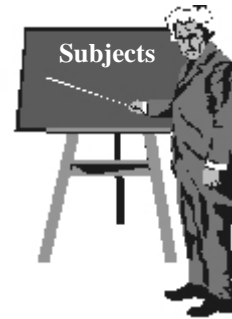


*Concepts & Cameos*  
A Page Or Two Of Philosophy



Schools For Tough Times  
Flying Over The Cuckoos Nest  
The Pragmatists  
Freedom  
Galileo

Check  
Codes

BRUCE CAMERON

## Concepts & Cameos A Page Or Two Of Philosophy



*When your back's against  
the wall, you need -  
The Schools For Tough  
Times*

Things were never the same after Aristotle died. The downside was the loss of focus upon the big, universal questions raised by the Greek masters. The upside was the new focus upon the individual; not so much how the world was made, but how to make it in a world that had gone to pot. This new orientation was the result of the decay of the Greek state. The collapse of stable government left life in the city-states less stable than it had been. Moreover, life had become more cosmopolitan. Nations were commingling in Greece, and any concept of what was the good life had to meet the outlook of more than Athenians. Schools in philosophy emerged to deal with this.

S.1.7.



The Stoics said: ***soldier on daily***. Zeno of Citium (334-252 BC) advocated a stiff-upper-lip response to adversity. If it's beyond our control to prevent, play the cards you've been dealt and keep a poker-face.

The Cynics said: ***drop out occasionally***. Diogenes (412-323 BC) was a "drop-out" who tried to beat a troubled world by renouncing it. He went overboard, flouting social conventions with fanatical behaviour, but occasional withdrawals from the worrisome world is good management.

The Sceptics said: ***think life through critically***, Pyrrho (365-270 BC) pulled up traditions by their roots before he let them be re-planted in his mind. Antiquity is not authority, and no "truth" is absolute.

The Epicureans said: ***make whoopee frequently***. Epicurus (341-270 BC) held for pleasure as the chief good, not merely in terms of "feel good" *intensity*, but pleasures with *duration*, like friendship.

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### On Flying Over The Cuckoos Nest

The Cuckoo is a parasite, laying its eggs in another bird's nest, and as such illustrates the bullied, brainwashing, badgering of beliefs imposed upon the human mind by traditions - religious, political or lifestyle. The female visits the nest of other birds - the pipit, warbler or robin - and noting the eggs which colour-march hers, replaces them with her own . This parasitic habit suggests the parental-priestly sin of introjecting beliefs and behaviour patterns *in such a manner as does not encourage the recipient to think for themselves*. There is a world of difference between guiding a mind and gripping it, of offering a point of view and obligating its acceptance. By their very nature, fundamentalisms are cuckoo.

S.2.7.



So, what has this to do with an appropriate approach to Philosophy; to maintaining the spirit of the discipline? One has to



fly over the cuckoos nest to freedom of thought. J. L. Christian observes -

*Philosophy is for those  
who are willing to be disturbed  
with a creative disturbance .*

*Philosophy is for those  
who still have the capacity  
for wonder.*

To carry this analogy to its completion, it must be acknowledged with proper respect, that certain types of mentality find in the cuckoos nest a restful place to live. Allowing, even applying to institutions of alleged authority to do their thinking for them on the big issues of life and death, is a legitimate option. There is nothing patronising in that observation. ***They may, in fact, be right!*** But, in the case, say, of religion, Bishop Spong was on the money to say - ***the heart cannot worship what the mind rejects.***

## Concepts & Cameos A Page Or Two Of Philosophy



### ACTIVIST SCHOOLS 2.The Pragmatists



#### The cash value of ideas

Does God exist? Is history his story? Is reality a manifestation of the absolute mind of God? These and similar notions had occupied German philosophical idealism throughout the 19th century, and brought a "Damn the Absolute!" response from America's William James. If not in detail but in direction, James agreed with Marx, philosophers should deal with the bread-and-butter issues of human existence. Philosophy should work at solving the pressing problems of human life.

S.3.7.



**pragmatism:** a philosophy by C.S.Peirce (1839-1914) interpreted by James and Dewey that belief and behaviour are to be judged by practical consequences. The pragmatic truth-and-value test developed mainly by James claims it is true if it works; it is right if it works, i.e., brings about *desirable* results. To impress his notion James adopted the term "cash value", i.e., like cash in the hand in contrast to a speculative investment, philosophical concepts should be evaluated in terms of their practical consequences. However, desirable results can also be of an immaterial nature. Immortality cannot be truth-tested on pragmatic grounds because that "event" cannot be factually checked out as a human experience. So, is it untrue? No. A correspondence test of truth may show the idea "works", in that belief in immortality can produce a desirable result, viz., the attitude of hope.

## Concepts & Cameos A Page Or Two Of Philosophy



### FREEDOM

*I'm as free as the breeze,  
Flying high in the trees.  
I can live as I please.  
Open road, open skies.*

Is he having himself on? Unfortunately, yes. He *feels* free

but he isn't free. There is a distinction between feeling free and being free. E.g.,

As a guest at a luncheon in a piano bar, a gifted pianist receives a post-hypnotic suggestion that during the luncheon he will walk to the piano and play the National Anthem. It happened exactly as programmed. Is it fair to say he only *felt* free, but the event was in fact predetermined and as such outside his free will? He felt free but wasn't free

A concept of freedom results from this story. It is becoming aware of the elements of unconscious bondage in our human make-up, and learning to be free of them. For had the pianist known he was to be hypnotised, he could have chosen not to perform or to play Waltzing Matilda.

S.4.7.



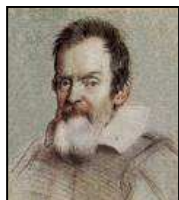
We can be free only to the extent that we know how we are predetermined. Only then are we free to undo what has been done to us. By "God" or a goddess? Religious people have a concept of a God who both presides and provides their affairs of life. Freedom may involve getting free of this "God" because this "God" may be a concept of mere religious tradition rather than of reality. Freedom may also involve staying one step ahead of the goddess of fortune.

"She was to be found on the back of many Roman coins, holding a cornucopia in one hand and a rudder in the other. ... The cornucopia was a symbol of her power to bestow favours, the rudder a symbol of her more sinister power to change destinies. She could scatter gifts, then with terrifying speed shift the rudder's course, maintaining an imperturbable smile as she watched us choke to death on a fishbone or disappear in a landslide".

(Alain de Botton). Only by knowing the odds can we throw the dice of determination to be free



## Concepts & Cameos A Page Or Two Of Philosophy



**GALILEO GALILEI**  
(1564-1642 AD)

This great thinker excelled as a scholar from childhood, and upon his graduation from the University of Pisa, taught Maths and Physics for 18 years at the University of Padua. Affirming that the sun stands motionless at the centre of the universe, the earth rotating around it daily, put him on a collision course with the Office of the Inquisition within the Catholic Church of his time. His books were banned, and he was tried for heresy on June 21st., 1633. Pragmatically, Galileo filled in the confession formula provided for the occasion, to wit: "I, Galileo Galilei .. abjure, curse and detest the aforesaid errors". It was a whopper to beat the chopper (wise man), and exemplifies two realities worth noting

S.5.7.



Not that we need the emphasis because it is still with us today, it highlights the fascist mentality of religious fundamentalism. Webster's Dictionary defines fascism as "any centralised system of government which exercises absolute control ... imposes strict censorship and suppresses all opposition". Comparatively, religious fundamentalism in any of its forms, manifests a fixed unalterable non-negotiable dogma in a mentality engrossed with notions of truth considered absolute, thereby denying intellectual freedom of thought. There is probably nothing more opposed to the "spirit and power of philosophy". However, after his trial Galileo completed a giant scientific opus which was smuggled to Holland and duly published in 1638. This work is said to have laid the foundation for modern Physics, and clearly demonstrates that truth cannot and will never be suppressed by ignorance.