



Welcome to issue no. 7

I hope you will enjoy the three articles here, from different Schools around the world. And I hope this gives a sense of the work by students in the School.

Have a look at our Facebook page - link at the bottom of the newsletter. Please keep sending me articles, top tips, and anything you think will interest our philosophical community.

Visit the website, Schoolinsight to see up-to-date information on Distance Learning courses, and catch up on back issues.

With very best wishes,
Christine Lambie

This Pretoria student tells about his career and how he came to the School.



Standing against Corruption Mike Tshishonga, Gauteng, South Africa

From an early age my inspiration came from famous leaders and family, particularly my mother. I have been mostly motivated by the challenges of hardships. Adversities do not destroy us, but rather build and strengthen our character.

I developed a sense of common humanity and social justice by observing my mother, naïvely thinking all humans subscribed to this.

Deputy Director General

In 1997, I was Deputy Director General in South Africa, a government post, and as such was responsible for what happened when companies went into liquidation. It is important to protect the financial interests of persons whose assets are involved in such cases. Some liquidations can run into millions of Rands and so there is always the possibility of corruption.

Blowing the Whistle

I received information about the appointment of a certain liquidator, in total disregard of the law, in the liquidation of a large company. The Supreme Court set the appointment aside, after the discrepancy was brought to light.

However the Minister of Justice went as far as to appoint an official from another jurisdiction to appoint the same liquidator, even after the court had set aside his appointment. It came to my attention that this liquidation could be linked to other similar cases in the country, involving a further R950 000 of corrupt activities. As head of the liquidation of companies, I had to act.

The procedure was firstly to raise my concern internally. Nothing happened so I went to the regulatory body. I went as far as the presidency but still nothing happened. Still not satisfied, the Act allowed me to make a wider disclosure to the media. I blew the whistle publicly, because nobody was prepared to investigate my concern, despite its seriousness.

I did all this because there was a need to do so, a need for good governance and rule of law. As a result I was dragged before a disciplinary enquiry for misconduct. I was found not guilty but the department made several appeals. This continued from 2003 to 2009, when the final appeal was heard.

The liquidator and the minister threatened to sue me and I was referred to as a “Dunderhead, a relic of the Bantustan, who cannot box himself out of a wet paper bag” on national television. The matter was not happily resolved and despite being cleared of all wrong-doing, the issue that led to me blowing the whistle was never thoroughly investigated. The investigation was deliberately avoided and the Director General regarded me as irresponsible. This resulted in me losing my job. It was like being back in the Stone Age.

During this time my physical personal safety was at high risk, but it was interesting to observe that when survival was at stake I was highly alert and had all the information I needed at that moment. While conscious of the fact that I was in this world I became more conscious that I did not belong to it. I was however concerned about my family.

Vindication

I was finally vindicated when the judges found that I had acted within the law and in the public interest. The people who were accusing me of bad faith, failed to turn up in court to give evidence to that effect. I was very happy that the judges confirmed that what I did was not for personal gain and that I blew the whistle in good faith. It made me proud and happy to have taken a stance against corruption.

Adversity is not necessarily bad or good, depending on how one looks at it. Adversity reminds us of something that needs to be attended to, restoring balance. I experienced anxiety and pain and felt the world was against me for doing the right thing. I knew deep down in my heart that the universe would not allow the imbalance to prevail in my life. Common humanity and social justice would be supported by universal forces.

This understanding enabled me to cope with my trials and strengthened my faith in universal justice.

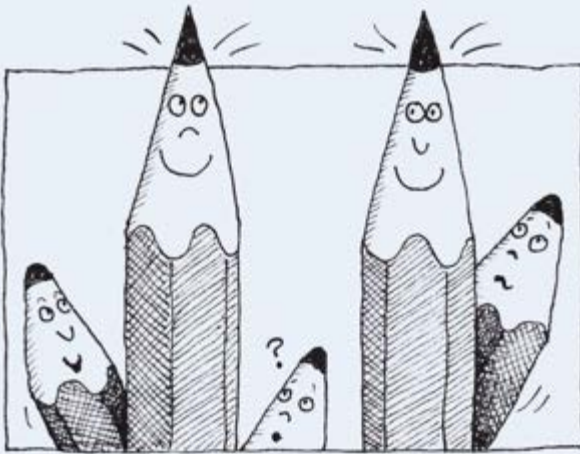
Meeting the School

In 2005, during the disciplinary enquiry proceedings, I was introduced to the School of Practical Philosophy. It was here that I found the words to describe what I was experiencing and above all, found some direction. I slowly became an observer of what was happening in my life without attachment. I also learned to reduce the desires that were ruling my life in a subtle manner.

The School reminded me of who I am and what I knew. It also taught me how to uncover the light of truth by focusing on being in the present. Destructive forces can absorb, scatter or displace this light by getting involved in hopeless ideas or ideologies.

Many people are conditioned negatively and think that those who encounter adversities should come out of it sceptical, bitter and angry, but I know the advantages of adversity. Viewed positively, adversity built and strengthened my character. I may lack appropriate words to describe the good experience brought by this situation, but that does not minimize the truth of my experience.

Life's journey is taking me to a space that is difficult to define. William Blake described it best; "To see a world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of your hand and eternity in an hour." This means practising love without judgment, seeking truth. It means not the absence of anything, but the presence of everything. Not the absence of fear, but the presence of love. Not the absence of negatives, but the presence of positives. The partial dissolves in the presence of the perfect and the eternal.



Top Tips - items recommended by readers

1. **The Science Delusion** by Rupert Sheldrake.

This book is a highly readable critique of the materialistic approach taken in modern science. It is the counter-argument to Richard Dawkins' book: *The God Delusion*.

TED Good ideas People often credit their ideas to individual "Eureka!" moments. But Steven Johnson shows how history tells a different story. His fascinating tour takes us from the "liquid networks" of London's coffee

houses to today's high-velocity web. Go to [TEDJohnson](#)

3. **School on radio** Wessex branch leader Raymond Payne (UK) is interviewed with two other students discussing the value of the School. Go to: [WessexRadio](#). Look for the clip titled Tues 13 March - the interview starts after about 7 mins.
4. **Great Pyramids of Giza** Visit now, without all the tourists and vendors. See the airpano site with its amazing 360 photography. Go to [airpanopyramids](#)
5. **Land value taxation** Samuel Brittan argues in the Financial Times for a land tax. The debate goes on. To read the article go to: [FTTax](#)

This enthusiastic Platonist has produced a practical guide book on dialectic.

Dialectic

Marita Brewster, Melbourne

Socrates said "Dialectic is the highest of the sciences – the nature of knowledge can go no further."

Socrates obviously thought it was important, but what exactly was it that he practised so tirelessly right to the end of his life?



How does Socrates speak in his dialogues?

On reading the dialogues, a number of aspects of Socrates' approach become obvious. To mention just a few:

- He listens intently
- He often refers to those proficient in the subject under investigation
- He is not interested in consensus, only the truth
- He is continually questioning, taking one step at a time
- He never presumes to know the answer
- He is happy to be proved wrong
- He can be totally exasperating!

It made sense to use these observations to try to formulate some sort of system that might help us move forward. If we practised what we could see Socrates doing, we might discover more about where it leads. What has followed since has been a journey of discovery – the goal being to discover what dialectic really is, and how it can be put to use so that others may experience the connection that so inspired me.

Developing dialectic exercises

David Horan, (Dublin) who is currently undertaking a new translation of the Dialogues of Plato, has been proactive in developing a range of exercises and study sessions to help penetrate dialectic. Philosophy students around the world have been enthusiastically engaging in these exercises for some time now, and have made many discoveries.

On one occasion, a group of about 30 philosophy students were divided into small groups to explore the nature of love. They were given some simple questions modelled on the way Socrates approached some of his own discussions: Do you possess love? If you possess it, then can you say what you think it is? What sort of person does love make you when it is present? etc. There were no 'right' answers to these questions, but unexpectedly, the effect on all who participated was an overwhelming experience of love.

Many people have reported that the most profound benefit they have found from practising dialectic exercises has been the discovery of the power of simply asking questions and the liberating effect that it has on one's being. To ask a question implies an admission of 'not knowing' – what a relief not to have to know, and what a wonderful journey of discovery that follows the admission of not knowing. Not only does the questioner not need to know, neither does the answerer. The answers come from somewhere else altogether.

Dialectic Booklet

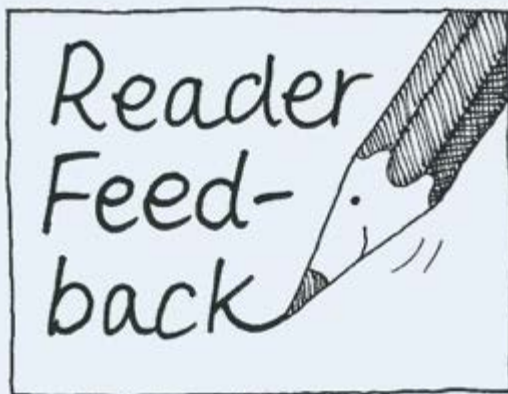
What followed was the development of a booklet, which sets out some simple principles, and guidance for their practical application. Socrates said, "An unexamined life is not worth living".

The booklet provides guidance for examining our own capacity in relation to such things as our ability to listen, our willingness to be proven wrong, and our ability to follow. It lends itself well both to a quiet read by an individual and also to group study. It has proved worthwhile in helping us develop our own personal approach to dialectic as well as incorporating it in our daily lives. It has also affected the way we engage in philosophy group discussions.

The French philosopher Pierre Hadot said "As a dialectical exercise, the Platonic dialogue corresponds exactly to a spiritual exercise." He also said that it is "a mode by which we may ascend to the divine." If we can learn to approach conversation as a spiritual exercise, with our eye fixed on the 'unifying principle or the truth', then I am confident that we will reach the goal of dialectic – not in a theoretical sense, but by engaging directly with it and experiencing it for ourselves.

Where to from here? Who knows? There is still much more to be discovered about what Socrates was doing. What was his reference point in leading his discussions? What did he know that made it possible for his discussion to develop? Plato's Republic gives us many clues regarding the education of philosophers, which will be well worth exploring.

The booklet referred to, Dialectic, a practical guide for philosophers, is available via E mail from PlatoMelbourne for orders and dispatch.



Reader Feedback

*Thank you for the lovely newsletter . Again such fine articles which put me in touch with the finer aspects of life. All three articles were very inspiring and a real happiness arose. Philosophy is so good. What a wonderful start to the weekend. Thank you. **Gauteng, South Africa***

*I was intrigued to read the article on the School in Hungary by Miklos, an old friend of mine (we used to enjoy solving the world's problems over port and cigars). The impact of different types of government on the fabric of a nation is a subject which I wish to write about for the Auckland School's magazine, having seen it at play in Venice and Prague - two dramatically different cities. Keep up the good work. **Auckland, New Zealand***

*I sent this to a former student of mine, now living in Canada. As a result of our philosophy courses, this developed a growing common interest between her and her mother - wonderful! So her mother received the newsletter and enrolled in the distance learning programme. And my student also sent it to her uncle who enrolled in Auckland - on the same day. Well, it is just so encouraging. **Durban, South Africa***

Pauline is one of the introductory year philosophy tutors in the School in London, and reflects on caring for her dying mother and what has developed from this situation.

Changing an Attitude

Pauline Purves, London



While there is very little that is guaranteed in our lives, just as we have been born, we will also die. What we do not know is how or when that may be.

My mother sadly died on the 27th April 2011, just three months after she had been diagnosed with cancer. While the whole experience was on one level difficult, it was also simultaneously enriching for me as her daughter. At the age of 74 years my mother was active and engaged in all sorts of voluntary activities in Hampshire where we had been brought up as a family. I visited both my parents in December 2010; my mother looked unwell and said that she had been feeling ill for three weeks.

Diagnosis

On the 19th December I received a call from my sister to say that my mother had been taken into hospital. Eventually she was discharged to spend Christmas at home. But on the 26th January the diagnosis came that she had mesothelioma cancer, a terminal lung cancer, for which there is currently no known cure. The diagnosis was given by a senior consultant in the presence of me, my sister, another consultant and a MacMillan nurse. All eyes were on my mother, as, despite her physically weakened state, she was mentally as sharp as a pin and asked many questions. In fact, in that moment I did not see 'mother' but a highly intelligent & articulate woman who held the attention of all in the room. Undeniably, the body was greatly weakened but the spirit was bright and undiminished.

Decision to care

Once we left the hospital, my mother made it quite clear that as there was no treatment, she did not want to return to the hospital unless absolutely essential.

When my sister and I spoke, we both agreed that we would do whatever was necessary to care for both my parents. The decision was spontaneous and natural. This was important because from that point onwards it was about my parents not about me. We shopped, cleaned, cooked, did laundry and helped my mother with everything needed. We both took turns to stay over a few evenings a week.

It soon became clear that my mother's health was in rapid decline. At each visit, new challenges arose. From being able to walk with a stick from room to room, she became too weak and needed to be wheeled in a wheelchair. She needed help washing, bathing and dressing.

One day she wanted a bath, and while I had managed to give her a bath the week before, I observed that she was physically weaker. We took things very slowly but when it came to getting her out of the bath, I could not lift her, as I had been able to previously. In that moment it became clear that if I got into the bath, I would be in a better position to lift her out. I literally whipped off my shoes, tights & skirt, explaining to my mother what I was going to do. Once my mother was dried and dressed we were able to laugh at the whole process.

Unconditional love

As my mother became more dependent, there was one particular day when she was upset; she had never wanted to ask me to help her in so many ways. In that moment I simply knelt down and held her cheeks in my hands. I looked into her eyes and said that I absolutely knew that if the roles were reversed, she would do exactly the same for me. There was a unity of unconditional love that I will never forget. Despite losing my mother, I am now extremely grateful that I made the decision to put the needs of both my

parents first. With this wholehearted decision, neither I nor my sister ever questioned what we had to do. We accepted it fully and worked in unison to meet every situation as it arose. Also, the help that we received from the district and MacMillan nurses was wonderful.

Taking responsibility for elderly parents

The MacMillan nurse told me that what we were doing for our parents was very unusual, as many people expect the state to take responsibility. This has concerned me greatly as I feel enriched by my experience. Many people seem to be afraid of the situation of caring for an elderly parent, but I feel that it is the most natural thing in the world.

As a result, I am currently undertaking research to understand why it has become culturally acceptable to expect the state to take responsibility for our elderly relatives. Understanding how this attitude has developed is an essential prerequisite to making any recommendations for change.

We need to address this as a matter of urgency - I believe that the prospect of the elderly being seen as a burden to society rather than being embraced, is potentially very dangerous.

Ultimately I believe that with a change in attitude and education, combined with government support, we could achieve a level of care that is much better for the elderly while simultaneously providing peace of mind for the family members.

It is a huge task but I believe a very important one. It will be a tribute to the memory of my mother who taught me what it means to love unconditionally

Thanks for reading

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Please keep that feedback coming. I need all your suggestions of personal stories, insights, links, articles, cartoons, video clips – anything that will be of interest to our philosophy community. Do you know someone in the School who has an interesting story to tell? E-mail me at: editor@seslondon.org. Thanks again for reading, CL

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School of Economic Science, 11 Mandeville Place, London W1U 3AJ
Charity No. 313115 and SC039950

schooleconomicsscience.org