

EDITED EXCERPTS FROM A LETTER BY LEE KLEISS

1

I will avoid jargon and long sentences, at the risk of being less convincing to those who are seduced by such things.

2

[Transcendent, pessimistic] philosophy is a virus. It may drive some of its hosts to suicide, but those who survive infection and live with this virus walk with a negative glamour that seduces others into playing host, keeping the form instantiated. Darwin's ghost walks with me. What kind of forms should we expect to persist? The theory of evolution is almost a tautology. The soldier's risk of his life is a calculated risk. The form "learns" to sacrifice some of its instantiations in order to maximize resources for those which are not sacrificed. In the same way, the "virus" of transcendence pessimistic philosophy can "afford" to drive some of its hosts to suicide and despair. A bee sacrifices its life for the hive when it stings. Sickle-cell anemia is also an individual being partially sacrificed for a larger organism. With this in mind we might think of an organism as any kind of stuff which is unified by a purpose.

3

Let me stress that this virus cannot take just anyone for a host. Humans must primarily be earnest believers, lapping up the goo produced by the standard politician type. By the preacher of fake Jesus or the race resentment theorist. Us and them. We are good. They are bad. This is the fundamental structure. This is sanity itself. Those "trapped" or "snug as a bug in a rug" within this primary blanket cannot see this blanket from the outside. For to see the blanket from the outside is to no longer enjoy its warmth. Naturally those in the blanket can pretend to see this blanket from the outside. And this is where you get shallow or false versions of critical thinking (philosophy). This is the plastic Socrates that glows in the dark, similar to the plastic *Jesus* that Kierkegaard can be understood to have been talking about.

The “virus” of transcendent pessimistic philosophy that I’m focused on is precisely what **cannot** be institutionalized. To be sure, the words could be put on a sign or a manifesto. We can very much have glow-in-the-dark plastic radical critical thinking. We can also pretend that π is rational, equal to 3 perhaps. And we can even vote on it. This would voting against the existence of death and darkness. This would be voting against the existence of ambiguity, ignorance, and cognitive dissonance. And the rule is just such a vote, though naturally it’s not understood by voters in such stark terms, for knowledge of ignorance would break the spell. So one is instead always voting for common sense, decency, a better fairer world. Of course.

At this point in the exposition, when I’ve been foolish enough to offer my views to other “philosophers”, I tend to find myself understood as one more shrill complainer, as one more moralist. This is a serious misunderstanding. The transcendent pessimist must not be understood as one more (confused, hypocritical) accuser of the species. The so-called problem with the world is bone-deep. The incentive structure of this world guarantees just the kind of so-called shittiness that we tend to find. Blame a truant God. Blame the deep structure of that evil goddess Nature. Which is to say blame no one. Not really because you “should” not. It just hurts less to get over that habit and learn to see the thing with cold calm eyes.

I’m married, and my wife will follow me on much of this, but she still gets pissed at me on the next point. We are all complicit. We are not innocent victims. The world is not fucked (if it is fucked) because billionaires are greedy. We are *all* greedy, albeit in different ways. Some thinkers talk of integrating the shadow. That’s what I’m getting at. The transcendent pessimist knows that he is fundamentally a greedy replicator. And that the enlightened philosopher within him is a kind of parasite, who diverts energy from replication to do potentially suicidal kind of science. The philosopher is a poisoned and poisoning replicator. Socrates will given a taste of his own medicine, because he corrupted

the youth. Though I'd say it was always already too late to stop him. Because the "cancer" of philosophy is adjacent to the seductively powerful technology of synthetic-critical conversation. In other words, if philosophy is a virus, it's a virus within the larger virus of human culture itself. And there's no clear boundary between pure (toxic) science and impure replication-encouraging engineering.

7

Pure perception is apathetic. Or motivated only by the goal the accuracy. So the philosopher as ur-scientist is greatest when least entangled. This is why the pure philosopher must have a foot in the grave. He is ambivalent about his own survival. But, since he is a philosopher and primarily a linguistic-cultural being, his survival is the survival of the softwhere which is hosted by the tribe. He is therefore world-weary *geist*, heavy with memory, heavy with crystallized nectar. We might look to Spengler on this issue. Megalopolitan man is empty. Full of knowledge but devoid of a grand mission. "Socrates was a nihilist, and Buddha." Whether Spengler is historically right in both cases is beside the point. What matters is his envisioning of both as belated or final thinkers. Belated and final, and yet the species has continued for thousands of years, and may continue for thousands more. Because toxic philosophy is a parasite, a virus that only finds its way in to a rare type of human being, the shaman type. But I don't pretend there's an obvious boundary. The public intellectual can go dark. The dark thinker can mutate and become an evangelist who pretends to have tamed that darkness.

8

This letter only makes sense if understood to be addressed to the type of person susceptible to infection. Elsewhere I've discussed how the nihilism in Buddhism gets fixed for consumption by the greedy householder. By fixed I mean of course removed. Qoheleth can also be fixed by those desperate to have a book written by a god, an embarrassingly childish fantasy, yes, but brutally effective as a meme in some contexts. A tribe is an organism. Culture must unify, organize, and coordinate the doings of the tribe. But fidelity to a dead text turns out to be inefficient. So we get the adoption of a synthetic-critical tradition, something that allows at least for high-tech engineering. A quick glance

at the crudity of political conversation reminds one that most people are pre-scientific savages most of the time. Of course. Because pure science is a parasite on a form whose priority is getting itself replicated. Note that the form need not be aware of this priority, so the teleological language can be metaphorical. (Those who can't grasp this should give up now. They should return to politics.)

9

Let me emphasize now the precarious and absurd situation of the transcendent pessimistic philosopher, of someone like your friend Kleiss. Almost no one wants to hear what they have to say. Granted that they possess the truth, no one is buying, for the truth is ugly. All things are empty. The world is a machine that no one controls. Moloch (a personification of a runaway incentive structure) demands a tower. There will be no revolution. Just the bloodflower sinwheel forever. Eternal the squirm of the shame. Time is the less in we wheel not learn.

10

Who wants such a message ? What institution can embrace a thinker who articulate such a message ? *An institutions' primary message is always its own value.* This is the necessary subtext. But toxic philosophy (a toxically masculine disagreeable critical thinking) tends to put such value into question. Indeed, pure-toxic "Criticism" puts even itself into question, seriously considering and tempted by the alternative of death and nothingness.

11

Hamlet is good symbol for the toxic philosopher. He is not purely suicidal. He runs his mouth, seduces us with his negative glamor. His interiority is vast. His soul is a system of caves. Does the poison urge him toward the crystallization of an entire culture ? He is a symbol for Shakespeare. Does Shakespeare incite us on to more life ? He shows us the horror and the futility, and yet we cry for more. We want our art to be this terrible and infinite. Are we soldiers ? Are we pioneers ?

The toxicity of philosophy helps replicators by delegitimizing those who oppress or constrain them. The toxic philosopher is not impressed by religious fairy tales, fame, or wealth. In this sense philosophy is a flamethrower, a ghostbuster. It strips everything inessential from the map in a time of war. And here we get to the essence of a strong sophistry which declares that only power is knowledge. While this is paradoxical and false in some sense, such pragmatism is a potentially potent confusion or semi-ironic crowbar. The danger of such a tool is that it threatens the solidarity of the group wielding it. If the fine phrases of the other side are mere rationalizations, then what of the fine phrases on our side? So we get to the last age of cynical individualism, the chaotic age. It is not really a shrewd age, for there is plenty of sentimentally self-righteous conspiracy theory. In that sense, the mob is not truly cynical, for it still believes in its own rightness and goodness. But the cacophony of the resentment industrial complex is the perfect soil of that rare black flower: pessimistic transcendent philosophy.

This black flower hovers quietly above the noisy scene of mere agents. This black flower emerges from a background of merely finite personalities, of cartoons who depend for their being on exclusion of their equally cartoonish other. They are immersed in their time, fundamentally topical and hysterical *agents*. They instantiate a passing Cause, regurgitate a few tribal phrases, jockeying to be the most famous spewer of the one side's doctrine. This is natural. It's just the pursuit of wealth and fame — more deeply of replication. Pointless to judge or complain. I merely describe, articulate, get distance on the machine of the world.