



**Journal of  
Humanistic  
Psychiatry**

Summer 2020/Volume 8 Issue 3  
ISSN: 2325-9485

# The Universe



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# Editor's Note

## The Universe

For millennia, we have enjoyed the contemplation of the sky at night. The stars and the planets have been subject of symbolism and mystical thinking in all civilizations. Astronomical events like shooting stars, comets and the movement of the planets have been interpreted politically or religiously throughout history. For instance, Mars was the god of war due to its reddish color. Ancient romans had little idea of the high iron content of the planet. Also in roman times, Octavius Augustus saw a seven day comet in July 44 BC. This comet, known as Caesar's comet was interpreted by Augustus as the soul of his uncle Julius Caesar's entering the Olympus as a god. As part of his propaganda he minted currency with the comet and built a temple dedicated to the divinity of Caesar. 1st century Jews believed that planets were closer to the Earth as compared to the stars. Thus, they interpreted the movement of the planets as the negative influence from our corrupt world. The stars in contrast, were far away from the world's negative impact and would stay still. In the early Middle Ages, the normans interpreted the Halley comet as a sign that Harold should not have taken possession of the crown of England. The Halley comet laid the foundation for the conquering of England by the normans.

Over the last three centuries we have gained more and more understanding of the universe physics. In the 1924, astronomer Edwin Hubble described Andromeda. At that time we confirmed that there were other galaxies in the Universe. Over the last few decades we have become aware of millions of galaxies, black and wormholes, and the observable universe. We still lack the tools to study the non observable universe, the part that travels faster than speed of light. Theoretically we have developed models to explain the dynamics of the Universe, the dark matter and the dark energy might explain the observed current expansion of the universe. The Big Bang is the most accepted model to explain the origin of the universe. However, we still lack consensus about the end of the universe. The Big Rip theory hypothesizes a universe that

continues to fall apart to the point that objects, atoms, subatomic particles and even space and time will torn apart.

Talking about the universe is talking about the existence. Now we know that time is relative, we can travel to the future but we can't travel to the past. This finding could be related to the fact that the universe is expanding. As humans it is difficult and counterintuitive to think about the relativity of time.

No matter how much knowledge we have about cosmology, contemplating the universe is always worth it. The contemplation of the universe allows us to understand how insignificant we are. That way we may free ourselves from the neurosis of our daily living and get closer to the understanding of the bigger picture. Contemplating the universe will allow us to separate ourselves from the system we have created and look at it from the distance. As such we may become more free, independent and live with more authenticity.

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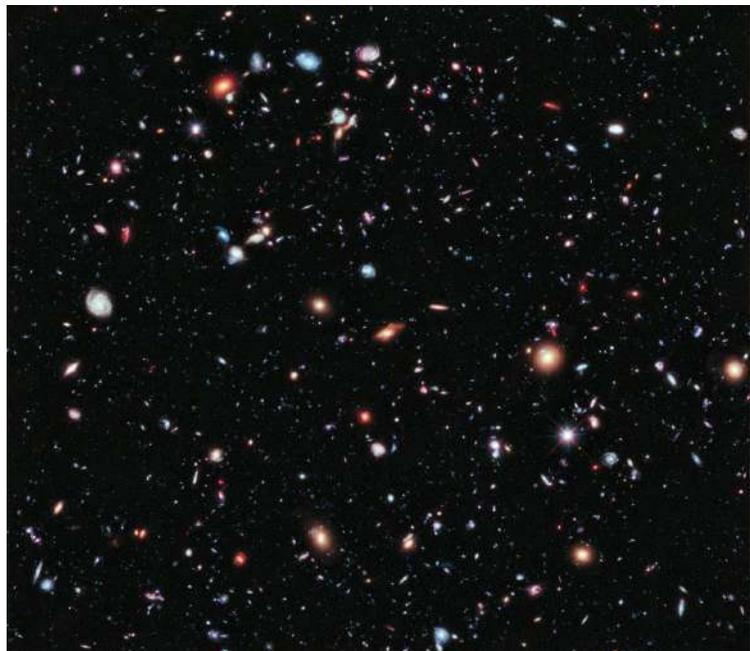
# Icons of Psychiatry

## The Farthest Area Explored by Homo Sapiens

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It took 10 years to collect data for this image. The Hubble telescope identified a patch that allowed for data collection from light coming from very far away. With a technique called extreme deep field (XDF), we have been able to come with the farthest ever view of the Universe. If our universe is 13,7 billions old, this image collects information from light 13,2 billion years the speed of light. At that time



our universe was very young, only half a billion years old. This is the farthest view of the universe in space and time. The image shows thousands of galaxies. Some of them are colliding. Through this picture we now have more understanding of the origins of the existence. We, as Homo sapiens have the executive function and intellectual skills to explore and understand. Moreover, we have curiosity and will to go and see what is happening on the other side and far beyond. This image is the result of our natural exploration instinct.

# Articles

## An Experience of Oneness

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Our daily lives mostly revolve around us moving from one task to the next, from household chores, work, and spending time with our loved ones, leaving us physically drained. Going through the same motions daily for weeks, months, and even years further puts a toll on us mentally. This is even more so in recent times where people do not have a solid support system.

I had attended a three-day “mindful meditation” workshop with no idea what I was signing up for. It was promoted as a “Happiness Program” designed to increase well-being, clarity, and focus. Meditation is a mind and body practice that has long been used to induce relaxation, and overall health and well-being. Current research into this spiritual practice suggests that it can improve focus, memory, processing information, and even reverse aging.<sup>1</sup> I had read about the positive effects of meditation and yoga but had never tried them out for myself.

We human beings are creatures who long for connection. That longing extends to our fellow man and even the universe. Have you ever walked down to the beach to watch the sunset? At that moment, as you watch the daylight dim with the sand beneath your feet, you feel your worries slipping away. It feels that life is good. Many attribute this to “being in the moment”, but it is actually a glimpse of what it is like to connect with something larger than oneself.

This course was incredibly enlightening for me. Never had I experienced anything like this before. One particular moment stands out above all else, and that was the *Web of life*

*meditation* portion. This aims to increase the feeling of connection to oneself, friends, family, other living beings, our world, and the cosmos.

The section began with performing some exercises aimed to help increase deep breathing. Once this warm-up was done, with eyes closed, the class began to inhale and exhale normally while focusing on each breath. Slowly, the instructor guided everyone to expand their awareness outward. Each expansion focused on how we were not alone and surrounded by other beings, small or large. There was a focus on how we do not live in a vacuum but are interconnected. Everything is made of energy, just the composition is different. An effort was being made to be consciously aware of that. We were instructed to let the thoughts flow, whether positive or negative, and use our breathing as the means to connect with something larger. We were a component of this living universe and wished well for everything.

I remember being shaken after this experience and having this newfound clarity. I felt it made me more empathic with everything around me. As Albert Einstein accurately put it, “*A human being is part of the whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.*”<sup>2</sup>

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# Forever

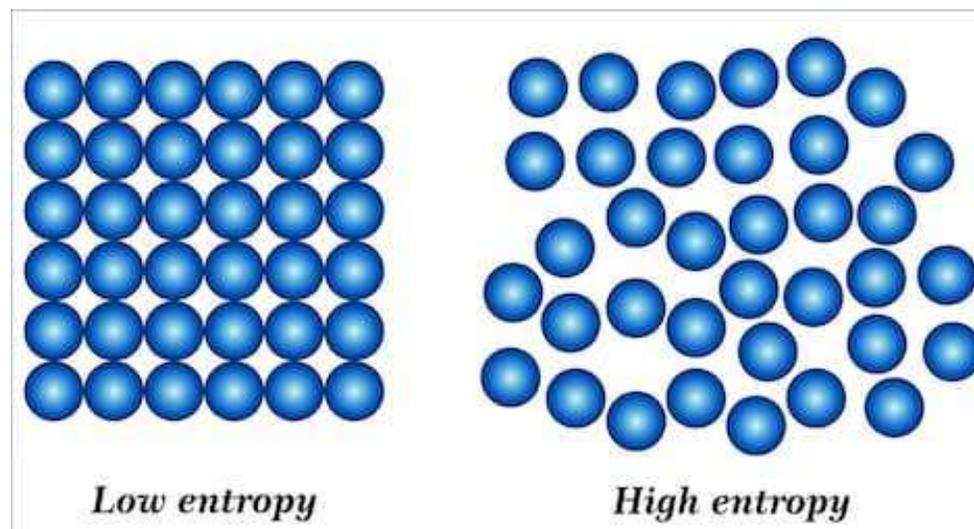
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'The law that entropy always increases, holds I think, the supreme position among the laws of Nature... (Hence) if your theory is found to be against the second law of thermodynamics I can give you no hope; there is nothing for it but to collapse in deepest humiliation.'

Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World* (1927)

The November 1956 issue of *Science Fiction Quarterly* published a short story by Isaac Asimov called 'The Last Question'\*. The question asked of the Multivac computer was: 'How can the net amount of entropy of the universe be massively decreased?' The 'last question' was asked seven times, representing seven stages of Human evolution (maybe replaying the seven days of Biblical Genesis). At each stage the complexity and sophistication of the computer was also increased, .until both man and computer were without physical structure and just 'spirit



) The question could be rephrased: 'Can the second law of thermodynamics (entropy of the universe, in this story) be reversed?' Asked differently again: How is life sustained, indeed created, if disorder is the order of the day?

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Asimov's idea that man and machine can evolve into spirit and then fuse into each other provides an interesting framework by which to explore Entropy and Organization of Life.

The idea of humanity fusing into one psycho-social body is a theme reflected many times in human history: mythology (Tower of Babel), philosophy (Communism) and social movements (Hippies).

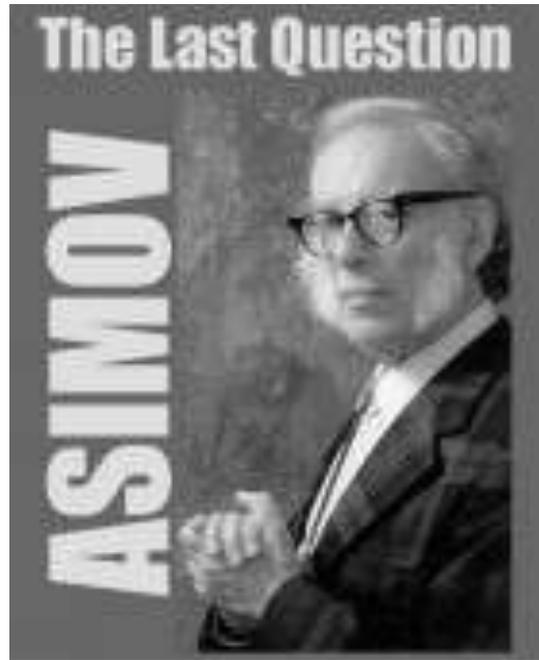
Asimov's idea of melding Maker and Man – the Creator and the Created - is quite different, although it also contains the idea of Man losing his individuality. In our present form of evolution I think it is an offensive idea.

Nevertheless there must be something in our psycho-genetic makeup that allows this urge to exist and for it to be repeated so often in human history. Maybe I should not be naïve nor dogmatic, and acknowledge that the future might include a fusion of Mans' consciousness of sorts – but not today.

Asimov's is a pantheistic idea. Pantheism is the view that everything is part of an all-encompassing, transcendent god. Some hold that pantheism is a non-religious philosophical position. To them, pantheism is the view that the Universe (in the sense of the totality of all existence) and God are identical (implying that God is not uniquely extant). In this system everything is relative and self-referential – including values and ethics. There is no objective yardstick by which to judge good and evil – there is no Judge.

Asimov does acknowledge there was a Beginning to the Universe. It was only in 1965 (nine years after Asimov's story) that two Bell Lab scientists, Arno Penzias and Robert Woodrow

Wilson, discovered cosmic microwave background radiation, the remnant and confirmation of the Big Bang.



Isaak Yudovich Ozimov, a.k.a. Isaac Asimov was born in Russia in 1920 and immigrated to America aged three. Asimov, a professor of biochemistry was best known for his works in science fiction. He was an avowed atheist. But even so, at least in this story, he was forced through logic to acknowledge that some life force in some form exists to reverse entropy, and to create life.

The organization of life from atoms to cells to organs that sustain our bodies is anti-entropy. This is what we call the miracle of life. Is this miracle a breach of the second law of thermodynamics?

Yet day-to-day we do not breach the Law and we are not perpetual motion machine. We have to add energy to our system to stop us deteriorating into a (too early) entropic death.

Everything on earth breaks down if we do not put energy into it to sustain it - from a building to a field of corn to the human body. All will revert back to a lower form of organization. Decay is entropy, order is life.

Asimov explores these ideas and in the end falls back to a traditional and indeed logical solution. Upon finding an answer, the universe begins over, knowing that everything will end once again, in the distant future, and then repeat the cycle. To Asimov, this is the cycle of existence, the explosive beginning, and the reflective end.

To merge the Creator with the Created is an insufferable paradox however. Nevertheless all metaphors are imperfect – but as a work of art, 'The Last Question' fires the imagination in a creative way that, as it were, negates entropy.



This is why we don't teach our children about entropy until much later...

\* 'The Last Question' (9 pages) is freely available as PDF download.

# Cinema and Psychiatry

## Certainty And Doubt:

### A Personal Journey With Martin Scorsese

Alejandro Pérez<sup>1</sup>, María Batalla-Monedero<sup>2</sup>, Ignacio Banuls<sup>1</sup>.

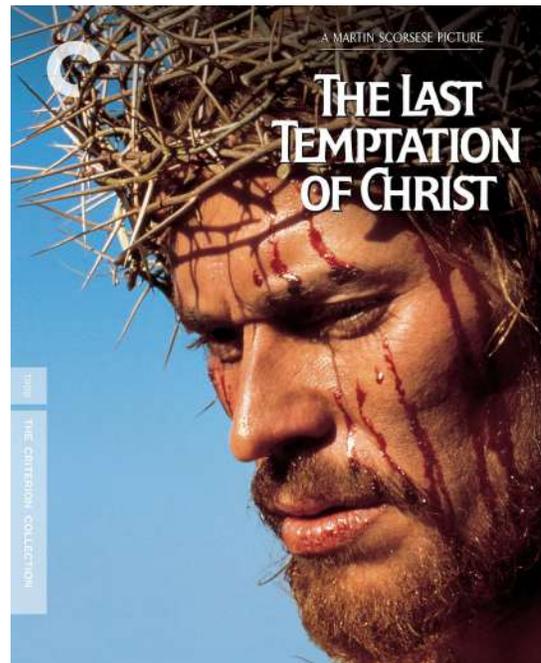
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If watched in 2020, Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ" (1988) feels perhaps a bit more uncomfortable because of its "psychiatric" implications rather than because of the (back in the day) controversial sex scenes.

Being true that each spectator incorporates to any movie his personal perspective (the Talmud says: we don't see things as they are, but as we are), what stands out from a psychologizing point of view



in this film is what follows: the story of a subject who is subdued to a pre-delusional state (as described magnificently by Moreau de Tours, Angel Hesnard and Clérambault) but finally stabilizes himself through the narrative of the Messiah.

The story of the pre-delusional state is harder to track than the conceptualization of the idea of delusion<sup>1</sup>, which is, by its own merits, also quite complicated. The general idea that helps this interpretation of the movie is: the delusion (understood by taking into account the fixation of the belief, not its content) arises from a primordial issue, which is related to the disintegration of the self.

That “zero moment” of the psychotic process is characterized by an overproduction of disorganized endogenous experiences. This was better described by Clérambault, who proposed that psychosis was a structure, and delusion was a “suprastructure”. Following this reasoning, this “primordial issue” allows a delusion to happen in the patient (this delusion must be understood as a secondary process, or an intellectual byproduct). Then, the narrative that the person creates around the disintegration of the self is a secondary problem.

Clérambault describes these phenomena of the “early stage” of a psychosis with a pleiad of names and descriptions (they all fall into the category of Mental Automatism). These are subtle clues that herald the true gross psychotic symptoms we see in practice. The subject then, becomes a helpless receiver of these new experiences that, although without meaning, they inevitably concern him. In this moment, the subject is ready to display his abilities in trying to build a delusion that sustains the whole experience<sup>2</sup>. The specific content of the delusion then, must be only relevant to the biography of the subject, or related to that particular cultural-social

moment. When the delusion has crystallized, the bizarre and disturbing (xenopathic) experiences are long gone.

That is what we can see if we follow Martin Scorsese's tale: During the first hour of the film we find a tormented Jesus, who hears voices while presenting a facial expression of anguish and perplexity that never leaves. He turns around when he is walking and asks who is out there. He experiences kinesthetic phenomena and intrusion thoughts. That who speaks is God but, what does he want?

When he comes back from the desert, however, he is a new man: no trace of suffering in his face, he has the semblance of a Messiah. He knows the truth. God is no longer speaking, words are unnecessary. Christ now knows his mission in this world, his relationship with a God that he no longer hears has changed. He has reached some agreement with his voices, and he is ready to preach the Word and perform miracles. There is no torment, no anguish, his self does not decompose or divide. He understands he is the son of God.

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# Interstellar

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What I find most interesting about Interstellar is the focus. This is the movie that seems enormous in scale, one that exists in different planets, travels across our solar system, and goes into the



fifth dimension. But despite these expansive ideas being featured in the movie, these ideas take a back seat to explore much simpler and grounded ones about humanity. “Who we are”, “where are we going” and “why we matter”– it’s about flaws as a specie, but also what makes us unique. Part of why Christopher Nolan is heralded with so much respect as a storyteller is how he masks a simple question with a much bigger concept in execution. This movie speaks wonders about the human condition, and what people will do no matter what type of situation they are in.

The movie illustrates several different mindsets that human beings possibly possess. The first mindset that we were introduced to was when Cooper captures a drone and explains how it isn’t serving a purpose but can be used for the best of humanity; to help with farm production,

but Murphy doesn't agree. Her rationale was - "the drone wasn't hurting anybody, so why should we do something that hurts it". Murphy's mindset is shown to be passive that doesn't want to pester anyone and expects the same in return. Moving on, we see another kind of mindset, which was portrayed by the school principal during the parent-teacher conference. This mindset is the one that accepts fate. Cooper wants his son Tom to go to college but the principal bluntly dismisses that and says Tom should be a farmer. Although this mindset may be negative, it's realistic. This is the mindset Cooper fights against in the movie, as he doesn't want to accept his lonely position in the universe; he decides to do something about it.

The Yankees game itself postulates more about humanity as a whole, as opposed to a particular mindset. The world that we are introduced to is a shadow of the one that we used to live. Society has collapsed, yet the small town is enjoying America's favorite pastime. This ultimately proclaims that we as humans are stubborn; we will let nothing get in our way. Watching the Yankees game is not the most practical thing to do, but it's part of what makes us human.

The final ethos that we were introduced to on earth is through Cooper. Right before he leaves, he faces a choice; to both stay on earth with his family and continue his monotonous life, or leave them behind to make the world a better place. This is about being selfish or selfless; about choosing to put others in front of you or put yourself first. He prioritizes others in front of him and throughout most of the film, we must question if that was the right decision, because it looks like he could have failed. This is what makes Cooper unique, as we will soon come to learn when other characters are in a similar situation, most are going to choose differently.

This movie did a lot to stay on track with science, and even the best astrophysicists and scientists claim that a lot of its notions align with reality. However, controversially enough, *Interstellar* gives the concept of 'love' a bigger meaning than a series of chemical reactions and neurochemical processes. It conceptualizes love as something that can bend reality and change the course of a metaphysical world.

Lastly, when we are introduced to Dr. Mann, we are also introduced to yet another mindset. This one is the exact counterpart of Cooper's, as Mann wants to jeopardize the mission of saving humanity only to save himself and reunite with others on earth. He is the embodiment of selfishness, and his name 'Mann' clearly has some significance. Dr. Mann is the perfect rendition of the flaws in humanity; eager to jump in headfirst, but when deemed helpless, he just pulls others down to get himself out and safe.

Interstellar is one of those sui generis movies with an outer shell that seems foreign; that has never been done before in film, but when you break it open, it has a familiar look at humanity. It perceives love as a driving force, something that connects the universe and human race, or as Dr. Brand would say – **“Love is the one thing that transcends time and space”**.

# Universal Studios: Fahrenheit 451, A Movie

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## Epigraph

'That was only a prelude: where they burn books, they will in the end also burn people.'

Heinrich Heine (1797-1856)

## Book burning

This memorial plaque at Bebelplatz in Berlin, commemorates Nazi book burning. The quote in German is from Heine's play, *Almansor* (1820). Our Epigraph is a translation.



What is the relation between books and people?

Humans create ideas. Books are ideas. Therefore humans are books. When you burn books, you are already symbolically burning people. However Heine meant literally – which is exactly what happened in Germany 100 years later.

## **Universal Studios**

In 1909 Carl Laemmle a German immigrant to America opened the International Motion Picture Company. Later, as ambitions grew, it was renamed The Universal Film Manufacturing Company.

Universal Studios have created and/or distributed many fine movies including Sophie's Choice, Back to the Future, The Blues Brothers, The Sting, and Fahrenheit 451.

## **The 1966 Truffaut film, Fahrenheit 451**



Truffaut's film 'Fahrenheit 451' is based on a 1953 novel by American author Ray Bradbury. 'Fahrenheit 451' (233 centigrade), refers to the auto-ignition point of book-paper — the

temperature at which book-paper will catch fire without being exposed to a naked flame. The novel describes a totalitarian society which outlaws books and which 'firemen' burn. Guy Montag, the hero, is a fireman who becomes disillusioned with government control. He rebels and joins a commune whose aim is to preserve books. The symbol or talisman of the Firemen is a Salamander.



A 16th-century image of a salamander and fire.

Myths abound that salamanders are born in fire. This connection probably originates from salamanders hibernating in rotting logs. When wood was brought indoors and put on the fire, the creatures 'mysteriously' appeared from the flames.

**Clarisse McClellan** is a young neighbour and notices Montag on the train. She senses that he is unhappy and dissatisfied. She seduces him mind and soul, with cunning questions designed to plant doubt in his already unsettled mind. Is it true that firemen once put out fires, and did not make them? Why do you burn books? Montag answers: 'It is my job. For me kerosene is like perfume'. Books make people unhappy and antisocial, he parrots.

Her questioning made him ask questions, which started his downfall.

**Mildred**, Montag's wife, pushes questions away with drugs – uppers and downers – and State-sponsored interactive TV called the 'family on the wall with 'cousins everywhere'.

Julie Christie acted both women – the wife, Mildred, and the rebellious neighbour, Clarisse. An interesting nuance. Christie is an intense, skilled actress and she was convincing as two quite different people.

**John Beatty**, the Captain of the Fire Brigade summed up the technique of how to control a population: 'Cram them full of non-combustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely 'brilliant' with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies melancholy.'

Curiously the Captain knew all the books. Had he 'come over' to the authorities from the cold, or was he part of the unequal elite typical of totalitarian societies?

### **Montag's epiphany**

Montag knew he was unfulfilled in his work and unhappy in marriage. His wife was more interested in the 'family on the wall'. The final straw for him was that she did not remember where they had met.

Montag's break with the Establishment came to the fore at his wife's afternoon tea party with her girlfriends. Montag challenges their inanity and fear of emotion. One lady's husband was away at war but society forbade her to use the word 'war' in order to avoid her fear of death.\*

Montag cries to them in defence of books: 'behind each book is a man - that is what interests me'. When Montag started reading a book one of the women burst into tears: 'I had forgotten about all those feelings'.

They fled as he read.

Oskar Werner, who portrayed Montag, appeared wooden. To me he did not convey with sufficient angst the hollowness, uncertainty and later passion of purpose. The transformation was carried by the plot more than the craft of the actor.

### **Montag's escape**

Clarisse had escaped the Firemen but returned to warn Montag and explain to him about the Book People living in a commune in the forest. Each person commits to memory a book and his/her personal name is that of the book.

Finally Montag's wife, Mildred, informs on her husband. The Firemen raid their home and force Montag to burn all his books. But first he symbolically burnt the marital bed, then the 'family on the wall' screen and finally Montag killed the Captain.

Montag escaped with his book to the Book People.

### **Ray Bradbury**

Bradbury an American Author (1920-2012) wrote science-fiction which often critiqued culture and society. 'People ask me to predict the Future, when all I want to do is prevent it.'

He wrote 'Fahrenheit 451' in UCLA's Powell Library, in a study room with typewriters for rent. It cost Bradbury \$9.80, given the library's typewriter-rental fees of ten cents per half-hour.

In a 1994 interview, Bradbury thought that 'Fahrenheit 451' was as relevant as ever: 'it works even better because we have political correctness now. Political correctness is the real enemy these days. The black groups want to control our thinking and you can't say certain things. The homosexual groups don't want you to criticize them. It's thought control and freedom of speech control.'

Bradbury maintained that 'Fahrenheit 451' describes the alienation of people and the dangers of an illiterate or uncultured society infatuated with mass media. How he would have decried the smart-phone and social media of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Analysis**

Several themes stand out.

Primarily it is of the state controlling the individual. When 'Fahrenheit 451' was written (1953) McCarthyism was rearing its head in America and totalitarian states like the USSR and China were in their ascendancy.

Bradbury showed how the State can rule the individual: ban books, control the media, encourage citizens to inform on one another, and use medications to avoid existential questions and emotional pain. Ernest Becker in *Denial of Death* (1973) observed: 'Modern man is drinking and drugging himself out of awareness, or he spends his time shopping which is the same thing.'

In 2020 I regret that we no longer buy at the local butcher or greengrocer, where sage advice and human contact were also traded – maybe not with supermarket efficiency, but with homely psycho-social therapy.

In the film in a scene near the end, the Firemen arrive at Clarisse's house to burn the books. Her aunt refuses to leave. The Firemen spray kerosene on the pile of books at her feet. The Chief counts down – she refuses to leave, and self-immolates in preference to leaving her books. As the books burn the camera focuses on a book of Dali's paintings with pages flicking slowly as they burnt so we could see the pictures – why? Surely it is that surrealism has an element of absurdity which is a well-spring of existential questions – and the utter freedom and individuality of Dali's creativity which totalitarian regimes snuff out.

'Fahrenheit 451' has similarities to George Orwell's '1984' (1949) and Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World' (1932). No one suggests plagiarism. Rather, by standing on shoulders of

giants Bradbury was able to create a vehicle for a wonderful fresh idea that cut to the heart of man's nature.

Today there are many societies that discourage books. The books are 'off-limits' to the masses. The leaders limit information and select only 'suitable' ideas. Social engineering then encourages self-censorship.

In the Middle-East (where we are domicile) the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups and the wider Arab nation limit exposure to the media. Books are unofficially banned or un-translated for moral and social reasons. Religious texts are to be preferred.

## **Free Speech**

'Freedom of expression is the matrix, the indispensable condition, of nearly every other form of freedom,' opined U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Benjamin N. Cardozo in *Palko v. Connecticut* (1937).

To be able to speak your mind freely is a 'natural right'. However free speech can potentially cause harm or offend. How to judge offence and balance these societal needs is indeed difficult.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) argued that without human freedom to share views there can be no progress in science, law or politics - nor the arts. Mill argued that truth drives out falsehood, therefore the free expression of ideas, true or false, should not be feared. Mill suggested that 'the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.' This presumably includes certain freedoms of speech.

Does censorship, which is equivalent to book burning, have a place in a free society? Should a society be able to tolerate openly any ideas – and simply rely on the free market-place of ideas to sort good from bad? Is it relevant to distinguish between restricting freedom of speech in the public domain versus that of the private domain?

Oppression and suppression by any authority leads to hiding, lying and secrets. The secondary cost is dullness, drugged frustration and a loss of creativity.

Personally I support absolute free-speech though I acknowledge self-imposed restrictions of a civic society – to not offend unnecessarily. I am reminded of a childhood ditty: 'Sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me.' Better is to have no censorship but educate children to tolerance and argument. Sadly the physical threat of violence curtails freedom of speech – the Islamic confrontation with the French magazine Charlie Hebdo; the Chinese Cultural Revolution; or Stalin's Gulags are but a few examples of the success of terrorism.

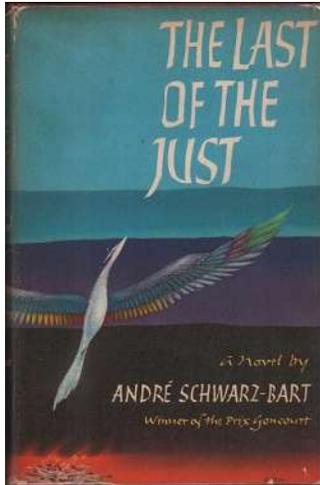
Hence society must defend freedom of speech with legislature, judiciary and enforcement. However this requires political will, the wisdom of how to preserve freedom on the one hand and restrictions on the other, and of course courage – which is not always in abundance.

## **Conclusion**

Evelyn Beatrice Hall in her 1906 biography of Voltaire attributed (incorrectly) to Voltaire: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.' This could serve as a universal social law.

The final scenes of the film were in the Book People's commune: an old man teaching his grandson his book and namesake; people wandering around, each practicing their book. Rather like a mantra or better - a prayer.

The film ends with an unasked question: What book would you want to be called by?



\* President Obama of the USA refused to use the expression ‘radical Islamic terrorism’ and banned, as a matter of policy, its use in his administration.

# Free Text

## Journey With My Brother

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### Chapter 3

“Through our eyes, the universe is perceiving itself.” - *Alan Watts*

We got off our bikes less than one mile from the community park. The fireworks were starting. We didn't want to miss the show. Unaware of the significance of this night, we had no idea it would be our last time together. As the fireworks began overhead my brother and I settled in for the Fourth of July festivities. He pulled a spliff out of his pocket. Cannabis was one of our allies. Our intention was set on enjoying each other's company and allowing the universe to unfold.

We rified on all things under the sun as the party took place around us. It was Ben's presence I appreciated the most. He was my older brother - someone I always looked up to - someone who taught me how to be in this world.

After the fireworks ended we biked home. I grabbed a blanket from my parent's house and headed back outside to stargaze. Living, now, on the Southside of Chicago near Midway airport the stars were lost to me. A shooting star was a Southwest flight. Being back visiting my parents in a town with little light pollution offered an opportunity to glimpse the union between dark and light.

I asked my brother if he wanted to come with me. “No, I'm good,” he said. More interested in music and film than most other things he was happy to pour himself a scotch and settle in for the night.

Taking a blanket I headed to a clearing in the park. I laid down the blanket and leaned back to open up to the cosmos. I didn't open my eyes until I was fully reclined. I wasn't prepared to see what I saw and feel what I felt.

The starry night sky spread across my visual field and pierced through my body. It was like a new way of seeing. In my adult life, I saw myself as too busy to engage in the ancient pastime of stargazing. I was unprepared for the feeling of being simultaneously infinite and infinitesimal. Containing the paradox proved too much. I let out a laugh that turned into a cry. This is what the mystics and the tricksters have been saying since time immemorial: That the universe is us, and we are the universe. I had heard this truism before. Yet, this was the first time I had this "Aha" moment shooting through my spine.

I went home to tell my brother of my realization. He was happy for me. Enjoying his scotch and halfway through a French film, he offered me a graham cracker and asked me to join him.

This was the last night I hung out with my brother. I flew back to Chicago and got a call from my father a few months later giving me the earth-shattering news that Ben was dead.

The next Fourth of July I was pining for my brother. I found myself in a grief-altered state. Tucked away on a small lake in Michigan with my extended family, my brother-in-law sensed the importance of the evening for my internal world. He offered to be my guide on a small (~25 ug) psycholytic journey with lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD).

Having some experience with similar amounts of the substance in comparable settings I took him up on the offer. I set an intention akin to the year before with my brother: To allow the universe to unfold and to feel his presence.

As day turned into night, my brother-in-law and I ventured out into the dark waters of the lake.

I stood up on the paddleboard and cut the first stroke into the glassy water. As we said goodbye to the shore, I began to open up. With each paddle I went deeper into whatever needed to show itself. Lightning struck behind us. A distant Midwest thunderstorm began to take shape across the horizon. The lightning cast light and shadow on the lake. Illuminated by the lightning we continued to paddle to the mouth of the creek on the far side of the lake.

Known by locals as swan creek, paddling through this tributary is like paddling back through time. Traversing the creek gives one the feeling of the Americas pre-Columbus. The mouth of the creek teems with wildlife. In the darkness its song was consuming. As we went deeper into the mouth the waterway narrowed. On either side the shore was lined with cattail reeds. Dancing among the cattails were fireflies.

The light show of fireflies appeared a mile high and a mile deep, so I danced too. A single firefly is miracle enough, but millions syncing together revealing their secrets is a strange attractor to awe-inspiring wonder.

For an hour my brother-in-law and I ventured upstream mesmerized by the bioluminescent light show. We continued to a point where we couldn't travel any farther. The current was slow, so we stopped to rest. Laying down on the paddle board and looking up I had the same experience that I had one year previously with my brother. The sky opened up to me, and I opened up to it. I remembered the vastness of the darkness and the brilliance of the starlight. I have been here before. I remembered my brother, too. I felt his presence and knew that he was with me.

The feeling of being in the universe and the universe being in me expanded when I turned and saw the fireflies in the night. The fireflies and the stars presented mirror images of each other. It was an, 'as above so below' type of moment, a moment of feeling completely at home in the universe.

We floated slowly back out of the creek. I laid supine on the paddle board allowing the flow of the water to take me wherever I needed to go. I alternated between looking at the vastness of the night sky, to the depth of the firefly dance. What was happening up there in the universe, was happening down here on the earth.

Seeing the universe unfold as it did, and feeling my brother's presence helped me with my grief. When the mouth of the creek spit us back out onto the lake I felt like a changed man. Witnessing the beauty of the cosmos being reflected back here on earth felt like a great gift in understanding this self-aware universe.

Returning to the lake house my brother-in-law and I poured ourselves a scotch, turned on a movie, and opened up a pack of graham crackers.

*Author's note:* I wrote this piece on the fifth day of five sitting vigil at my father's bedside. As the writing entered swan creek I knelt down next to him and prayed as he took his final breaths on this earth. I love you dad. This piece is dedicated to him, Cary Boyden.

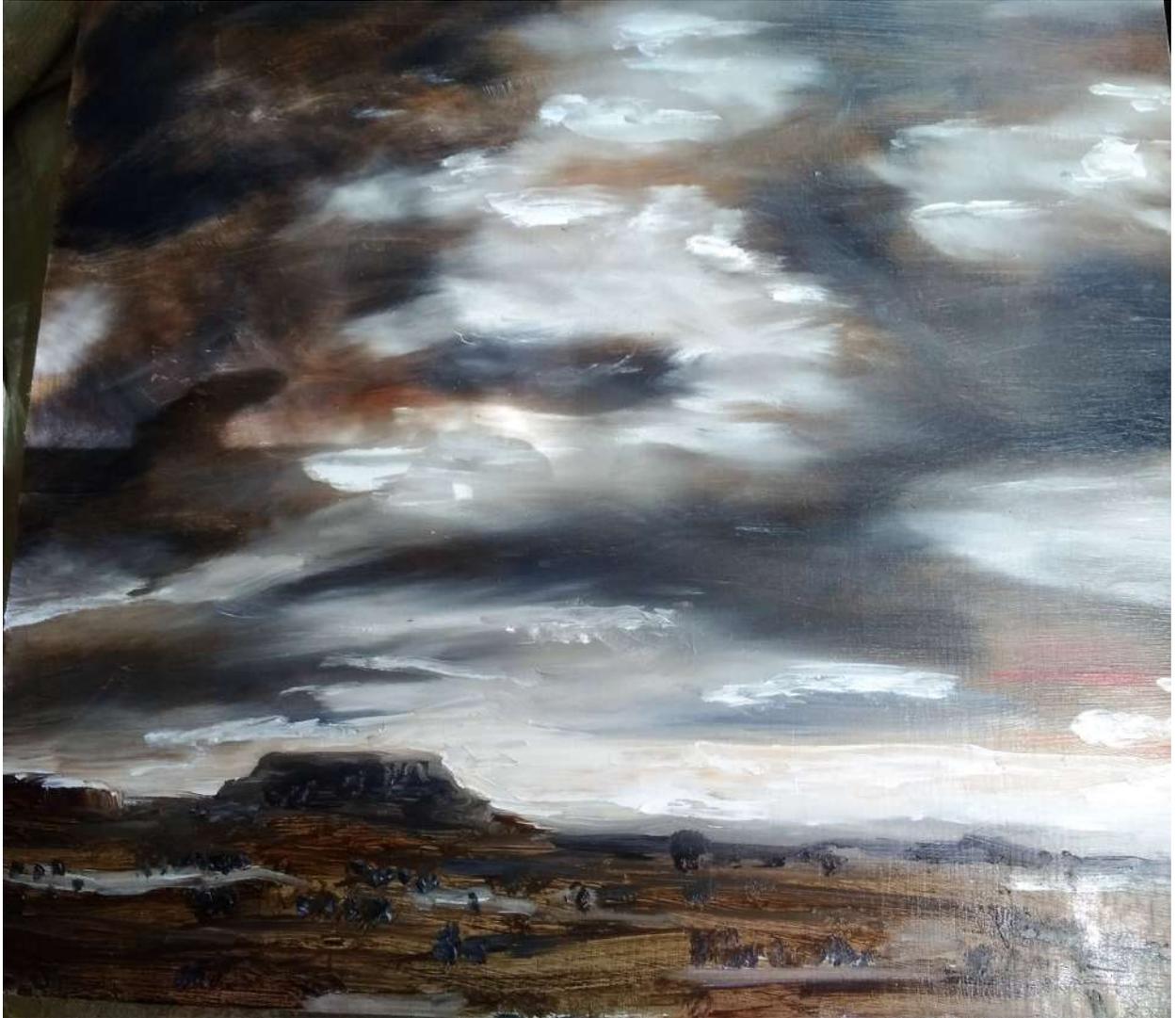
# Keeping The Gremlins Away

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Confinement has been a challenge. Humans seem programmed to always be doing something. They also desire anything they can't have at the time. At work they often talk about the amount of time to wait till the weekend. In an Epicurean way, we have now understood the value of work through confinement. Inactivity can certainly bring the gremlins though art can take them away. Painting, reading, writing or podcasting may keep the gremlins away. Landscapes allow for reflection on nature, ourselves and the whole existence. In our minds, the horizon has no delimitation. The horizon is the infinite. Artist Lena Wein's landscape shows an almost stormy horizon. The world still holds on, the beauty is still there but something might happen. Something that may challenge the beauty, the harmony. Her work reminds me of El Greco's depictions of Toledo and Die Brücke German expressionists. Something bad happened to the world after Die Brücke's movement. In the current times, confined or not, we fear something bad happening to the world.

**Lena Wein's Landscape, Petach Tikva, Israel**



# Future Issues

**Fall 2020 - The Truth**

**Winter 2021 - The Existence**

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