

The Journey Revisited by Emery Cournand

In August 2010 I graduated with a BA philosophy through the distance learning department of the University of London and, all things being already in place, by the end of the month I had quit my job of more than 28 years in the Public Service of Trinidad & Tobago and was in Paris booking into a school called 'LangueOnze' in order to fine-tune my French. I had applied to do *Master 1* at the Université de Paris 8 in Saint Denis, and had been awaiting their reply with huge anticipation. The French language, although not my mother tongue, along with both Oriental and Western philosophy, had been a passion for my entire adult life. Although I had done only up to O' Levels during my schooldays all those years ago, over the years since then, through attending classes at Alliance Française, I had managed to bring my level up to what was considered adequate in order to gain admission to a French university. Upon visiting the campus I was told my application had been accepted and I returned to my native Trinidad at the end of September, in order to convert my vacation visa into a student's visa.

It was no great surprise to me that the spiralling cost of tuition fees in the English speaking universities of the UK and USA prevented my studying there, as I held the view that the mercenary and materialist agenda of analytic philosophy, had been moulding these societies into conclaves of elitism over the last 100 years. In such societies the trend is for tertiary education to be restricted to the elites, with small quotas being made for the very talented, or the very resourceful of the rest. The Université de Montréal, which being a Canadian university, is philosophically located somewhere between the European model and the Anglo-American model, had refused my application. I did also receive a conditional acceptance by the Université de Genève, based on the results of an exam to evaluate my French, which I was supposed to take. However, in this instance, the circular nature of the bureaucracy proved to be my undoing. In order to travel I required a visa, and in order to get a visa I had to supply proof of being accepted; besides since there was no Swiss embassy in Trinidad, I would have also have had to spend a few weeks in Caracas, Venezuela, sorting out such issues.

It was in Paris, one of the most expensive cities in the world, in the middle of November 2010, a few days before my 51st birthday, that the rubber hit the road. It did so in a rather harsh manner with me lugging my luggage through the metro system in search of accommodation. I had chosen my two primary options using the website 'colocation.fr'. The first, which I chose because it was a lot closer to the university, turned out to be merely a hole in a wall, and I immediately lugged all my luggage down the four flights of stairs and headed to my second choice in the suburbs of Montreuil, which I found to be quite suitable. I paid 400 Euros a month for what was supposed to be a room but was really an entire apartment which occupied the 2nd floor of an old but well maintained building. The convivial landlord, who lived in the apartment above, used the other rooms to store some of his personal belongings. The main disadvantage

was that due to the location; it took approximately 1 hour by metro, to go each way to and from school.

The first shock I received was when the Admissions' Office at the university demanded my original BA certificate. I had used my results-slip in previous correspondence. For some strange and unknown reason the University of London then took a whole 12 weeks to send me an official letter; and as for my original certificate, I had absolutely no clue as to its whereabouts. More than a year later I found out that it was filed away at the Ministry of Education in Trinidad, who had supervised my exams on behalf of the University of London. Neither party had found it necessary to inform me of this minor detail, which caused me to miss a whole semester. Stranded and alone in a foreign country, in the heart of winter, with my birthday and the Christmas holidays approaching, I wrote a critical essay which I called 'The Analytic Agenda'. I also became a regular patron at a few of the bars that the city had to provide. Fortunately for me within a stone's throw away from my residence was a restaurant & bar that went by the name of 'La Grosse Mignonne', which very often had live entertainment, and where I spent many a happy hour slowly sipping my sorrows away on red wine and beer. I subsequently sent the 'The Analytic Agenda' to several philosophy magazines. It was about 15 to 20 pages long depending on the format and print. In response I received quite a few apologetic refusals saying that while the article was very interesting, it was not the sort of stuff that they normally published. After about 6 months I also received a very long winded response addressing me as 'Professor' and stating that they had been trying to see how they could publish my article, which they liked very much, but finally conceding that they were unable to do so.

My classes commenced in February 2011. Due to having missed the entire first semester, I knew that I had to complete as many courses as possible within what was comparatively a very limited time-span in order to graduate. This would have really been an ordeal had I the luxury to picking choosing at my disposal; however, the timetable of the various courses greatly affected my selection. In all I attended classes for at least 12 courses, eventually choosing to go all the way with 8. I used my familiarity with, and my affinity for either the subject matter, or the philosopher as a guide. In one instance I was totally swayed by the charisma of the lecturer. Along with some other students I had been waiting in the corridor on the lecturer for a course on Descartes when I saw a man a woman approaching. They turned out to be the lecturers of two courses that were to be held in adjacent rooms. The man introduced himself and on a whim I decided to take his course on Spinoza, in whom until then I had only the mildest of interest. It turned out to be one of the most rewarding decisions of my time in Paris for three important reasons. One reason was that the lecturer was dynamic motivator and it was quite obvious that he enjoyed his job tremendously. Another reason was that unknown to me at the time, Spinoza had had a major influence on, and been a necessary key to, understanding contemporary French philosophy. The third and final reason was that the core of students from that class was to be my closest friends during the rest of my stay, and along with other students from different universities around Paris who were mostly from Latin America, we organized many an intimate *soirée* along the banks of the Seine and its tributaries at night-time. We also played football almost every weekend at the Bois de Vincennes, which was within jogging distance from where I

lived. Our core group consisted of three Colombians, a Brazilian, a German, and an American from New Orleans. With regards to the course, the name of the lecturer was Charles Ramon and among other things, he was an expert on the modern philosophers.

It greatly surprised many of the other students to learn that the only criterion I had used when choosing a university was whether or not their website was capable of facilitating my application, and that I was totally indifferent to the reputation of Université de Paris 8 as a bastion of post-modernist philosophy. It was fortunate that one of the concepts of post-modernism is that of pluralism. This provided me with a wide range of courses from which to choose. I am careful to use the word 'concept' instead of the word 'principle', because a principle could be interpreted as being universal, and due to the same pluralism, most post-modernists deny the existence of universals. Of the two courses offered on analytic philosophy, I eventually went all the way with one taught by an American lecturer that was both in English and French and outlined the history of the analytic philosophy in general. I attended a few classes of the other analytic course but after about 3 sessions decided that myself and the subject matter, one Mr. Wittgenstein, should part company. Although I was not particularly partial to analytic philosophy, it was my hope that I would be able to enter the critique that I had written as the project for my *memoire* at the level of Master 2. As it turned out, while I would not claim that the course was entirely a waste of my time, I was unable to use my critique because the course was classified as an undergraduate course. In any event I was made to understand that the university did not offer courses in the area in which I was contemplating to specialize, at the *Master 2* level.

The main flaw of academic philosophy today is that it in building itself into an ivory tower, it has absconded its role in the development of human civilization. This role is even more important today since academic philosophy has itself been largely responsible for the depreciating influence of religion, which has traditionally been a major factor in development of human civilization throughout the ages. In the analytic tradition, philosophy, under the guise of being empirical, and of supporting science, has totally sold out to a hedonistic capitalistic elitist agenda that sees people as markets and the environment as raw material; poor people, in addition to being seen as markets, as far as their labour, and their body parts and internal organs are concerned, are also seen as raw material in a technological age that is progressively being tailored to suit only the artificially generated and superficial 'needs' of the a wealthy elite. I cannot speak for the whole of the contemporary continental tradition but in Paris three monoliths seem to hang their sombre shadows over the intellectual tradition; all with their own brands of intellectual propaganda that denies the moral responsibility of the individual towards the wider society. The first of these shadows is cast by Nietzsche, the second by Freud, and the third by Kafka. If one had to choose one word to describe the tone of Nietzsche's writings, it would be 'envious'. He openly mocks two individuals who have greatly contributed to the shaping of Western civilization: Christ and Socrates. He not only mocks them but attempts to supplant their teachings with his own writings, which when taken as a whole are both incoherent, and contradictory. He claims that one should embrace the life-experience but on different occasions lambasts important ingredients of this same life-experience such as the bond of friendship, and

man-woman relationships. He sneers at mysticism yet the only definition that fits his Zarathustra is that of a mystic. How can anyone who says, as Nietzsche does in 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra', that it is better to fall under the hands of a murderer than into the arms of a woman in heat, be ever taken seriously? One may discover the odd pearl of wisdom in his writing but unless one is obsessed with style, it is tough going because in order to access such pearls one has to wade through many an outlandish hyperbole, many a contradiction, and many downright falsehoods. As a philosopher he has been highly overrated by many. His Over-man is a hollow substitute for the transcendental of German idealism but represents nothing at all; not even an ideal. It is a great tragedy that in their morbid obsession with style over substance, the French have been seduced by his sweet but poisonous nectar. Placed in the most generous light Nietzsche's work should be viewed a dialectic reaction to its roots: Idealism and Christianity, and therefore be appropriately attributed some small but limited significance in the overall scheme of things.

Freud with his libido based hypothesis is another misleading diversion. This hypothesis states that the driving force behind all of human motivation is the libido. Even human morality is seen in this strange light. According to Freud one aspires to greatness in order to satisfy one's sexual libido, but due to the constraints of living within society, one is forced in the end to trade the sexual gratification that one really desires, for fame, prestige and professional success. In this way raw sexual energy is sublimated within society, for the benefit of the society. The only problem is that once one's sexual libido has been adequately sublimated, there ends one's responsibility with regards to his or her obligations to his fellow man, and the wider society in general. While at the instinctive level, there may be a morsel of truth in this myth, in the end it is just another attempt to supplant religion, spirituality, and the concept of the transcendental with a philosophy based purely on one's egocentric instincts and interests. However Freud is not entirely to blame because it is not as if there was not a credible alternative. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and the archetypes, when compared to Freud's libido driven subconscious, is a more holistic and humanistic approach that also includes the possibility of the transcendental; but again academia had been seduced by a philosophy that is more deterministic, and that denies man's responsibility for, and control over his destiny.

Once more through Kafka the individual is the victim of circumstances beyond his control. In his unfinished but celebrated novel 'The Trial', the fault is clearly that of the bureaucracy of the state which has become a sort of monster that answers only to itself. In the short-story 'The Metamorphosis' it is the main character that changes, and this precipitates changes in the behaviour of the rest of the family towards him. The point that modern academics seem to have missed is that Kafka wrote fiction mainly for the entertainment of himself and his friends. It was his desire that his works, although considered to be masterpieces today, be destroyed upon his passing. As satire, he has a lot to say about the society and the fate of the individual, but things should not be taken out of context as has been the case where they seem to be applied universally and given a certain degree of misdirected and false permanence. In 'The Trial' all along he hints of ways things could have been done better, more efficiently and more justly. In 'The Metamorphosis' the individual goes through drastic physical changes overnight and is transformed from a loving son and brother into a repulsive insect the size of a human being. If

there is some deeper message to be gained from this story, it should be that while often we as individuals may appear in the eyes of those we love to go through drastic and extreme psychological and physical changes, which may seem to occur almost overnight, and while we may be forced to accept their condemnation and our fate: while those who loved us may come to despise us: while those who we meet for the first time may not like us either, but may be also repulsed by us, such transformations are usually part of a long process, over which we do have a certain amount of control. While living, we may not for instance be able to stop the aging process altogether, but, with a certain amount of moderation, dietary changes, regular exercise and a proper attitude, we can have a certain amount of control over the manner in which we age. We however should be conscious of the fact that both ourselves and our environment are in a constant flux; and act appropriately, and in accordance with our circumstances.

In every way, and for better and for worse, French bureaucracy resonates Kafka. I had come to study for an academic year but was required to go through all the procedures as though I had come to stay. I had to take a medical, and cue up with thousands of prospective immigrants before sunrise, outdoors in the cold, on a quite few occasions in order to be granted a 1 year provisional visa. When I left in June 2011, at the end of the academic year, my original entry visa was still on a temporary extension. It was left up to me to return before the end of the following August, and take possession of my new 1 year provisional visa. By this time I had a social security number, and the French government was depositing more than 200 Euros every month, into my account at La Banque Postale.

As I hinted before Spinoza was the forefather of the Parisian of philosophical thought. He was the first to merge Descartes' dualism of extension (matter) and thinking substance (mind) into one substance, which he purported to God. For Spinoza God controlled everything and man's 'freedom' came only from accepting and willingly submitting to God's will. In his opinion God's nature is one hundred percent manifested in each and all of his creations, including man. Although today, God has been taken out of the equation, a form of deterministic organization still permeates the intellectual domain of contemporary French philosophy. This contrasts with the analytic tradition where the phenomenon of 'randomness' is used to explain all the mysteries of nature, including that of free will. I refer to 'randomness' as phenomenon because it does not exist in reality, but only seems to exist due to our lack of knowledge, or our ignorance about the true causes of certain events. However not because an event seems, in the light of no apparent explanation, to be random, is this really so. I find it very strange that those of the analytic tradition who, under normal circumstances claim that we are slaves to empiricism, so conveniently abandon the foundation of empiricism- cause and effect, by contradictorily turning to a vague and fuzzy randomness, whenever events fail to conform to their expectation. Some contemporary philosophers believe that Spinoza was really an atheist who reinvented his God as a compromise in a time when to believe otherwise would very likely have proved to be fatal. Although he was able to preserve his life until he reached the age of 44 when he died from natural causes, he still paid a heavy price as he was excommunicated from the Jewish faith, and his books were also eventually banned by the Roman Catholic Church.

Each of the three writers under consideration was very creative and possessed very vivid imaginations. Some would say they were all geniuses in their own right. Each was different in terms of style and substance. However mixed together in a form of contemporary French academic life locked mostly in its own self-promotion, where style is awarded greater relevance and significance than actual substance, and also where there is no forum for a critique based on rational principles of certain undesirable and dangerous tendencies, they help form a rather toxic cocktail for individual consummation. They help promote a philosophy where individual is powerless at the hands of circumstances, the bureaucracy of the state, his libido and his physiology; and that the quest of life is to search within oneself and one's external environment, or as Merleau-Ponty would say one's 'phenomenal field', so as to find some kind of enjoyment, fulfilment or fun, in what could be otherwise a rather chaotic and mostly unpleasant ride. Some of such enjoyment, fulfilment or fun could be found in bemoaning one's predicament, and that of humanity in general, in rather refined language, at sparring sessions at bars and other social functions. This reminds me of a song the teacher played for us students in class during the month I was at 'LangueOnze', which was about a guy criticizing his girlfriend's parents, whom at the time he had not yet met. He criticized their clothes, the newspapers they read, the car they drove, the music they listened to, etc. and compared these things to his own preferences and ended by saying the words "and if I should change my convictions". This is what is really absurd about the French. They really confuse the brand of clothes one wears, and the type of cigarettes one smokes, with one's convictions. It is indeed a sad day when one judges others, and is in turn judged, without having to say a word, purely by associated products of consummation. The students consider themselves to be free-thinkers but everywhere one goes they are wearing the same converse sneakers, wrapping the same smokes, gesticulating in the same manner, and using the same circular arguments with the same false, highly stylised sophistication that has more to do with their search for identity, than with their convictions; if in fact they do have any convictions at all. It is a great tragedy that in perhaps the country on the planet where philosophers are given the greatest consideration, such consideration is closer to the celebrity status given to rock-stars, than it is to that afforded to serious professionals with something of substance to offer. The Parisian philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre talked a lot about freedom, but in the end seemed to really acknowledge only artistic freedom. Instead of real political freedom he was preoccupied with a more stylised form of rebellion against the system. His world was one replete with political labels such as communism and bourgeoisie, which although invented in order to shed light along the path, and although being somewhat more relevant during his time, in today's world only function as vessels of containment from which the individual could only hope to escape. His view that there is no core at centre of human consciousness means that the individual is directly moulded by external factors and circumstances, and as a result could never be 'free' in the true sense of the word, as there is no dialectic resistance coming from within.

Irrespective of the weather, or the time of the day I thoroughly enjoyed walking in Paris and provided that time was on my side, I took every opportunity to do so. I particularly enjoyed that period of the morning when the metro had stopped; when I'd walk from the southern side of the city, across the Seine, to the area where I had to wait for the night-bus heading in the direction

where I lived. In all my life never had I been so lonely and yet paradoxically, so happy at the same time. The odd song or reflections on my surroundings and my life in general usually occupied my mind. I looked forward to these lonely moments just as much as I looked forward to the rendezvous with my friends. Not all of my moments were passed alone however and it is with more than a little pride that I could say that I was known to almost every bouncer at the clubs between Saint Michel and Saint Germaine; especially in the bars where they loved to play retro style 70s music of the early disco era, which was just before the talent got trumped by the technology. I would enter and everyone would be sitting; then, courtesy of Mr. Barry White, Mr. George McCrae, The Bee Gees, Earth Wind and Fire, Ms. Donna Summer or KC and the Sunshine Band, the DJ would play a song that held special memories to me. I would do a little dance at the end of which, I would go to bar and have a drink. When I returned to the dance-floor, it would be crowded and everyone would seem to have suddenly become my friend. This scene, although totally unplanned, repeated itself over and over again throughout my stay. At the club 'Chez George' in Saint Germaine upon arriving outside, I would stand at the side while the other patrons, mostly students from around Paris, queued up around the corner; and within a minute or two the bouncer would give me the signal to enter.

Since I first broke loose during the latter half of my teens, my life has mostly been like a merging of that of the two main characters in the novel 'Narcissus and Goldmund' by Herman Hesse. It has been a mixture of what to the objective observer would most likely appear as two extremes; one of intense meditation or introspection, and the other of external self-indulgence. Few however knew that the latter, as it was with my dancing, has been merely an external manifestation of the former. In the early part of my life I looked to former for my salvation and I must say that it has helped keep me well preserved both physically and mentally to-date. However it is my self-indulgent nature, of which I have been half-ashamed for most of my life, which has proved to be my greatest ally, in terms of my self-realization. I can think of no other reason as to why my life has gone in a completely different direction from that of all the contemporaries of my youth and my young adulthood, except that I found a strange sense of satisfaction in giving certain emotional and intellectual inclinations full reign over my being, at the expense of all else. Perhaps it is because I knew that too much self-indulgence in other areas would have led to my demise. As I have successfully managed to study by distance, alone, without any support and without any tuition for four years, after being more or less academically inactive for more than twenty-eight, many credit me with possessing tremendous powers of self-discipline or willpower. However, I credit my success on the ability to perform a certain form of psychological judo, where I was able to channel my rather self-indulgent and sometimes delinquent tendencies, into my love for philosophy, and to a lesser degree, the French language.

In May 2011 my bubble burst in the form of my father suffering a heart-attack. At the same time my mother, having already had two knee replacements, now scheduled for a hip-replacement, and was more or less bed-ridden. This created a tremendous burden upon my siblings who all had families of their own. I had already paid for my return ticket and under normal circumstances would have returned to Paris at the end of the following August in order to try to continue my studies. As it now stood I brought forward my return flight by a week, and

indefinitely postponed any thought of returning to Paris. On my return my day now consisted of household chores, attending to my parents' needs, running various errands which included driving my parents to and from their medical appointments, since I was now the designated driver of the household. During the nights I sang karaoke in order to shake the blues. In a semi-desperate manner I also attended part-time classes in German and Portuguese. After a year there were not enough students in the class to continue the Portuguese so I switched to Spanish. In order to continue my studies in philosophy, I now applied to the Université de Toulouse 2- Le Miral. At the time I was quite aware of the fact that although they had a distance learning programme, one still was obligated to go to France to sit the final exams. However on this occasion they made an exception. When my file had arrived from Paris 8, a jury at the Toulouse 2 decided that all I would have to do in order to gain my Master 1 was to submit my project, which in this instance was the article 'The Analytical Agenda', and cover a certain amount of material, and submit an essay on a course mainly about the link between phenomenology and existentialism, which I subsequently did. The name of this work was 'The Analysis of Experience', and it is yet to be translated into English.

Now I have come to the place where I am forced to write about the most unpleasant experiences relating to my studies. These incidents were not totally unexpected because knowing human nature, and having already had some experience in life, I sort of expected to have such negative experiences sooner or later. The first was caused by the only female lecturer whose classes I attended for the entire semester. She taught a very interesting course entitled 'Democracy and Justice'. The first assignment I did for her was based on an analysis of the novel *The Trial* by Kafka. She laced my paper with red markings and summed up everything with a note to the effect that my poor command of the French language had prevented me from properly presenting my very interesting ideas, and that I should come to her for personal assistance. Seeing that time was at a premium, I knew that I could not afford to play what at the time appeared to me to be an elaborate game of cat and mouse. I continued to attend her lectures, which I found to be quite interesting, and I continued to contribute towards discussions in class, and submit assignments which she refused to mark. Inquires about her from fellow students on campus revealed that she was a rather complicated character to say the least. An undergraduate student told me that she had given him a mark of nine out of twenty on a course and upon his complaining by email about his grade, she changed the mark from a nine to a thirteen: a difference of a whole four points! She finally failed me by giving me a mark of seven out of twenty on the course, but, all things considered I had benefited tremendously philosophically by the classroom discussions, and from working diligently on all the assignments.

The final negative experience with regards to my studies was not unpleasant in the true sense of the word but had certain lasting repercussions which left an indelible impression upon my mind. It was not more unpleasant than two other minor experiences that I had and now wish to just mention. It was not more unpleasant than when another female lecturer with a huge reputation lambasted me in class. She had just finished giving a monologue praising the integration of philosophy into the French education system, and implied that due to this measure, the average French student had a tremendous advantage over students from other parts of the world. I had the

audacity to ask her then why were the French youth as preoccupied as, if not more preoccupied with, fads, fashion and other forms of superficiality when compared with, other students of similar age. Her reproach avoided my question by focusing on its banality. Much to the chagrin and astonishment of the other students in the class, I objected by saying that I thought the issue to be very relevant, but she continued by saying that our purpose was not to occupy ourselves with such trivial matters, but to focus on philosophy. The other minor incident, which I had anticipated, took place towards the end of my stay when I presented myself before the panel to discuss my project for the Master 2. Seeing that I could not do a critique on analytic philosophy, I offered to do a critique of academic philosophy, which was rejected outright as being too general. This I had somewhat expected but I was not prepared for the avarice and scorn of one of the panellists in particular, who was insolent enough to state that what I proposed was not philosophy. I guess in his estimate philosophy is more about writing a hundred pages on a particular historical figure, than actually seeking solutions to the problems of the day. This I also had anticipated would be the case beforehand, but his callous barbs nevertheless found their mark.

This brings me to the final and completely unexpected disappointment that, as I stated before, caused me to look at the whole Paris experience in a completely different light. It occurred with an amiable lecturer who was quite a favourite among the other students. He thought a course of which the main work of study was the book 'The Black Jacobins', which quite fortunately for me, was written by my fellow Trinidadian CLR James. It is a historical and biographical analysis of the Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution. Since, I had never gotten around to reading it, but knew about it and its significance to the Caribbean and the West Indian colonial experience by reputation, I now launched into it with my usual self-indulgent abandon; totally abandoning the other writers whose work were also being considered as I knew absolutely nothing about them, and also lacked the desire to do so. At the end of the course I submitted a paper entitled 'Sugar Cane Culture', in which I attempted to give a brief analysis of the development, or lack of development, of various post-colonial societies in the Caribbean. Upon my enquiry the lecturer told me by email that my piece was very well written and that all I needed to do was to now submit a bibliography, which I subsequently did. Upon my return to Trinidad, I wrote to those that I considered to be my favourite lecturers about the possibility of continuing at the Master 2 level by distance. They both replied stating more or less the same thing. They said that under normal circumstances such was not possible, but if I were persistent, kept in contact with fellow students, and also with the various lecturers, maybe something would work out in the end. However, I did not relish the prospect of being a guinea-pig, and subsequently initiated a transfer to Toulouse 2, which had a structured distance learning programme. Upon communicating my decision to the lecturer in question, he replied by email saying that in spite of my unfortunate decision, he wished me the best, and that he had given me a mark of ten out of twenty in the course. So once again, I was the unfortunate victim of the rather easily wounded French pride. With this final pique I came to certain conclusions about the psychological nature of the French, and their intellectual endeavours, which were not altogether

positive, and, although on the whole my Paris experience was both positive and very rewarding, I wondered if I would ever choose to study there again.

The following year after completing the requirements specified earlier, I obtained a Master 1 from Université de Toulouse 2- Le Miral and, in spite of the fact that I knew that due to my parents' illness, and also taking into account of financial considerations, I would have been in no position to return to France at the end of the academic year to sit my final exams, I then applied to a Master 2. Rather unsuccessfully, I then wrote to my prospective lecturers in a desperate hope that my situation would be given special consideration. Registering as a student gave me the opportunity to cover some of the work and analyze whether I found any of it appealing or relevant. In retrospect, all I am prepared to say for now, is that my inability to return to France may have proven to be a blessing in disguise. It is not necessarily that I would not have been successful in my studies; but towards what end? Being already an outsider, it has never been my intention to carve out a niche for myself in the ivory-tower that is academic philosophy, but instead to try to bridge the widening gap between academic philosophy and the rest of society by being 'a part' of academia, while at the same time being 'apart' from academia. My dilemma, and that of all those who have chosen a similar path, is that to preserve one's integrity and autonomy, and yet maintain a healthy relationship with academia, continues to be a very demanding, if not downright impossible task.

In September 2012, an article that I had written in the early part of 2010, just before taking the final exams for my BA, was published in a leading international philosophy magazine. I had also set up a blog, which contained all the essays that I had English versions of, to-date. In May 2013 my father passed away, just one day after his 79th birthday. While this was a hard blow it freed up my time a bit because instead of having to attend to needs of both parents, I now had to focus only on my mother. She now needed me more than ever though, as since my return to Trinidad, she had had a hip replacement, and the first knee-replacement had to be repaired. The improvements due to the operation did not last however, and she was now totally and permanently restricted to the bed. This seemed somewhat strange to the outside observer because, in spite of being overweight, she otherwise seemed relatively robust for her age. Taking the restrictions of my situation into consideration, I now had to make some decisions about whatever was left of my future. The only thing that I was certain of is that due to my commitments, whatever job I now did would have to be part-time. Almost by accident I fell into teaching a class in linguistics, a subject which I knew at the time I was not qualified to teach. In August 2007 the travel bug had hit me hard and so, as an excuse to travel, I had taken a 5 week intensive course in Teaching English as Foreign Language, in an isolated but quite beautiful village called Mauzac, in the south of France. Based on the certificate gained from his course, which I had not used to-date, an acquaintance, who ran a private school approached me to teach a course to students and young professionals who desired to, or were already earning a living, teaching English to non-English speakers. My first impulse was to refuse, but when I considered the manner in which I had used the Internet to study for my BA, I decided to give it a try. My plan was to act more as a facilitator, than as a lecturer. For 6 months, I would download short articles from experts in the field, which I then sent to my 5 students. We would then discuss

these articles, which often conflicted with each other, during our Saturday morning class. Just before the end of the course I also started teaching Spanish speaking students from Venezuela, English at the same private instruction. Since so far I have not lost any students, and everyone involved seems to-date to be satisfied, I guess I must be doing something right. Connecting my studies in philosophy to my new found interest in linguistics and language-learning, it is very interesting to see how the materialism of the analytic philosophical tradition, has seeped into linguistic theory and language learning, through the works of Stephen Krashen and Norm Chomsky.

As I conclude this essay my life consists of attending to the needs of my mother, teaching English to Venezuelan students part-time, jogging and meditating a few times a week, and singing karaoke and occasionally dancing salsa on weekends. Beers and rum have always been, and are still part of my weekend routine. In this part of the world however, wine is a bit too expensive to be a regular part of my diet. If I could get the occasional article published, then that would be great. Meanwhile I have applied to the UWI (University of the West Indies) to do a 2 year postgraduate diploma in TESOL (Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) part-time. If successful I would have the option of studying for an additional year in order to convert this diploma into a MA. So, 4 years after retiring as a computer programmer in the Public Service, I seem well on my way to developing a second career.

Who knows where the future leads. If successful in my new endeavours I would be able someday to live anywhere in the world that my self-indulgent self chooses. Recently I had a strange but beautiful dream. In the dream I knew that I had died and was speaking to a former co-worker with whom I had worked with for more than 25 years, and who had recently passed on. She was wearing a light blue dress and seemed a bit depressed. I was giving her a pep-talk on the advantages of being dead. One advantage, of which I was now taking full advantage, was the ability to fly. After flying around for a while just revelling in my freedom, I began to get heavy and flying became more difficult. A golden eagle came to my rescue and I mounted its back. While were heading to the top of a green mountain I saw a friend whom I had known since she was in high-school, and I an adult of about 37 years. She was riding a black eagle in the same direction. She was now around the same age that I had been when I first met her, still single, and living aboard. I originally passed her but then turned around to speak to her. I explained to that I had died. She asked me about my family, which I now thought about for the first time. A sudden sadness then descended upon me and I awakened. I don't know what goals I may accomplish in the future, and perhaps, apart from what I can do for others, my life is over. However, I'd now like to think that my family consists of not only those to whom I may be related by blood, but also to all who have had the privilege, to suffer the human condition.

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