

THE BURNING BLOCK

Philosophy, Metapolitics, Literature

No. 6

December 22, 2017

EDITOR

SHANE EIDE

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Edition 1 Published by Shane Eide, December 22, 2017
Edited by Shane Eide
Cover design by Shane Eide
Cover image by Kathryn Eide
Portland Oregon

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Shane Eide

One will see in the essays of *The Burning Block* No. 6 some reoccurring existential themes. Nihilism and egoism are treated in their modern sense (if I'm allowed to use the word 'modern' in terms of the past 175 odd years), and the philosophical problems they pose to questions of freedom and liberation.

This issue sees the return of aphorisms, which here fall under the title, 'Aphorisms and Aggravations.'

APHORISMS AND AGGRAVATIONS

Shane Eide

Free Speech and Taboo. Free speech operates entirely in a defensive, tribunal manner, in which grievance is carried to its logical conclusion. Speech is never truly protected. Culture takes care of that speech the state will not. Whether one contends with or confronts the sharpness of certain words, the taboo nature of certain ideas or the implication of violence, nothing is stronger than the grievance on which the democratic process's most important illusion rests. It is important to people that they distinguish themselves by their words. To rise, they must push through a crowd of others and climb on top of their heads. Every hard-won cliché is, in fact, the victory of an ideological war. When one finds a word or an idea unpalatable, one's work lies ahead if one seeks to dismantle their respective foundations. People are given so much which in turn takes so much when they cling to their beloved ideals. We believe in free speech because we still wish to identify that which we must censor in the other's heart.

*

Society as the Manson Family. Society loves its self-fulfilling prophecies. People would rather be right than perform a diagnostic of any consequence. Like Charlie Manson, young and wonder-eyed, reading meanings into the fabric of pop songs, we have the information but we jumble it up into configurations which ultimately feed the delusions that give us a sensation of power and mastery over others and over reality.

Democracy, consumerism, materialism, bureaucracy... these all harbor perpetual wars within them, building violence into the very fabric of all our social interactions. It is remarkable to note how often apologists of Manson's crimes rattle off the same sentiments one hears about any given president of the country after any given foreign intervention: 'he was not a direct actor in the state's violence;' 'he is not necessarily responsible for the people he represents,' etc. A system which thrives off of the antagonism between opposing groups from the top down is going to produce mirror values from the bottom up. In a culture where grievance is the very perpetual engine of how we make decisions, the west is always going to end up with the odd Manson family, the odd Jonestown and Waco cult,

the odd commune, compound, church or sports organization which specializes in preying on the fears and taking advantage of the privations of the disenfranchised and disturbed. When you look into the eyes of Charlie Manson, you see the fevered insanity, in all of its lucidity, which reveals itself in our world as an ever-present hallucination.

*

What Needs to Be Done. Society has been organized around the crisis of what needs to be done. We no longer have a concept of duty. Duty came with studying nature and assessing one's place within it. Having divorced nature, we with it divorced duty, and are now ever turning our heads to find the one who will be able to recognize what needs to be done.

*

Space as Direction. One happens upon the Divine when nonbeing is left to itself, rather than reified as a space of the future, of impossibility and anxiety. We try to create so many shapes to contain the open spaces before us and seldom rest in the unfolding of creation which is always at hand, able to manifest in any form and move any direction. But to move any direction, we must be aware of the space before us.

*

All phenomena, all physics amounts to a coming, a going and a stillness. Each time we witness a going and exalt it in opposition to a coming, we've lost access to the stillness which makes them possible. We've lost what is in between.

*

The phrase 'research shows' as prophecy.

*

Even more dangerous than books which break taboos are books which lead to other books.

*

Utopia is nothing if not the belief that future pleasure can be purchased through present suffering.

*

Religions project reason into their symbols, and thus, when only the symbols remain after a time, the signature of reason is lost. The symbols themselves are scoffed at by people who place importance in reason alone, which they perceive to extract from symbols provided to them by the punitive matrix of the state, of culture, and their secular ideology. They stand too close to their own secular religions to ascertain the level of nonreason to which they've been subjected.

*

Is there anything more chilling than nobility? In almost all cases, it frames the event of a great crime committed by a family long ago.

*

Technology has provided us with endless opportunities to increase our intelligence but has severed our means of turning our knowledge into wisdom.

*

Polite Society and Hidden Smell. Society became polite when it entrusted its procreative agency to other people. Perfumes and colognes hid the pheromones and their accompanied sense of heat, rut and ovulation. We then had to rely on sight, as anyone could be adorned with smell. Makeup didn't so easily perform the same task for beauty that perfumes did for smell. There still remained the traces of age and deformity revealed by varying gradations of light and shade. The theater of sexual attraction depended on the most adequate performance, the highest verisimilitude rather than the perfume of nature.

*

A man loses his religion after having acknowledged a series of creeping suspicions he would not allow himself to address. The same man will find religion again after having assigned those same suspicions to the realm of misapprehension of the mythic.

*

Crashing Violently Eastward. Though many thinkers from the west may align with the wisdom of the east, they have to crash violently through western nihilism to get there. They resent the miracles Christianity would have them believe, for they know that the east considers its very

mythmaking capacity the real miracle. The blissful emptiness of Nirvana, the nuanced, untraceability of the Tao; these make a plaything of worldly concerns. The west's penchant for linear thinking gives them apocalyptic obstacles to overcome before they can arrive at the other side. Nietzsche grafted onto the Christian God the destiny of the Norse gods. The west wages war more when it doesn't believe in war. Cioran could only appreciate the Taoist principle to 'act without acting' by passing through his despair of everything in the face of death. Michelstaedter, though ultimately aligned with Buddhism, required the complete inversion and reintegration of the Socratic dialogue. It is not for one like Heidegger to operate on trust in the trials and tribulations that the eastern traditions suffered in order to arrive where they are. He had to take the path alone and invented his own language for it. Western thinkers do not trust what does not cost them what would most comfort them. Eastern thinkers do not trust what does not cost them everything.

*

We've turned the warrior inclination toward battles of the intellect. One wanders into the dark and thrusts one's sword into blind spots. When it turns out that our whimsical thrusts have killed a few strangers, we say, 'Aha! I knew there were enemies here! If they were not here, they would not be dead!'

*

Secularism divinizes those events throughout history when the mob had its shining moment.

*

The just are always fascinated by the wayward direction; those who incrementally deteriorate, for, in the midst of the other's dysfunction, they see not the internal prison of such a case, but only the very freedom in squalor which the just do not allow themselves.

*

Music as Monotony. What could possibly be the point of modern music? In it, we accept in the space of three and a half minutes what we would never tolerate from a peer over the course of a month: mindless, droning, sentimental repetition. It is all the better if it can aid some mindless labor or task at home; anything to keep our minds

inundated with the notion that such vacuity, such endless gear shifting is indeed normal. There might have been a time when music was able to offer us the salve of affirmation for our romantic needs, but now, it is only monotonous, predictable sound. The tunes that come flapping out of the noise-holes of most artists are a sort of protracted puberty; childish disappointment elevated to the discussion of a dinner party in which everyone must look around to read the signature of their social climate to learn what kinds of feelings are worth having. It isn't enough that the music itself is repetitive by nature; our culture insists on repeating the actual songs every chance it can turn a profit. More of it must be produced, never too complicated, and never with arches, themes and motifs larger than what one can ascertain on a car ride or at the workplace. By the time the musicians come to town, their entirely non-poetic word-based art has been memorized by the audience through endless repetition. The musician has only to sit back and listen to the words he wrote with the highest sentiment become cheapened through more and more, and quicker and quicker commodification. Modern music, eventually, beats us completely into submission. It is the ultimate proof that mankind will substitute just about any quality for stimulus.

*

Reality is a surplus which transcendence spends on the leisure time awarded by consummation.

*

Unable to implement the wholly possible task of slowing time down, we've traded it for an impossible task: to destroy time altogether.

*

Insofar as 'will' exists, it implies free agency in itself. Only when it is posited that will can be given as a gift does there then arise speculation as to whether or not it can still be free.

*

Interpretation and Passivity. Who is the one interpreting, and on what criteria can his interpretation be built? There will come a time when even active thought will be considered too passive.

*

One wears one's opinions like a king who posts the severed heads of his enemies on poles around his castle. One suffers the instrument responsible for such a display at one's own peril, though by then, the king only adds another head, not because he needs more, but because the others failed to demonstrate his purpose.

*

One does best to experience life at the expense of art, though it is assumed that the opposite grants one some esteem. But to turn one's life into creation lends one the energy to create, here and there in the twilight, those works which far surpass the steadier, more consistent creative hand.

*

Music should be judged harshly where it incites disruption of the breath.

*

Love of the law is like the love of melancholy; once it is loved, the conditions for its existence vanish altogether.

*

Ashrams, western orders of initiative magic and mega-churches all increase in volume in the most soulless of densely populated American cities like Las Vegas and Los Angeles... In places where both commodities and desires are born, spiritualities offer a form of parasitism which balance both. There are simply some sins which are worth the redemption they call for; all the better when discounted at an ungodly price.

*

Buddhism as Fascism. Continental Philosophy of the Idealistic strain paired well with the wisdom of the east. However, they did themselves a great disservice by philosophizing something from the top down which was, fundamentally, experiential from the bottom up. Hegel can be boiled down to the once fashionable and fashionable once again philosopher, Giovanni Gentile, who concluded that individual rights don't exist. Regardless of the truth claim, it was the politicization of the claim which caused harm. Politicization creates illusions in accordance with the degree that it tries to administer truth.

*

One does so much to import laughter into this realm of darkness. One must go to the outside and tell the angels jokes in order to bring laughter down from the heavens.

*

Writers of fragments, unruly, wild and reckless, always follow builders of tight systems. Through an act of daring, rather than mere truth seeking, the fragmentary writer adjusts the vocabulary of his predecessors so that it can exalt his position in the world. A system becomes a laboratory of possibilities, history itself a means of expression.

*

It is, perhaps, the androgyne's destiny alone to be able to look upon society without falling prey to the complaint that it has become either 'too masculine' or 'too feminine.'

DISARM YOUR DESIRE

Shane Eide

Your body is a living ecosystem. Each cell is alive and breeding. Its major parts all depend on one another, but when broken down smaller, the faculties of unity become less explainable. Just what is it that constitutes the unitive principle responsible for your existence? Is it will as Schopenhauer thought? Is it Darwinian selection? Is it simply the need and never ending thirst of these various components? Even clinging to various parts of your body are bacteria which invade and break down what encumbers them, and which can become overactive and wear away at you if not kept in check. The body itself is the site of a war. Your consciousness is something which only happened late in the stages of that careful accretion that is your being.

And to what degree do you control your consciousness? You tell yourself it is time to eat after your organism becomes aware of it. You stave off relieving yourself. You breathe without noticing. Your consciousness would seem to be powerless before these forces, these various conglomerates which all act in and through you.

Where does your desire breed? Does it arise from the depths of your being, or does it prick you like so many barbs? Is it a tool of your destiny or is it your God? Do you worship it from below, ready to sacrifice everything for it? Do you throw all the best of you and your mind into that hollow, hungry cavern, in the hopes that it will one day vomit up the riches of your heart's craving?

Do not think that this craving, this seizeless yearning, is any kind of measurement of value... You empty each value one by one like a wine skin slit at the bottom and drained of its contents, but you save one last one, one precious one for yourself which you hold onto until the end of your life which you claim nothing can touch.

It is an illusion. It is not one thing, but mere wind you continue to dress up in new costumes.

There are those who believe that if only we could all fulfill our desires, we'd all be living in a Fourierian utopia, rushing into the garden at night to pick cherries in between sleep and endless libations. They forget the insatiable night side of desire; the distant, tortured scream of a De Sadean nightmare in which all pleasure is only had at the expense of the Other.

But this is just the secret: your own desire is already at your own expense. The raw need, the sense of want, is always there. It creates being out of thin air—it gives the gift of life to your fears, to your worries, your guilts, hatreds and anxieties. Desire is not the condition of your deprivation, but rather, the wet, swampy realm where your desire grows. The dog, whimpering for scraps of food, conditioned away from running into the wild to catch his own prey—this image can be likened to the desirous.

But can I disparage desire completely? After all, isn't wanting to be rid of desires simply a new desire on top of the others? When most people speak of detachment, they speak of it precisely in these terms—if only they could just find that one numbing agent, that one high or buzz for which they could throw out all the others... They fail to realize just how much more they've affirmed their desires through their 'detachment.' Always pushing them away, covering their eyes and plugging their ears, they think only of their desire. They don't realize just how large the chasm is between possessing desire and being possessed by desire. They have failed to discern this truth: it is not by closing your eyes in the presence of desire that you earn power over it, but rather, by looking straight at it, by becoming more aware of it.

Awareness is enough to cool any desire. Your very gaze will stop its unruly motion. You will be able to discern its parts and realize, ultimately, that your desire is not an end, just as your desire itself is not a cause. Your desire is only a means to more desires, each of them caused, each of them never ending, providing opportunity for more and more fragmentation of your being. You must point your desires in a different direction. Realize that they have no end, that there will never be some final object to possess. Rather, it is reality before you naked and complete, which you must possess. There is no one act, no one gesture or ideology which will grant you access into this holy temple. You will only get there by awareness. An aware action is a pure action. When you are aware, you no longer have desires as ends but as means; that is if you even notice them at all. With a newfound awareness of reality, you will bypass the need, the endless craving of life through an immediate engagement with the demands of reality. An aware person will also create conditions, rather than seek out opportunities to end conditions. In this way, you yourself become a cause, rather than one whose actions are always caused.

Notice this about the desirous... Are they not always trying to qualify their desire with added features which are not natural to it? Constantly trying to possess objects, they try to conquer them forever in the name of successors so that all might enjoy what has been given to them. They mistake the flux, the impermanence of everything, for their own deprivation, and therefore, their own need. They create all kinds of social and political causes for everyone around them. They act under the banner of egalitarianism, of love, but they might as well be waving flags for their inflated egos. They don't live freely, but are trapped in their own small prisons which they spend their whole lives building. In order to perpetuate the conditions which granted them the free gift that was the object of their desires, they turn the possession of that desire into a 'right,' a 'moral good.' In this way, they feel they are escaping the death of everything that is happening each moment. But there is life birthed each moment too! They miss it, mired in a single moment which they have used to define the whole universe.

One must offer up one's engagement with reality as a gift. Your awareness will allow you to pick and enjoy the best fruits of life and scatter the seeds in the most harmonious place. If you have the mind to let the wind carry the seeds, then so be it.

Don't become mired in the memories of unsustained pleasure or pain. Take up your seat in the absolute center of yourself, where you can observe all and arrest those alien conditions before they have a chance to lay claim to your being. Those who would tell you to arm your desire should be given credit for their honesty. But it is by their very desire that they will become owned by another every time.

If you cannot learn to make your spirit free even in a prison cell, you will by no means be granted freedom in the wilderness of chaos. It is not a matter of suppression, but rather, of changing positions. One cannot err where one acts out of love, and love is the marriage of the cause and the condition. The act which fulfills itself leaves no room for need.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MASTURBATION

Shane Eide

My chief criticism of Max Stirner is that, for all his cleverness, he never divined a way to discourage the disciples his work would generate by way of a crude misunderstanding. Bored by the endless pages describing just how steeped in the ego are the spooks believed in by common man, they studied with libidinal intensity those passages which more or less justified the pure inescapability of the ego altogether as something to revel in and make a meaning of one's life. This is certainly the first mistake of many one makes as a reader of Stirner.

One reads him as a young man, not quite seasoned in the world, and finds in the philosophy of egoism a seemingly imperturbable excuse to sow one's wild oats indefinitely. One reads him again when one is older, weathered and in one's good wits, and one sees not a philosophy of freedom, but rather, a philosophy of non-freedom; a brilliant phenomenology of human self-delusion and history's long climb up a mountain whose final destination would see everyone enslaved one and the same by their own neurotic need to create idols. Stirner's solution to the problem he presents is different from Schopenhauer's call to 'deny the will to life' only in degree. It is rather not about what is being denied but what is being affirmed; particularly, the Unique, which many an English translation has seen fit to capitalize to rival words like God or One or the Absolute. This very rivalry is, it would seem, of no vital importance to Stirner, but rather more like an elaborate game into which one can throw one's whole life, or a notion to which one can offer up a sort of passing prayer of thanks for one's propensity to enjoy and give pleasure without scruples.

It is precisely this unscrupulousity which is fundamental to Stirner's method of critique. What does one owe a truth? This would be Stirner's question for today's postmodernists, deconstructionists and materialists. So much of their energy is spent on unmasking truths that they never stop to ask the fundamental question which existentialists were always closer to: even if something or other *were* true, what difference does it make if it does not interest me?

Here we have the fundamental Stirnerian tenant. *Interest* would even rival love as the thing which makes the world go 'round.

Because Stirner is not putting forward a 'philosophy' *per se*, and perhaps because he would appear to be entirely unconcerned with the veracity of his claims as it could be said that one had simply failed to carry out the full application of his thought if one did not believe him, it is often then assumed by his admirers that the ego is interesting in itself. As his admirers each suppose that they mean roughly what Stirner means when he says 'Unique' and 'egoism,' and because they find this idea interesting, they then challenge us, not with any kind of new interesting game, but in our very endurance to withstand their tedious sentiments about themselves. They preach egoism as they would any gospel, and because this gospel can only be understood in terms of one's own ego, they are always talking about themselves. Because this interest-recognizing faculty is so fascinating to them, they've completely stopped being fascinated with anything else beside it. This is not necessarily to their discredit, if that is their true way of life. However, the rest of us suffer in the presence of one who identifies as an 'egoist.' Stirner may well have quite simply meant that all people are egoists whether they realize it or not, at which point he could give one final middle finger to the 'truth' before enjoying his own business without scruples, but he left, in his wake, the worst kind of charlatanism one could ever take pains to stomach.

How many people can truly read the Novatores of this world without feeling that maybe one has wandered into someone else's sock drawer?

I'm much friendlier to the apocryphal intellectual connection between Stirner and Nietzsche: that Nietzsche had been a secret admirer of Stirner's work and that his own work was a means of exorcizing Stirner's insurmountable conclusions in favor of something bigger and bolder than mere carnivalism... A crude and incomplete notion, certainly, but nevertheless, the best disciple is the one who sets himself the task of reaching heights the master dare not tread.

INTERPRETATIONS OF NIHILISM: DESTRUCTIVE VS. ACTIVE

Shane Eide

Despite the stigma in our culture around the word 'nihilism,' there is the argument that nihilism, functionally, can act as a tool to level incoherent precepts about the nature of reality in order to extract from it identifiable, constituent parts. Of course, people can take this too far to where even the constituent parts are done away with altogether, which leads one ultimately to the position that one can act as though no negative consequences to one's actions matter. This, however, is not representative of the wider implications of nihilism as a conceptual project but is rather more in line with Sartre's contention that 'existence precedes essence;' a claim with revolutionary connotations which doesn't say anything about the nature of meaning, in that it relies on a linear conception of the nature of essence that is, from the outset, only grammatically determined with the fulfillment of its self-created object in mind.

Nihilism 1.0—Nothing has an essential nature.

Nihilism 2.0—Nothing has inherent value.

In 1.0, it could never be clear at what point something ever could have an essential nature later, for if something could develop one, it would be a contingent nature by definition. But then we're in a paradox, in that we're dealing with a concept that essentially lacks essence. To essentially lack essence, one is left only with becoming, for which Nietzsche's remedy is to embrace the innocence of this essential lack whose face and sign is becoming itself. One is then a faceless object acting upon that which acts upon it in kind and calling this surrender and communion a willed relationship. For Nietzsche, meaning is a possibility of living and thus subordinate to living, regardless of the actual essential nature of anything occurring within life which might grant it any correlative meaning.

In 2.0, the claim that something has no inherent value presupposes a subject already residing within a correlative framework in which constituent parts create a formula for utility. It assumes the essence of constituent parts but grants that essence can also follow the existence of other objects with respective essential natures.

A confusion between 1.0 and 2.0 creates what Nietzsche called 'destructive nihilism:' people take even

those values born from formulas with constituent essences as meaningless, as the result doesn't have any value in isolation from its formula. This is the thought process behind people who make a complete stop in any argument at the term 'social construct,' which can honestly be applied to almost any transaction in the phenomenal world.

The contradiction enters when people reject both the consequence of a formula of constituent essences but then want to create a desired result by simply endorsing the arrangement of new constituent essences to suit their ends. By what mechanism does one go about selecting constituent essences to achieve value? It is largely done arbitrarily, or rather, by unchecked psychological mechanisms of preference, which were responsible for most values to begin with.

In other words, a preference or a 'desire' determines the condition for the leveling/essence-negating quality. Nihilism hides the power one wants to exert in the name of one's desire, the object of which has been essentialized as having a use value. It goes in an endless circle. By their very nihilism, nihilists dominate, whereas morality would dominate them in the name of some other object. Functionally, we witness here that morality and nihilism, respectively, both act as means to an end. The question is, what is the purpose of saying, in either case, that something does or doesn't possess inherent value or essence? It possesses none to me, the subject, insofar as I stand only as a configurative witness.

To remain the configurative witness frees one from all responsibility, as it atomizes one's role in relation to outside phenomena. This form of destructive nihilism could be equated with solipsism, and is destructive on account of the very fact that it is not a thorough enough form of nihilism.

An active nihilism, in the Nietzschean sense, would be to push one's skepticism even further into the realm of depersonalization. One acknowledges oneself in a hyper-historical (hermeneutic) register which betrays linear personalization, not only in the name of contextualizing and thus measuring the weight of one's own nature, but in the name of determining one's place within nature (a determination which marks the very event of a historical transvaluation).

A crude reduction:

Destructive nihilism exerts power by creating limits.

Active nihilism exerts power by testing limits and exploring possibility.

In an active form of nihilism, power is recognized in its nature as a surplus, the diffusion of which co-terminates whatever essence latched onto the configuration responsible for its manifestation. The revelation of the limit is the point of power's greatest intensity, after which it has no choice but to dissipate, entropy leaving behind only a shadow, a memory of God, as it were. The tragic nature of this philosophy comes with the instruction to forget—which is in keeping with the death of a moral god, so that a new god, which represents a new value just as the old represented an outworn value, can be heroically affirmed.

Nietzsche's ultimate project to transvaluate all values, along with his extreme depersonalization, can be seen as a counter-measure against the increased atomizing tendency one finds in systems of value (whether moral or economic) today. Atomization favors quantity over quality; disparate parts can be arranged to fit the basest use for a task, mitigating distinction where it occurs (sin), but little to offer in terms of acquiring abundance. The quest for abundance is ultimately the goal of an active nihilism: limits are tested, the unknown is made known, weaknesses are exposed and, ultimately, one is hardened toward degenerative elements in life (resultant features of atomization which die after having outworn their short-lived use). Active nihilism then becomes the ultimate awareness of one's place; the ability to command and the ability to obey, both experienced in one domain of subjectivity.

Nietzsche is a thinker whose reputation often overreaches his actual work. Often associated with extreme individualism, it would be more accurate to say that Nietzsche's work is ultimately a philosophy of self-cultivation; a philosophy whose major transvaluation lies precisely in the fact that it depends on an intense degree of awareness, both of oneself and of the scale in which one can even be identified, and where one stands within that scale. Only in consideration of such a scale can one determine just to what degree one is 'free' or of this type or that type of person. To say that Nietzsche's work is hierarchical is not a mere statement about his elitism. It speaks to the very meaning of a Nietzschean freedom which is measured in every way differently from any moral measurement of freedom we could consider today under atomizing thought-structures. His sense of hierarchy is the

very space in which truth can come to be understood, not as a law, but as a space of intensity, of what it is possible to be, as becoming has turned into being.

The warring of various definitions of nihilism and different nihilistic projects is ultimately a war of power and its allocation. It ultimately becomes a matter of using power in such a way that it destroys or in such a way that it creates. Both destruction and creation are their own types of squandering in the universal economy marked by the will to power.

THOUGHTS ON FREEDOM

Shane Eide

1

Whether they are selling socks or toad meat, marketers are no strangers to the abstract concepts that humans want most but which cannot be sold. They know that what most humans want is freedom—but especially in America where happiness is mistaken for it.

But what does freedom mean in a world of meaningless words? Or is that just it? Is freedom merely a ‘construct?’ A ‘fiction?’ No, in western society, freedom is the God-given negation of all other destructive fictions. Perhaps it would be simpler to drop the word ‘destructive’ and let ‘fiction’ stand on its own, since it is all the same to young people today. One will hear it spoken on campuses, inside of coffee houses, on picket lines and inside living rooms that this or that idea, whether ‘love,’ ‘justice,’ ‘truth,’ ‘race’ or ‘nation,’ are all ‘human constructs.’ What was once considered a subversive discourse in western culture has now become part of the common rhetoric.

This may have profound political relevance to the masses in different phases of history and is perhaps necessary so that this or that kingdom might be overthrown to make room for a different one. But on the other hand, this rupture in all value is responsible precisely for the dualistic reality it seeks to expose. If conventions are concepts and conventions are what we are slave to, then freedom becomes a mere escape from all concepts. If each concept is considered equally suspect as the next, when brought back into society to be handled, the masses mistake this for meaning that all concepts are of the same quality. This is the true spirit of democracy. Democracy does not subsist on value but merely survives in the bad faith that fairness means freedom. It makes things confusing enough that people think ‘fairness’ means ‘equal portion.’

2

In a society where the contemporary realm of concepts have been revealed to be mere fictions and when this revelation produces exalted states of liberation, as it happened with the Enlightenment, the whole nature of this exit from the world of contemporary concepts mimics a redemptive, religious path. Man of the Enlightenment fought through his fictions and arrived on a plane whose

empty surface appeared to be his ultimate freedom. Since sovereign entities and stand-ins for sovereigns were no longer sufficient and undesired when proven so, it would be necessary for this man of the Enlightenment to praise the very same vehicles by which he arrived on this plane—those being ‘Reason,’ ‘Rationality,’ and ‘Progress.’ But instead of letting these vehicles recede into his being as mere faculties of his intellect and using them to appropriate all new features of reality, they became ends in and of themselves to continue arriving at the same exact plane—they became new transcendent concepts, unquestionable though quite unrepresentative of most minds.

3

It matters little what men of contemporary letters, contemporary values or pop-discourse choose to confront on their battlefield. The very way in which today’s leading academicians, journalists and cultural critics go about choosing ideological enemies makes their battles of less importance than they already were when they’d first attacked them. For example, listen to those polemicists against religion who fall for the same Manichean heresy that Christians couldn’t resist for two millennia—that there is an all-consuming evil force at equal variance with good, though in this case this evil goes by the very name of ‘religion,’ which takes many forms and which is responsible for all the misfortune in the world. Not only do such polemicists fail to comprehend that the conditions which were responsible for this particular enemy predate the enemy itself and have and will exist in different forms, but they fail to recognize that their attempts to place abstract concepts like morality into the realm of objectivity are for nothing if not for helping these said conditions remain. To them, God is not dead—he’s merely an employee they fired from their company. They already gave his cubicle to someone else.

4

The fact of the matter is that many people would become ideological refugees if it were not for freedom. So long as freedom is always something that exists behind, over and underneath the structures of modern society, it can always remain far off, to be pushed back and repressed so that people can go on living their lives without working toward it.

In more blatantly secular vocabularies, ‘truth’ is prioritized above ‘freedom.’ In both cases, the end result is much the same. Both cases commit this error—that both ‘freedom’ and ‘truth’ become solely eschatological. Is it not possible for man to have his one truth for his one question and his one freedom from his one chain?

5

So what happens when marketers get a hold of freedom? We end up with slogans like, ‘Have it your way.’ ‘Independent’ becomes a means of describing a music style where it was once a means of describing its production. In a capitalist society, one is free to purchase a combination of products which will ensure individuality. Individuality, in the western world, is largely a matter of permutation in taste. It has little to do with cultivating an ontological rupture in one’s perception and everything to do with how one might stand out while moving in the same direction as the crowd.

6

Since the masses have been trained to think of reality in terms of dualism, any nihilistic devaluation of value will lapse into dualism as well. For instance, it is not good enough for them that there is no ‘good’ or ‘evil,’ because they presuppose that a lack of good in the world is, in essence, a great evil. What they perceive to be ‘reality’ is something to escape, thus the need for a utopia, which places good and evil not in the realm of action or in states of being, but between two phases of history; one pre-utopia and one post-utopia. The idea of revolution becomes no better than the dualisms that creep into the major world faiths.

7

One can see them from far off; the unrelaxed manner in which people speak of their own individuality. One can see them for what they are: slaves to a whole series of different conventions for which they have not allowed any formal place in their lives. They are victims of precisely the very conventions they despised in name, and because they didn’t take the time to understand them, were swallowed up in them.

8

How many small freedoms are traded for the great coming freedom of revolution? How many truths are traded in the name of the great tribunal which shall see the one truth come to pass?

SUICIDE AND RHETORIC

Shane Eide

Carlo Michelstaedter probably didn't study the Buddhist texts. Had he have done so, he might have pulled a Schopenhauer and extracted some of their content to help his own case. Where the Buddha taught one to not even desire one's own extinction, Michelstaedter's philosophy, as outlined in *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, redresses the 'pure act' of Aristotle. All moments die and fall out from underneath us and tomorrow, also, is death. To be self-persuaded is to die. Michelstaedter took himself too literally and killed himself after writing the very book he claimed had been written countless times before in different forms. Were he to take the Buddha's advice he might have resolved himself to create a better pure act. The problem is that by resolving to kill himself, if we are to look at it strictly philosophically, which is really the only way we can, he treated the monadic pure act the same way he treated the people-as-objects rhetoric requires for self-affirmation. He required actions to be so pure that he could die happy after completing them. If he were to take his own thought further, perhaps he would have canceled his own need to perform such a purified act and been persuaded, quite simply, of that which is left even when the persuaded self is satisfied. In the end, Michelstaedter sought external refuge that he could internalize, thus concluding the value of his own life.

Even further than the path of the Buddha is the path of Lao Tzu, who suggested that one does best to 'act without acting,' and likewise, to 'not act while acting,' suggesting both the inner stillness which one can assume even while in the midst of activity and likewise the subtle actions which occur unseen but which manifest outwardly. The pure act in this case then becomes the one which is animated precisely by the space of possibility (or emptiness where, paradoxically, limitless possibility can occur).

The ancient mysteries granted options to those who were patient. Michelstaedter wasn't patient enough for his own self-persuasion. In his system, it must occur now because tomorrow is dead. To oppose to this an opposite example, perhaps, he could have gone the way of E.M. Cioran who admitted on more than one occasion that he'd convinced himself and others not to commit suicide on the grounds that the option is always available to one later on,

so why not just keep holding out to see what happens? This sort of being toward death, as Heidegger called it, then becomes an active feature of life which may lead to the pure act in an inverted, cumbersome form.

Michelstaedter's work offers us an exciting example of what is possible in the realm of philosophical self-determination, while his life offers us a warning as to what lies at the end of the road when one reifies being to the extreme that it becomes an object to be possessed.

Michelstaedter turned persuasion into rhetoric rather than rhetoric into persuasion, which is the whole subtle paradox of his existential formula.

THE DEEPEST STATE

Shane Eide

One would do best to apply Occam's Razor to the idea of conspiracy and the deep state. But in doing so, one should keep in mind that complexity is often very simple and simplicity is, paradoxically, quite complex. What do all the various cabals, cartels, secret societies, gangs, corporations, mobs, foundations, banks and cabinets have as their ultimate goal if they are not what they seem? To the degree that they are working counter to the interests of the people they claim to serve, how much of their folly and falsehood is actually discernable?

The answer may be answered, first, with another question. What lies behind motivation itself? Which of our actions can be explained by us and which of them reach beyond our own understanding? If one wants to know what lies at the top of the pyramid, so to speak, one need not search much further than whatever mechanism allows so many disparate sovereignties to have any kind of interface. Whether it is divine right of kings, a regal imprint hidden in the shadows or a synarchy of simple, common elite interest, one thing is being appealed to in each case, and perhaps only one thing at once. But behind each mind and behind the volition of each mind, there are passions and inclinations guided entirely by a mind of the nocturne; a quiet space which is formed and informed by impersonal movement itself. The deepest state of all lives within us. To the degree that any hidden state could be more dangerous than another is the degree to which we do not keep watch over the darkest hour of our own souls. The state within is deeper than any other, and the closer we get to unpeeling its layers, the less vulnerable we are to the layer of our world which would hope to enslave us.

There has only ever been one real enemy and such has been the point of all true spiritual wisdom since time immemorial. The enemy is within.

COMMUNITY OF THE ASOCIAL

Shane Eide

We carry out our charity in contempt. The utter ubiquity of the human project has scaled each of us down to a mere shaving of a block of which we have fallen too far into the cracks to see the whole. We smile with reserve, offer courtesy laughs, and fail at each turn to offer one another the most honest advice we can: that one best strive to be interesting to us, for anything less would be a full assault on the human spirit.

We conscious shadows would not hesitate to cancel the path of our journey toward that point in the road and that perfect time of day when we would disappear into our own source, if only we had some idea of just how a shadow can take comfort in the night. Then, we would leave our hosts behind and let the sun fold over the hills, content to watch only the remnants of its splendor... To be the sun! To be as free and as powerful as that element; so powerful, in fact, that the fruits of its benevolence survive the night. The tree of knowledge was nothing compared to the first night in all of existence, in which that which survived the sun's absence was witnessed like a sleeping bride the morning after her wedding night, frosted faintly by that gossamer of ghostly vapors which haunt the dawn and bless all those remnants of the sun's over-abundance. We conscious shadows, like this bride, await the night more than this dawn. It is in the night that our sense of wonder is satiated, when we become what we are, wedded to our other. As for the morning, it is quite impossible to tell if it is the victory of time over us or we over time.

Is there not something perverse in our wholesale acceptance of this category, 'humanity?' No matter how much we clench our teeth through forced smiles, the death grimace tautens the boundaries of our expressions, revealing itself as the only real destiny we could all ever have in common. To accept humanity is to stop looking for a friend. The friend of Man is no friend to anyone and has no love for an 'other,' no matter which 'other' it is... The human scale robbed us of something when it was first distinguished. It was always supposed at one time that each people of the earth, according to their respective myths, were in fact *the* people, and the nature of that mechanism which constituted this unilateral distinction was different in each case. No matter how much trepidation we're sure to

invest into our historical sentiments, we are as idiots in a village of doll houses in our condescending treatment of history—we the masters of all perception, dealing the violence of history's traces with a kindness it will never reciprocate. No, no people quite knew what was being said when they translated another people's word for 'people' into their own language, just as it is never quite certain just what the other could possibly mean by the words 'I' and 'myself.' Our very means of communicating is riddled with the being we must give away in order to recognize others.

If I am not to give life to my others, then who are they, these beacons of individuality? These lone eagles of indiscretion? What intercourse is there to be had with them who are as convinced of their minds as I am of mine? Only through extremes, the absolute limits of extroversion do we become lost in the other. To turn everything inward is not so extraordinary a feat, regardless of what we are always being told by mystics about the perfection of infancy. No, the truth is the future—the time-granted possibility required to empty oneself, to expel from oneself that hidden potentiality, that germ of creativity that is communication; accelerated appropriation, growth and accumulation taking on its own life in such a manner that it appears to be before the eyes... This is, after all, the first instance of a recognition of a God who is an *other*.

We will go home to our flats and cottages and quiet country homes, we wakeful ones of the night. We will stir restless in hope for the morning for which we can forsake our positions as watchers of the night's melancholy. We wait for a friend brave enough to be defeated by the night, only to lift our heads with an all new sunrise, retiring to our beds with the realization in our breast that all have merely gone on surviving these nights over and over in the loftiest solitudes.