from within a political system which failed to recognise what we today might call the full humanity of some of those who fall under its jurisdiction. In *The Politics*, Aristotle argued that the state is a creation of nature, emerging as it did, from other naturally occurring groups (man and woman united conjugally, and slave and master, thence families and villages). He held that the end, the *telos* of the family and the village is the state 'and the nature of a thing is its end' (Aristotle, *Politics* 1252^b30). Consequently, Aristotle claimed the state is prior to the family and to the individual for an individual cannot survive in isolation. But it is the state that cultivates and perfects the social instinct 'implanted in all men by nature'. Since the nature of a thing is its end, and the end of human nature is happiness, it is incumbent upon the state to produce the conditions under which human nature might achieve that end. We are presented with a picture of a coalescing of ends that

are viewed as congruous with each other. Happiness ends up being tied to the well functioning state.

However, Aristotle also held that slavery and the subjection of women are creations of nature. He articulates the ‘natural’ dichotomies:

soul	ruler	master	man
body	ruled	slave	woman

in which the first occurring term of each pair is superior to the second occurring term. He argues that slaves are living possessions, that slaves are by nature not in possession of themselves but are the possession of another, the master (1253^b25-37, 1254^a10-14). In the case of women, men are the rulers, women the ruled, and ‘this principle, of necessity, extends to all of mankind’ (1254^b14&15). The well-functioning state depends upon the functioning of these dichotomies, in the value laden dualism they express.

Aristotle’s interpretation of ‘creation of nature’, the naturally occurring order of things in which there are ruled and ruler, and the teleology which emerges from his view has been, arguably, immanent in the founding of settler Australia and as it continues today. How Indigenous Australians were viewed and have continued to be viewed by the invading settlers and our descendants is embodied in Aboriginal Australians’ second rate status as Australian citizens highlighted by the theft of their land, their people, their culture. In my view, many of us have yet to come to terms with this. The use of philosophies which advocate views like Aristotle’s, without a simultaneous acknowledgement of their ontological elitism entailing problematic ethical assumption, white-washes and makes acceptable, their philosophies as a whole. In some sense, I sit here today on Aboriginal land because of those philosophies as practised, and this recognition, I hope, is reflected in my acknowledging the traditional peoples of Australia. It is not just that an individual cannot survive in isolation: it is that an individual cannot survive, cannot thrive, without her people: and the manipulation of this intuition has been used politically to determine the fate of millions, including Aboriginal Australians.

But I also write in the knowledge that we are all concerned with human happiness, our own and the happiness of others, each of which, like it or not, is inextricably linked with the other. Many of us seem to think that happiness revolves around acquiring goods, where ‘goods’ is taken to be material possessions: cars, washing machines, houses and mobile telephones, all of which have emerged as consumer items because of the incredibly sophisticated scientific discoveries of the past one hundred and fifty years. While it might be the case that goods in this sense do bring happiness, for they bring pleasure and satisfaction as well as responsibility, they can also stand in the way of happiness and of human flourishing. It is lack of these goods—basic necessities like food and water—just as much as their excess that brings misery suffering and prevail against human flourishing. It is also how we have used science to create misery that might lead us to think that science itself is a two edged sword, bringing both succour and scourge. As the *Dhammapada* says, ‘Let us be free from pleasure and let us be free from pain; for

not to have pleasure is sorrow and to have pain is sorrow' (*Dhammapada* 210).

Noting the ambiguity of the term 'goods', I remind you that there are also less tangible but highly contested goods, a fact noted by Iris Marion Young, that tempt and disrupt and over which we quarrel. One of these goods, so often in dispute, is power. We see and understand power as something to be 'got', to be used for our benefit and the benefit of others. We see power almost as a commodity, something to be bought and sold and bartered for, hardly even noticing that we exercise what we want in attempting to get what we want. Power as a good exhibited and performed in our relations with one another is highly desirable, highly desired. However, as Plato so astutely hypothesised in *The Republic*, both the just and the unjust person (he actually said 'man' but we will forgive him for that) would ultimately act in precisely the same way, unjustly, if they were in possession of Gyges' ring. The good that power is reckoned to be, overwhelms its wielder, leading unfailingly to selfish preoccupation and self-interest. Power seems always corruptible. At length, the corruptibility of power is transmuted by the corruptibility of the body. It is death that proves to be the greatest power, death that without fail we all come to, hopefully with a calm heart. In that sense, the sense that sees death as always present and always the victor, power is incorruptible. 'Neither in the sky, nor deep in the ocean, nor in a mountain cave, nor anywhere, can we be free from the power of death,' declares the *Dhammapada* (*Dhammapada* 128).¹

I am mostly concerned here, though, not with material goods or even goods of a less palpable nature although I am of course, tangentially so. One cannot really talk about one without talking about, or assuming, all. I wonder in this paper, about how we might live a good life and what that notion, a 'good life', might mean. I make the assumption that I am privileged, as are many others, to be able to actually ponder this question.

That all said, I have a flashing image of voracious and insistent words, gabbling at me, at you, jostling for the front row, leaping up and shouting, 'Me! Me!', that keeps infiltrating my consciousness. Those words have lives of their own. They have a palpable, material presence, a thickness and substantiality which makes them difficult to ignore. And they are ubiquitous. One can go hardly anywhere and not encounter them. Not only are they ubiquitous, the words are chameleon like, taking on the shapes, sizes and colours of their environments. And the words appropriate those environments, making them their own. Like squabbling, naughty children, the words disruptively compete for supremacy, aggressively struggling for victory. And what is the victory for which those words strive? It is the winning of truth and the winning over truth, both, sometimes simultaneously.

My paper is written then in the awareness that there may already be too many words. And also that words are, in part, responsible for constructing a world, or perhaps

1. The translation of the *Dhammapada* I have uses the term 'man' and 'he' throughout. I have substituted 'we', 'us', 'they' for that term. I take it that the way of the Buddha is open to all, women and men and that the *Dhammapada*, like all texts, is constrained by ontological assumptions, historical circumstance and social relations.

I should say, worlds, which pre-dispose against the living of a good, indeed a beautiful life, and maybe even conceiving of such a possibility. But words also propitiously construct worlds. The contrariness of words, their possibilities for negativity and affirmation, contemporaneously subtends and permeates our being in the world.

Hélène Cixous suggests that there are words that are magical. She cites the twentieth century Russian writer, Tsvetaeva, who wrote that '(t)here are magical words, magical apart from their meanings ... physically magical, with a magic inherent in the sound itself, words that before they deliver a message already have meaning ... It is possible that each person has in his own life his own magic words ...' Cixous goes on to comment, 'This is good news, because if you haven't yet found your own personal magic words, you still have time to find them. Everyone has their own magic words. The moment you find your magic word—it may be one word or several—then you have the key, you can start writing' (Cixous 1993:90).

Magical words are transformative, and transform in different ways. The young boy's declaration that the emperor was not actually wearing clothes, his audacity in uttering those words, was transforming: a jolting of consciousness which salvaged truth. The words of the boy constituted a transformative moment for the whole of the kingdom: I hope that in reading this you might find some magical words for you, some word or words to transform and maybe to enhance your life. A huge ask, I know, perhaps even above all, from an academic philosopher. But ...

WALKING WITH DEATH

'Never walk with a dead man'. That is the epigram that begins the film, *Dead Man*. Let us say also, 'never walk with a dead woman, either'. 'Never walk with a dead person' is even better. Think about these words: never walk with a dead person. Were we never to walk with a dead person, we should never walk with anyone. We should always walk alone. More dramatically, we should never walk at all, not even with ourselves. For you see we are all dead persons. This is the most sobering, confronting fact of our human lives, that we are all dead in the future, that the future is now and that now no longer is here. Our consciousness of our mortality, our consciousness that we are mundane—of the earth—and that it is to the earth that we shall return, weaves itself into our lives: we are the dead walking with the dead. Like the fine threads of a magnificent tapestry, that consciousness is not always clear to us. We are the dead walking with the dead because we are walking with our pasts, but also with our futures. But we are walking now and this is our present. All our moments are moments of death, ineluctably, be they past, future or present.

However—and this is a most important 'however'—we are not quite dead, not yet. There is a not-yetness to death which accompanies our being the dead walking with the dead. Our deaths are framed by our lives, *our being*. And our lives, our being, bring to our deaths their not-yetness: we are, we are alive. For us, this fact, the fact that opposes the galling fact of our mortality, is sublime: we live, we are in not-yetness, just as we die

in not-yetness. And it is how we live that not-yetness that counts. Our being is a being of possibilities, a living interrogation of actuality, the fact that we are, in the face of potential life which is finalised in death.

What does it mean to be human, to live in not-yetness and to be alive? How are we to think of this life which frames our deaths? To be human can be articulated in terms of deliberately living that not-yetness as best as we can, knowing that the end of life is death. The *Dhammapada* tells us that '(j)ust as a keeper of cows drives their cows into the fields, old age and death drive living beings far into the fields of death' (*Dhammapada* 135). A short time later it declares that we should '(h)ave faith like a noble horse touched by the whip. By faith, by virtue and energy, by deep contemplation and vision by wisdom and by right action, you shall overcome the sorrows of life' (*Dhammapada* 144). For Buddhists, overcoming the sorrows of life entails overcoming the sorrow of death and its inevitability.

The key way to doing this is to live without harming oneself or others. An important aspect of the Dhamma is that harming others entails that one harms oneself and that harming oneself inevitably entails harming others; doing good for others bring good to oneself, just as doing good for oneself, brings good to others. 'The wrong action seems sweet to the fool until the reaction comes and brings pain, and the bitter fruits of wrong deeds have then to be eaten by the fool ... We may find pain in doing good as long as our good has not given fruit; but when the fruit of good comes, then we find good indeed ... If we seek happiness for ourselves by making others unhappy, we are bound in the chains of hate and from those we cannot be free' (*Dhammapada* 69, 120, 291). This knowledge is wrought in suffering but also in happiness, good heartedness and generosity. Suffering and happiness, are the effects of our actions, our being, and carry us to the moment when not-yetness ceases to be mere potential, when not-yetness is actualised in and as death. They are also the causal factors which predispose us to further acts of happiness and suffering.

We have, then, a vested interest in practising virtue, in practising right action. We can be happy only if we live a life of goodness. Disposition, too, plays a role in the making of happiness through right action. The Eightfold Path focuses on how we are disposed to the world, the kinds of attitudes we should embody. By gradually disentangling ourselves from those attitudes and actions that bring us misery, including clinging in vain to our mortality, we will know a deep happiness resonant with the openness of being, resonant that is with knowledge of our finitude. We know we are living rightly if we and those around us are happy in this sense.

Discussing virtue and, in particular, the virtue of courage, Aristotle remarked that the more one 'is possessed of virtue in its entirety and the happier (one) is, the more (one) will be pained at the thought of death; for life is best worth living for such a man, and he knowingly loses the greatest goods and this is painful' (Aristotle, 1972: 1117b13). For Aristotle, the happier one is, the more repulsive will the gaze of death appear to be. And Aristotle, it could be argued, is the voice of natural attitude: death is an inevitable but miserable end for us all: death is something unspeakable, truly too awful to contemplate.

And we don't think about it because well, frankly, it *is* too horrible. But suppose we were to re-figure this attitude, suppose we were to think, of life as that which frames death *rather than* of death as the spectre that lingers menacingly always in the background, framing everything that we do and see and feel and believe and love, framing our lives, our aliveness. What effect would that have?

Buddhists are very honest about mortality: death will come but the gift of this conscious, human life is immeasurably great and a means of transforming the inevitability of death. They have some wonderful stories that are salient to the thesis of this paper. I take these stories from *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. You may be familiar with an anecdote, either from that book or another text, about Krishna Gotami, a contemporary of Gotama, the Buddha. Krishna Gotami's child died and she was overcome with grief; she wanted her child's life restored. She eventually found the Buddha who told her that her affliction would be healed if she could bring to him a mustard seed from a house that had never experienced death. So off she set, but at every house she came to, death had been a visitor. Of course Krishna Gotami could not find a deathless house: there was no mustard seed to be had. So she took her child to the charnel ground, said farewell, and found the Buddha again to tell him of the insight she had achieved. Note that the Buddha did not promise to restore the life of Krishna Gotami's child: he said that her affliction would be healed. Tuck that in the cupboards of your minds for the moment.

The second story concerns a woman who was dying, and who was despairing at the thought, as she had only a few months to live. She sought out a Tibetan master, Dudjom Rinpoche, and entreated him to help her. She was met by chuckling and the words, 'You see we are all dying. It's only a matter of time. Some of us just die sooner than others' (Sogyal Rinpoche 30). One reading of this is that the response was grossly insensitive and that Dudjom Rinpoche showed little compassion towards the dying woman. Another, however, is that he showed consummate compassion, that this was really one of the few appropriate things he could say.

The contrast between the grief of Aristotle's virtuous happy person, his person who has achieved happiness, and the responses of Buddhists is not unremarkable. On the one hand, Aristotle's person is pained at the thought of death because s/he is happy and death is contrary to happiness; on the other, the Buddhist orientation is almost cavalier. But if we think the Buddhist recognition that radical impermanence—death—disrupts, and indeed is the condition of all being, is cavalier, then we might profit from reflecting on our own metaphysical assumptions. The Buddhist attitude is reminiscent of Socrates' attitude to death in the *Phaedo* (Plato, 2003:117) where death is not to be feared but welcomed, a position markedly different from Aristotle whose attitude reflects the Parmenidean commitment to permanence. Aristotle's unmoved mover, a changeless ontological origin of all being is more closely aligned with Parmenides than it is with inherent changeableness (if for example he were Heraclitian) which I think is implicit in Socrates' attitude.² The philosophies of inherent change and of permanence

2. This point requires deeper philosophical analysis not appropriate to this paper.

reflect very different metaphysical and phenomenological commitments found in their respective attitudes to death.

But what interests me most about these philosophies, is that they each attach enormous importance to a happiness that is not tied to the possession of material objects. The practice of psychological balance as a living philosophy is enacted in conceiving of the purpose of life as virtuous commitment. In order to be happy, in order to promote the flourishing of the *polis*, or of all sentient creatures, one lives rightly. For Buddhists, the purpose of life is to see things as they are, to practise compassion, detachment and realise nirvana. For both Aristotle and Buddhists generally, happiness is an effect of living rightly, notwithstanding the historico-cultural differences that fill out what it means to live rightly.

Some of the happiest people I have ever met are Tibetan Buddhists. These are dispossessed people, people who have and still suffer, people who have few material possessions but who have hearts as full and as deep as the cosmos. For them, happiness is a practice of the heart, a disposition towards the world, a deeply compassionate way of being. Like Aristotle's philosophy of happiness the relation between living ethically and happiness is expressed in the philosophical praxis of the lives of these people.

For Aristotle, one becomes happy by being virtuous. How does one become virtuous? By practising not rehearsing virtue. Moral virtue. Moral virtue like courage, like temperance. Moral virtue which becomes a habit, a habit of the mind. A conscientious, deliberate, habit, a habit that embodies a state of character. That state of character exhibits harmony, balance, moderation, the golden mean as it has been called. For Buddhists, one becomes enlightened by practising compassion, by practising, and here, again, I do not mean 'rehearsing' but performing, enacting, living, the eightfold noble path. Doing, becoming and being are entwined: one does, one becomes, one is. How one acts in the world, on the world is paramount and it is here that the ethical life unfolds. And that is where happiness lies.

Both positions will entail carrying oneself lightly through life, lightly with a lightness that is grounded in the world. And here we encounter a difficulty: how does one do that? How does one do that in a world bombarded with words and aggression and seduction and pushes and pulls and tugs and demands? How does one do that? Add that question to the cupboards of your minds.

WALKING WITH SCIENCE

One way of reading the various projects of science, is that those projects promote happiness, happiness not only for humans but for all sentient creatures. Read in this way, science becomes a set of social practices, derived from particular understandings of the nature of the cosmos and of social groupings. That is one way. Another way is to take up the opposing view: that science, even as a set of social practices destroys happiness. If, as seems to be the case at the moment, our world leaders are married to, and have consummated their nuptials with Thanatos, then we need to observe that the

political practice of science is deeply antagonistic to life. One could conceive of those leaders as the instruments of science thought of, firstly, in the latter mode. Their words legitimate the ritualisation of destruction, the exercise of science in its magnificent awfulness, its cataclysmic dreadfulness. But perhaps this is too grim a view. After all, are there not multitudes of ways in which science does promote or has promoted happiness? Are not world leaders instruments of science in this mode, too? Have not world leaders encouraged the use and development of science for the advancement of human happiness?

The list of scientific advances which promote human flourishing in a world framed by compassion, the awareness that practical knowledge and discovery can alleviate suffering is salutary: the Salk vaccine (Salk), the X-ray (the Curies), penicillin (Florey), peri-natal care, electricity, ... But then we move to anti-depressants, nuclear reactors, space ships to the moon (perhaps), television, the internet, cars, aeroplanes. And from there to nylon undies, microwave ovens, central heating, Hollywood, champagne, National Parks, plastic surgery, reproductive technologies: the list goes on and on but seems to become enmired by the constraints of desire and pleasure rather than necessity and flourishing ... This is desire and pleasure for the few at the expense of the many still suffering, still with no water, still plagued by malnutrition. Desire seems to conspire with and become complicit with the social practice of science for the gratification of the relatively few.

The domain of euphoric science where science is conceived of as the champion of human flourishing seems so vulnerable. For it is a domain amongst many, a domain of the real world as it is in us: euphoric and/or desolate. It is the world in which we act and which acts upon us: it is the domain of the lightness of living, as well as despair. Such a fragile world! For overall, it might be claimed, our world as a totality is constituted and maintained by science, a world where happiness is derivative less of the practice of virtue, more of the pursuit of pleasure, ease, comfort. A world, then constituted and maintained by those who use science: you and I, as well as world leaders.

To speak of lightness of living in a world where happiness is the telos, seems anathema to current human pursuits. Currently, it might be claimed, science has more power than anything else. An awesome thought, that: science has more power than anything else. Another item for the cupboard.

But turn around and look back, just momentarily. Not just the world of 'euphoric science'. Yet also the world of destructive science. We are in the world that is in us, the world in which we act and which acts upon us, yes truly. It is a Janus-faced world. Both faces, one world, and walking with science, which, dear me, is walking with death. And an irony, a paradox, perhaps both, perhaps neither: that we shun death, *and* that our world leaders have married not only themselves to death, but us, also. The words again, those words, words which give us world leaders through the ballot box. Words which announce, ultimately, not only the infidelity of world leaders, but the infidelity of those who facilitate their world leadership. That is me; and that is you.

There is an advertisement for the Australian Quarantine Service which has been

showing recently on television. In that advertisement, a youngish man, Steve Irwin, in shorts, socks and boots dangles a piece of meat in front of a crocodile. He teases the crocodile, not quite giving it the meat. The crocodile eyes the youngish man, clearly anticipating having a meal (and maybe the youngish man will be the meal: is that what we might think?). The youngish man eyes the crocodile, and as he does that, he chats to us, the viewers, about letting dangerous flora and fauna into the country. And then he gives the crocodile the meat (not a gift of himself, mind you). The youngish man is flirting with death. In a non-advertising capacity, he flirts with death even more outrageously when, while holding his young child in his arms he feeds, apparently as a publicity stunt, another crocodile. The youngish man is making a point, facing death. Worse still his ego over-rides the interests of his very own child: such foolish, immoral behaviour to consciously risk the life of another as entertainment. Things could go wrong: the crocodile might lunge at him and have him or his child for a feed instead of the meat in the young man's hand. Undoubtedly, there would be safeguards in the making of the advertisement, perhaps someone nearby with a stun gun, or worse. Maybe we would have loved it more if things had gone wrong. Or maybe it's all not real anyway, a technological fraud, a product of digital mastery. Maybe ...

The youngish man must know that he is taking an enormous risk. He must know that his control is illusory. He *must know*, yet he consciously chooses to play with death, to go on a honeymoon with Thanatos, the honeymoon before the consummation. Married already to Thanatos, we are not much different from this youngish man in our flirting with science as we do. The youngish man has an alternative. That involves leaving the crocodile to be a crocodile, respecting its crocodileness, walking at a respectful distance where he cannot be grabbed and consumed. But that would involve detachment, the relinquishing of power; and we, as human beings find that a difficult undertaking.

Gillian Rose captures the spirit of what I am attempting to say here, when she quotes (from whom, I am not sure and it could even be her—she was such a *good* writer): 'Be—and at the same time know the terms of the negation' (Rose 146). We are alive: we are, yet we refuse the terms of the negation when we have a failure of courage in the exercise of our judgement. We know that we will die. And we deny that we will die, that we are walking with the dead, when we use science as we do, when we tempt its snapping jaws as if there is someone standing by with a stun gun. Well, there isn't, not even the United States of America. For the US is a rogue crocodile tempter, in spite of its rhetoric of liberty, as is any nation that flaunts science through the development of weapons of death (euphemistically now, weapons of mass destruction). Science is incapable of redeeming itself once those weapons have been used; and nature may triumph, but how is an unknown.

WALKING WITH THE LIVING: A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Perhaps my writing difficulty is transparent to you now. Not-yetness, it seems, is in danger of itself being reduced to a pile of rubble, but I insist on returning to thoughts

of a beautiful life, a life which is possible. That we are alive and capable of living happiness might seem like a western liberal democratic ideal, applicable to an already privileged 'we' but inapplicable to millions of inhabitants of underdeveloped, poverty stricken, drought/flood, infectious disease affected countries—and some inhabitants of western liberal democracies, for we should not forget the developed poor. I could be persuaded that western liberal democracy is the best model of polity we have, as my friend Peter Corrigan argues. But western liberal democracy has its foundations in colonial imperialism and the continuance of that imperialism, albeit in slightly different form, is unavoidably worrying. The plight of Indigenous Australians can be seen from this perspective: loss of land and destruction of culture without due acknowledgement that this is the case, affirms the dominance of Western history and democracy.

This brings us back to the cupboard and what is tucked away there. Three things, I am sure you recall:

1. the healing of Krishna Gotami's affliction
2. how one carries oneself lightly through life given the world I have been describing
3. that science has more power than anything else

A few weeks ago, I saw the moon rise over the ocean. It began as the tiniest slip of golden light before it emerged in its magnificent fullness. Imagine the full moon's rising out of the edge of the ocean and then over the ocean. Imagine the texture of the air, how the air smells, what the light is like, what the ocean sounds like. Science did not make the moon rise, nor did any human enterprise. It just rose: not for me, not for you, but because that is the way things are. And it was beautiful because that is the way some things are. Recently, earthquakes have devastated South Asian countries: thousands have died and some have even died on mercy missions to help survivors. Science did not make the earthquake, nor did any human enterprise. It was terrifyingly destructive because that is the way some things are. Daily, we cure our fellow humans, and ensure the supply of fresh water, clean food, drugs and surgery. Science and love and virtue, all human enterprises make this happen. That is the way things are because we have made it so. Daily we kill and maim and torture our fellow humans. We do this with our ingenuity, and with science. That is the way things are because we have made it so. Our actions corrupt our ingenuity, our noble reason, our very knowing.

The word 'science' comes from the Latin, '*scientia*', meaning to know. Its modern connotations are heavily inscribed by notions of observation, hypothesising, testing of hypotheses, proof and truth. Implicit in modern conceptions of science is another notion, that of objectivity, which suggests that there is a world beyond, and independent of, the languages we use to capture that world in the scientific models we construct and which, we assert, accurately reflect what we believe to be reality. [Of course there is a philosophical debate here into which I am not going to enter. One can imagine this as an essay or exam question, with the word, 'Discuss' written after it.] The word 'philosophy', Greek in origin, conjoins love and wisdom, the love of wisdom. 'Theology' again Greek in origin, has come to mean the study of God, but may equally well be

rendered the word of God, or the reason of God, or the logic of God, since '*logos*' has multifarious meanings. Most of us are undoubtedly familiar with all of these origins.

It is said that for the ancient Greeks, philosophy began in wonder; for Descartes, philosophy began in doubt and the quest for certainty; the English philosopher Simon Critchley thinks that philosophy begins in disappointment. My hunch is that science and theology begin where philosophy begins. My hunch is also that there is a kind of synchronicity of origins: that wonder, certainty, doubt and disappointment are, each of them, originary sites for the three disciplines. So there is not one point of emergence at all, but simultaneously many. That object of wonder, doubt, certainty and disappointment is there, primarily, in observation, in, if you like, noticing the world. I can't prove that, it's just my hunch.

All three are human enterprises and begin in the sensual body, in the eye that observes the rising moon, the ear that hears the rustling whisper of leaves, the mouth that tastes the deliciousness of ripe fruit. It is the body that observes and later, imagines, the full moon's rising out of the edge of the ocean and then over the ocean; that observes and later, imagines, the texture of the air, how the air smells, what the light is like, what the ocean sounds like. Observation and what we do with our observation when constituted as our experience, is fundamental to philosophy, science and theology.

Something was revealed to Krishna Gotami when she went to look for the mustard seed. She discovered that death is omnipresent: she *observed* that death is omnipresent. That observation helped her to re-figure her grief. It was the re-figuring of Krishna Gotami's grief that was the healing of her affliction. The Buddha identified her affliction differently from the way in which she did. For her, it was grief at the death of her daughter. For him, her affliction was the inability to see things as they are: that death is inevitable and everywhere and that there is no escape. He knew that she had to re-orient her thinking in order to be released from her suffering and to find happiness. That demands courage, insight and responsibility, all of which might be thought of as moral virtues.

It is in this way, in the developing of what I am thinking of as moral virtues that one can carry oneself lightly through life. While it is the case that truly dreadful things happen both to ourselves and others, others who are friends and who are strangers, it is also truly the case that the moon rises over the ocean and that it can be observed, noticed. And it is also the case that if we are to be morally virtuous then the happening of dreadful things will, inevitably, cease. Krishna Gotama took responsibility for her grief. She took responsibility for her mind and its disorganised, rampaging emotional contents, its uproarious thoughts. Doing that put her on the path to carrying herself lightly through life.

How many people see the moon rise, full or otherwise, over the sea or anywhere else? How many people, given the impoverishing state of the environment, can actually see the moon? Let us try on this thought: it is the power of science that prevents the seeing of the moon; it is also the power of science that permits the seeing of the moon in ways never thought possible since before the time of Galileo. Some of those ways,

paradoxically, the ways of seeing the moon, now contribute to preventing our seeing the moon. We have to pollute planet Earth in order to get to the moon. We have to dig up planet Earth, re-fashion the contents of planet Earth, *mine our source* in order to explore the moon . . .

But of course that is not truth *simpliciter*. Explorations of the moon are a small part of our diminishing environment which is complemented by our still accelerating environmental imperialism: there is a multitude of other factors which contribute to limiting what we can see in the sky, day or night. It is not only the moon, the seeing of which is limited, is it?

The power of science, more powerful than anything else, more powerful than Superman, just as he is more powerful than a locomotive. But to argue that is to disavow the responsibility of those who use science, however it is used, isn't it? (And remember, it is us, *all of us*.) Isn't that to dismiss the role that the body who thinks and builds, who plans and schemes, who invents and makes happy, who invents and destroys, plays in our deteriorating world? Isn't that to ascribe to science something which is unascrivable?

Yes, it is. The truth is that it is not science that is more powerful than anything else: it is the human mind. What we *do* with what we invent, what we discover, makes us powerful. And we have discovered more and more ingenious ways to kill, to maim, to destroy. And while we do not admit this, we are complicit in our own destruction, in our own wilful, premature, marriages with Thanatos.

Hence we need, it seems to me, to re-figure ourselves as did Krishna Gotami: we need to see things as they are and we need to accept responsibility for our minds. We need to clean up the messed up house where the goblins rampantly run. We all share the same affliction, you see, as Krishna Gotami. I argued earlier that for both Aristotle and Buddhists, one achieves one's ends by embracing one's mind and ordering its contents through action, through embodying virtue. That needs to be done with an intense sense of responsibility to ourselves and to everyone else. And that all entails acting in ways conducive to flourishing, conducive to becoming more and more involved in the loveliness of life. We live happiness and we live a beautiful life when we do this. Happiness, thus, it seems to me, is a matter of seeing things as they are, of accepting what and how they are, and of living consciously in that knowledge. Metaphorically, it is to see the full moon rising out of the ocean, beginning as a slip of gold.

There might well be an aporia here, the irresolvable dilemma of knowing that we are mortal, accepting that, yet resisting the cultivation of death through destructive science. After all, the thesis of this paper is that we should see things as they are and accept them: that is how we are to be happy. But I am not proposing a philosophy of quietism at all: no, not at all. For that, it seems to me, would be to acquiesce to the idea that death frames life. Recall that I wondered what the effect would be of thinking of life as that which frames death rather than the contrary position (death frames life). The effect, I suggest, would be that death is re-figured as a natural end of life. As an end to life, it is not distinct from life, but as that towards which life is directed. The not-yetness that is life demands conditions under which life can come into its fullness and then

wane, just as the moon waxes and wanes. Knowledge of death, acceptance of death thus becomes an aspect of the process of life, of not-yetness.

Listen to this: It is a short quote from Philippe Ariès' superb book, *The Hour of Our Death*. Ariès is commenting on the death of a peasant in a la Fontaine *Fable*. The peasant 'dies like the knight in the *Chanson (de Roland)*, or like those peasants in the heart of Russia whom Solzhenitsyn describes in *Cancer Ward*: 'but now, pacing the ward, he recalled how those old people had died in their villages along the Kama River—whether they were Russians, Tartars, or Udmurts. They did not bluster, fight back or boast they would never die. They took death *calmly*. Far from postponing the final reckoning, they got ready, little by little, and in good time decided who was to get the mare and who the foal, who the homespun coat and who the boots, then they passed on peacefully, as if simply moving to another cottage' (Ariès 1981: 16).

As if simply moving to another cottage ... Evocation that is sublimely simple. There is much to be learned from history. On the other hand, perhaps it is nauseatingly romantic to think that we might all be as the peasant. After all we live in a post-industrial society where our concerns are very different from those of a peasant. Or are they?

CONCLUSION

Living an ethical life, living a beautiful life means living our not-yetness responsibly in happiness. I suspect that this is probably both an enormously simple, yet supremely complicated task. And I could be wrong: I could have missed something that is very important in this context. But these are some conclusions that I have slowly come to over the past few years, as perhaps, have many of you already.

Well, there were many words clamouring to be spoken in the writing of this paper. My hope is that I have practised discernment in choosing which ones to write, and then to utter. To follow in the footsteps of Wittgenstein, who ended *The Tractatus* by saying what cannot be spoken must be passed over in silence (or words to that effect), I now hand you over to silence.

Dr. Frances Gray
Philosophy, School of Social Science
University of New England

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ariès, Phillipe *The Hour of Our Death* (translated by Helen Weaver) (1981, Random House, New York)
The Dhammapada (translated by Juan Mascaró) (1973, Penguin Classics)
 Sogyal Rinpoche *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*

-
- Aristotle, *Basic Works* (translated by Richard McKeon)(1972, New York, Random House)
- Cixous, Hélène *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (translated by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellars)(1993, New York, Columbia University Press)
- Dead Man* (1995) A film by Jim Jarmusch
- Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates* (2003, London, Penguin Classics)
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (translated by Pears and McGuinness) (1961, London, Routledge and Keegan Paul)
- Young, Iris Marion, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1993? Princeton, Princeton University Press)