Clive Walter Ingram Pearson: Australasia's own Existentialist.

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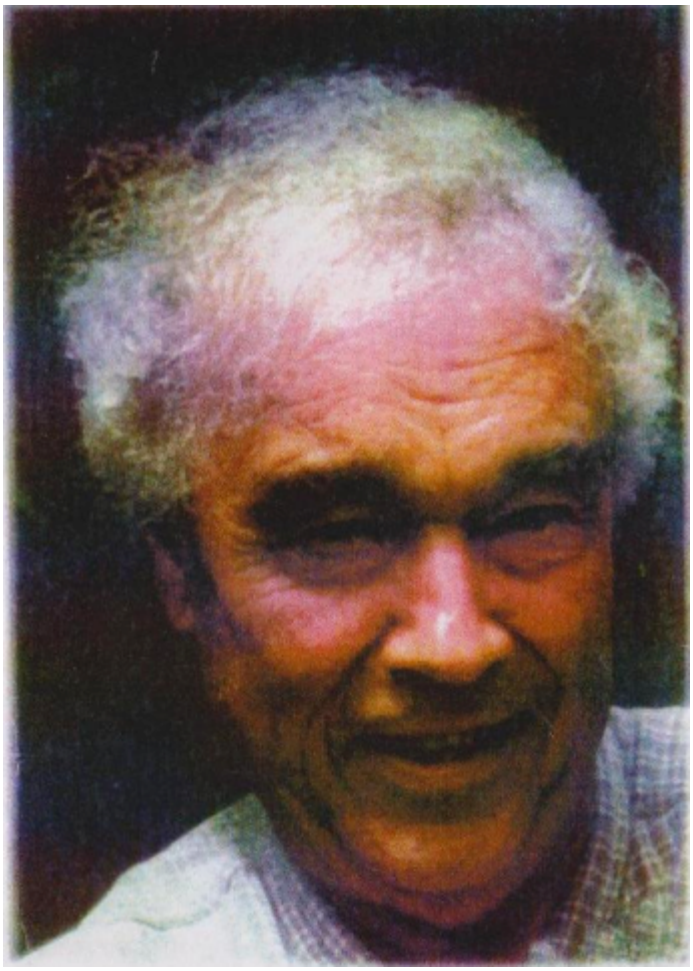

Clive Walter Ingram Pearson

"My first recollection of Clive was as a senior high school student when he gave a lecture which I found inspirational" (Dr John Hinchcliff, Emeritus Vice Chancellor, AUT University, 2012.)

Clive Walter Ingram Pearson (16-02-30 to 10-01-06), or Clive Pearson as he was more affectionately known by his many students and by his University of Auckland colleagues, was a very popular Senior Lecturer of Philosophy who – because of his consistent, lifelong, personable and personalized teaching style ("One of my colleagues recalls Clive's stock invitation to students: 'Why don't you come up and see me sometime?'" (John Bishop, Head of Philosophy Department, 2006) and purported non-mainstream teaching interests – tended to polarize so-called 'academic', 'language' or 'ivory tower' philosophers, who found him of such concern that an investigating tribunal sub-committee was set up during his tenure there (in 1975) to discern the then schisms in the Philosophy Department at Auckland, and centering largely on him. While, some later recall him as having, "an anti-establishment leaning, and a provocative manner that was not always appreciated by his colleagues," (Jeffrey Malpas, *The Antipodean Philosopher,* 2011) I believe he was misrepresented by those in the department who had no empathy for his philosophical stance.

For Clive Pearson was first and foremost an (Australasian) Existentialist with a strong grounding in, firstly Greek philosophers such as Parmenides and Heraclitus, and therefore as collateral, Phenomenology and (philosophy of) religion, including, for example, writers such as Alan Watts, along with his deep comprehension of Christian dogma: an approach he nominated as 'fundamental ontology', and based directly on the later works of Martin Heidegger. This placed him firmly inside the 'Continental' school.

Indeed, Dr John Bishop, then Head of Department, stresses: "He was, I think, the first person in the Auckland Philosophy Department to teach courses in Existentialism and 'Continental' Philosophy."

Given that more recently there has been some rapprochement between the so-called 'Analytic' and "Continental' zones of what constitutes philosophy, as for

example via ‘Speculative Realism’, it remains the former which still dominates in the Anglo-American world: “In the U.S *all* the leading state research universities, *all* the University of California campuses, most of the top liberal arts colleges, most of the flagship campuses of the second-tier state research universities boast philosophy departments that *overwhelmingly* self-identify as “analytic” (Brian Leiter, online, 2011.) The situation is similar within the U.K. among those philosophy departments still extant i.e. not closed, slated for closure or reduction - given that there are some exceptions such as Warwick - although Bishop (ibid) expressed his belief that, as regards the Philosophy Department in Auckland: “We have, I believe, transcended the ideological factional conflict of the past.”

I will not write at length here as regards the at times nebulous differences between these two poles, except to quote Gary Gutting from 2012 (online): “The distinction between analytic and continental philosophers seems odd, first of all, because it contrasts a geographical characterization (philosophy done on the European continent) with a methodological one (philosophy done by analyzing concepts…[with] the goals of clarity, precision, and logical rigor.” There have also been two precise pieces in *Philosophy Now,* by Mike Fuller in 1993, and by Kile Jones in 2009, and I refer readers to these for further delineations. Suffice to say, that anyone bold enough to continuously and skeptically question the tenets of academic philosophy and instead to be far more focused on what Leiter calls: “concerns more interested in actual political and cultural issues and loosely speaking the human situation and its ‘meaning” – particularly in New Zealand’s stifling Anglophile philosophical climate of the 1970s – was always going to be considered a threat, as anti-authoritarian, as somehow subversive - especially if, God forbid, he was also attracting students to his classes. As Sinnerbrink and Russell sum up as regards Clive’s special teaching style, “Pearson…is remembered as a particularly inspiring teacher, often forbidding note-taking (essential points would be dictated at the end of class) to encourage students to think and formulate opinions through considered debate” (*Black Swan: a History of Continental Philosophy in Australia and New Zealand*, 2014.)

Pearson was and remains an important philosopher, then, not only because of his written work, manifestly his seminal and original *The Laws of Appearance* (1992), to which I will return further on, but more especially because of this laconic yet influential approach to what Philosophy should be, what it should concentrate on.

Pearson epitomized then and still does today – via his many acolytes and distinguished ex-students such as Dr Jeff Malpas, now at the University of Tasmania, and Dr Carl Page, now at St. John's College, Maryland - philosophy not as a scurry toward publication in academic journals (although he – particularly early in his career was so published frequently, as for example in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* and *The Review of Metaphysics,* up until 1972, when his pamphlet *Worldhood* was published), but as an ongoing discourse with life per se, an examination of what it meant to exist, to be, more, what it meant to be human in the cosmos. His was an approach revolving around conversation, questioning, discussions with Being – all leading to praxis or an improvement in one's life on a diurnal basis.

Dougal Blyth, Senior Lecturer, Department of Classics at the University of Auckland, spoke of this factor very eloquently at Pearson's funeral: "He was a philosopher, in the true sense of the word, a genuine lover of wisdom, and only in a secondary sense an academic...his authentic embodiment of the philosophic spirit…his regard for human understanding as the sine qua non of the good life."

Such is his continued significance in 2016, at a time when philosophical schisms between 'European' on the one hand and analytical (language) approaches on the other, between philosophy as practise and philosophy as pedantry, continue – especially in the English-speaking community. As Professor Dr Julian Young, a longtime teaching colleague of Pearson at Auckland and also now at Wake Forest University, states: "It's dreadful that the same culture wars persist to this day in philosophy." His relevance, then, is palpably more now than in the 25 years or so he taught at Auckland, particularly when we review what happened in his Philosophy Department because of such schisms. However, before a further examination of Pearson's teaching style and his idiosyncratic metaphysics and the concomitant investigation into the Department, I want to make some reference to his background.

Pearson was Brisbane, Australian born and attended the University of Queensland, majoring in what can only be described advanced religious existentialism: his Masters thesis was entitled *The idea of God in the philosophy of Spinoza*, while his doctorate was entitled *Existence and reality: essay on method directed at the vindication of the Traditional Christian metaphysics as a*

valid attempt to designate the meaning of reality – a theme he maintained throughout his life. He also trained as a Methodist minister, although, true to his quick humour, he claimed later on that: “I gave up the Methodist ministry because I couldn’t see over the pulpit and here I am still struggling to see you all,” as he stood behind a sizeable lectern. He was somewhat short in physical stature, but very tall-standing as regards his empathetic drollness. He came to Aotearoa-New Zealand in 1959 and entrenched himself way up the university clock tower: his office was only reached by a steep clamber up many stairs via an ever-diminishing stairwell: Pearson remained an archetypal Outsider figure, and indeed I well recall discussing Colin Wilson with him on more than occasion. Only in this sense was he ever an ivory tower academic!

During the 1950s Pearson had also voyaged to Heidelberg to see Martin Heidegger in situ, and one of his (many) stories revolved around his surprise at seeing only one book on Heidegger’s shelves: a collection of poems by Holderlin.

Pearson did not ‘invent’ his relaxed and questioning teaching style as he matured as a teacher; this was a direct externalization of his overall character: concerned, straightforward, open. Sue Dick, a student from the early 1970s, recalls: “The main thing I remember about his class was his lecture(s) on ‘religious experience’, I remember that I had an epiphany in class that day – came out and felt that I had been ‘touched’ by an experience beyond the usual. I found all his lectures totally absorbing.”

John McEwan – at the time a tutor within the Department - recalls: “There are men who make an impact on your life with their challenge to critical but also very human thinking, and Clive was a man I will always be grateful to for that.”

Jeff Malpas, a Ph. D student of Pearson’s and later a Humboldt Scholar sums up: “At Auckland I had some very influential teachers. One was Clive Pearson, an inspiring and provocative figure who introduced me to Heidegger,” (*Interview with Jeffrey Malpas*, online, 2009), who also elsewhere characterized Pearson positively with, “Clive was a wonderful teacher, but an idiosyncratic one, and he also had an impish sense of humour,” (*The Antipodean Philosopher*, 2011), while Dougal Blyth consolidates this: “To be in one of Clive’s classes was an exhilarating, challenging and utterly intelligence – and life-affirming experience for

any student who was serious about the possibility of wisdom."

Geoffrey Sheehan was at the forefront of philosophy student activism during the 1970s. He recalls: "My main memory of Pearson is how effective he was in generating discussion in class. There was always the sense that he was living the philosophical issues that dominated his thinking, and that he wanted to share his thinking with us. There was nothing dogmatic in this approach; he would listen carefully, and carefully respond to our meagre suggestions. I remember his basic starting point: 'Being is; non-being is not,' and his appeals to the pre-Socratic philosophers. He attempted to steer us through the implications of such statements. I sensed with him a kinship to Zen Buddhism and its enigmatic koans - the same wish for enlightenment. This sense of philosophy as a search, a journey, was not something evident in any other member of the department."

The accolades continue. Professor Emeritus Dr Roger Horrocks recalled to me in 2014, the following, "Determined to major in Philosophy, I enrolled in the University of Auckland department in 1960. After two years, I was so disillusioned that I switched my major to English. The department in those days was…dominated by conservative forms of Christianity…The one bright spot each week in the second year was a lecture from Clive Pearson…His introduction to the early Greek philosophers generated genuine intellectual excitement. I didn't get to know Dr Pearson well, and I only wish I had been aware of his amazing background (such as his interest in Heidegger.) There was a rumour in our class that he would take off each weekend in a boat, alone at sea so that he could meditate on the ideas of Heraclitus and Parmenides. I have no idea whether this was a fact or a myth, but it fitted my image of him…I do remember him with the warmest affection as an inspiring influence."

And also Professor Laurence Simmons, in 2016 points out, "I was one of a group of students completing a major in a Romance language (in my case Italian) who gravitated to Clive after taking a large Stage 1 course on religion with him. His sense of humour, lack of dogma in a course on religion, provocative irreverence towards the University administration, and the loyalty of his tutors who worked with him stood out…Naturally as European language and literature students, we had a propensity for Continental Philosophy and staked out our ground in the

ideological divide between Analytic and Continental philosophy that then poisoned the Department. But the overpowering hegemonic presence of Analytic Philosophy and Logic turned us off majoring in the Philosophy Department…

The course I most remember was a stage 3 course on Existentialism and Heidegger with strong references to the pre-Socratics. I had to get a dispensation to take this course since I had not done enough logic in my undergraduate degree. There were moments of long, at times almost painful silence, in Clive's classes when we were asked to think about a ‘problem’. Surprisingly, this was an incredibly effective way of generating class discussion and Clive had a way of turning even the most banal comment you might make into something productive. We were not allowed to take notes during class and at the end Clive would dictate 5-10 sentences that he felt covered the main points of each session. Note-taking was a potential distraction from the hard work of thinking. And he taught us that thinking was ‘hard’, but that it was so because the ideas were not simply ‘academic’ but ones that we also, on his model, had to 'live'.

On frequent invitation, we would trudge up to Clive's office at the top of the University Clocktower, clambering up a narrow stairwell for the last part. Some how it seemed right that the least ‘ivory tower’ of our professors was at the top of the tower and this was also the place where the most ‘lofty’ philosopher Heidegger ‘resided’. My later interest in and commentary on the work of Jacques Derrida I attribute entirely to Clive Pearson’s inspirational teaching.”

Even Pearson’s ‘opposition’ – if you will – during his tenure there, now grant: “But many did find him an engaging teacher – he had something of the ‘guru’ about him” – this from Dr Robert Nola in 2012, Professor at Auckland today, and part of the then “analytic ascendancy [who] had no sympathy for Clive or his type of philosophy”, to quote from Julian Young who – in a huge irony – himself became an ardent Heideggerean and is acknowledged as a leading scholar of Heidegger today. Indeed, Young was to write in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1998, as he changed tack as regards his entire approach – partly attributable to men like Pearson: “The Continental tradition contains most of the great, truly synoptic, European thought of the past 200 years.”

Because Pearson was Pearson, a man who showed, to quote Blyth once more,

an: “almost complete disdain [he] sometimes seemed to regard scholarship” and who was more concerned with Heraclitus and Parmenides than Wilfrid Sellars and Gilbert Ryle – just to nominate two favourites among the then ‘academic ascendancy’ – he was seen as a thorn-in-the-side by the powers-that-be within the department, and indeed there developed a major split in its ranks between Pearson and Bernard Pflaum (who reached Aotearoa-New Zealand from Austria in 1949) and many tutors and students on the one hand (given that Pearson played a passive role throughout), and a majority of academic English ‘language analysis’ staff members (or what Pflaum himself described as “the Oxford-based brainwashing machine” in *Craccum* in1976, at the height of this kerfuffle) on the other.

Ironically again, prominent Existentialist philosophers such as Robert C. ‘Bob’ Solomon were also at the time visiting teachers at the University, as invited by this dominant academic body: “Solomon was clearly a guest of the "others…," as Carl Page (2012) recalls, while Malpas hones this aspect: “…there was some tension mainly because, as I understand it, Bob was brought in partly to provide an alternative to Clive... I certainly don’t think that Clive and Bob had much to do with one another” (private email, 2012.) Elsewhere, Malpas notes, “Bob was very important in Auckland and, partly because of the rift that had developed there between the analytic and European sides of the Department, or more particularly, between Hugh Montgomery [HOD] and Clive Pearson…Bob’s presence assisted in Clive’s marginalisation…” (*Antipodean Philosopher,* 2011.)

Such was the depth of this split that several letters and columns were scribed for the main campus newspaper, *Craccum*, at the time. One such was entitled *The Poverty of Philosophy* by Dave Hoskins and Sheehan, Masters students at that stage. They asked, in 1973, if: “Does the philosophy department at Auckland University attempt to give a full account of both the Analytical and European traditions?…We think not. It seems that philosophy, here, envelopes only that which can be defined in analytical terms; that which falls beyond this seemingly arbitrary line becomes ‘non-sensical. Philosophy cannot, in other words, be an interpretation of all philosophy, past and present, in terms of the language and concepts of **ONE** school.”[Their stress.]

What followed in 1975 was a bit of a witch-hunt. A university wide sub-committee

was formed and investigated the teaching, examining and staff relations in the University of Auckland Philosophy Department – and it reported back in February, 1976. Malpas best summarizes this entire sorry affair (which causes us to reflect on the relevancies for today's continued rifts in academia, and philosophy in particular, worldwide: Derrida and Cambridge University in 1992 is a distinct echo here, as is the University of Sydney Philosophy department rift-fiasco of 1972.)

In a recent interview (ibid, 2011) he, Malpas, stated: "The combination of Clive's somewhat charismatic personality with his liking for Heidegger led – given the analytic tendencies that had developed in the Department – to an official inquiry being mounted into his teaching. The inquiry was not favourable to Clive, and one result was that certain restrictions were placed on his teaching" (although somewhat ironically, Pearson was then able - to a degree - concentrate on his specialities and ended up having bigger graduate classes than he had ever had previously.) Another result was the sacking of several tutors who sided with the tenets of Continental Philosophy and Pearson. They included John McEwan.

What now follows is the sub-committee's 1976 summation as to what philosophy 'should be' at the University of Auckland: "Some students have enrolled in Philosophy with a rather different expectation, perhaps anticipating more emphasis on solving the problems of human existence, or even their own personal problems. It is important that students should be given a clearer perception of the purpose of a University Philosophy Department, and this should be addressed in the Departmental hand-out…An emphasis on **academic rigour**, the sub-committee believes, should apply irrespective of the content of the courses available. Staff should point up the notion that philosophy is an **intellectual discipline**." [My stress.] 'Fundamental ontology' it would seem, was just too vague and irrelevant, whilst philosophy as somehow meaningful and relevant to 'everyday life' was just not on the agenda!

Pflaum (ibid) ridiculed such a summation: "The so-called rigourism upon which the committee put such stress is commendable, but one must beware lest this rigourism change into *rigor mortis.*" Pearson remained his quiet self.

Quintessentially then, what happened was a coup d'etat. Writes McEwan: "Clive had too much dignity to make too open a fuss with students, but we could all tell

that he was suffering from pain as a result of the concerted attacks by the logicians", while Julian Young in 2012 laments when speaking of Pearson and the sub-committee 'investigation': "Later, I became appalled at the way he was persecuted by that same ascendancy – that had a lot to do with my own movement towards continental philosophy…It's all a very unhappy time that I don't like to think about too much." As for Carl Page's own reflections about this time, what stood out in 2012 was his own anger at a certain (here unnamed) 'academic' staff member: "…I shall never forgive him his rotten conduct in what you refer to as those "tumultuous years" (private email, 2012.)

Bishop (ibid) himself also expressed a later telling re-appraisal of Pearson from his own personal experiences: "Clive used to insist, following Paul Tillich, that anyone who says that God exists is an atheist. Now I used to dismiss this…but now I understand the point, and can appreciate its merit – namely, that to say that God exists risks reducing the divine to a thing on the same level as other existents, when the divine ought better be identified somehow with Being itself…So, although I didn't listen to him back in the 1980s, in fact Clive did have a significant impact on the development of my thinking…and I do regret that, having lost touch with him rather since he left the Department, I never had the opportunity to tell him so before now."

Pearson retired early 1988 and had several long spells of depression and serious illness thereafter. I kept in touch with him and later encountered him at his home in Takapuna, Auckland during the early 1990s. There I obtained his *Laws of Appearances*, and it is this important treatise – written in the form of a movie - "produced on the model of a cinema script and directed towards a philosophy of time and consciousness" - that I will now pay some closer attention too. For this later book further establishes Clive Pearson as a vital 'fundamental ontologist', fully deserving of much more attention worldwide, not only in the pages of academic philosophy journals, and not 'merely' because he was a somewhat sacrificial symbol of what I will term as 'Cosmological Metaphysics' – as opposed to 'continental' - and of what can happen within university (philosophy) departments even now, in 2016, whereby too much analysis leads to a form of academic anemia.

The Laws of Appearance:

The entire book summarizes most pithily Pearson's philosophy, whereby he makes a final accordance with God, inasmuch as: "the truth transcends personal identity" (Blyth, 2006.) Written as a set of aphorisms qua film-script enumerations and as styled also on the taut lines of Ancient Greek writers such as Heraclitus, whom he was often wont to cite, Pearson concretizes seemingly abstract terminology in an endeavor to nail home direct how-to-live-in-the-everyday-world home truths.

John Keene, another ex-student of Pearson's, as well as being president of Philsoc in the late 1960s - which in itself meant calling on Pearson in times of arranging speakers, "Clive always helped out in these crises and invariably had a different view from the establishment. Which he pursued with vigour and very good humour" - sums up his own insights into the book. " I must confess to having been quite impressed by it. I described it as the best piece of 'synthetic' (as distinct from analytic) philosophy since Spinoza. Which includes the *Tractatus* and Whitehead's *Process and Reality*. I particularly like the way he integrated the various issues I saw him wrestling with – personal identity, ethics, ontology, time, logic, theology, epistemology – into a more or less coherent view of the world" (private email, 2015.)

Let me then state what Pearson is expostulating in this mystical-philosophic tome. I do not use the term 'mystical' lightly here, either for – after Heidegger, who himself has been classed as a bona fide mystic ("the later Heidegger is essentially a philosopher of mysticism" wrote Fuller in 1993) – Pearson too had what can only be termed a mystical insight into what constitutes Da-sein and Being per se. Like Heidegger, Pearson instinctively felt that: "Every human being has an instinctual notion of Being and a drive to experience the Truth of Being" (Jeff Guilford, *Explorations,* 2011; see also John Caputo, 2006.)

Pearson concentrates here on: "a rigorous description of everyday [Husserlian] phenomena" (Gutting), as opposed, if you will, to any: "logical analysis of concepts or language"(ibid.) Indeed 'traditional' concepts and evisceration of language terminology can never come close to articulating what Pearson is concerned to delineate. Guilford writes further about: "the impotence of

conceptual thought in bringing the individual into contact with the Ultimate", for as Heidegger himself also nominated in his *Letter on Humanism* (1949): "there is a thinking more rigorous than the conceptual." Heidegger again: "[it] is not a matter of indulging in a special sort of profundity and of building complicated concepts; rather, it is concealed in the step back that lets thinking enter into a questioning that experiences" (ibid.) This experiencing, for Pearson also, is a reflective and receptive exploration beneath and beyond and into*: "experience* that penetrates beneath the veneer of common sense and science experience" (Gutting), the latter of which in fact could only ever be based on such fundamental knowledge.

For those readers who still cannot quite grip his parameters, let me here quote in full Pearson's Acknowledgement from *The Laws of Appearance*, to emphasize his own epiphanic stimulus:

This writing records an attempt to think the thought of Being in an original form.
- *namely, according to the way in which Being* Appears.

The term "original" does not signify that there is anything new in this thinking
- *indeed, completely to the contrary.*

The original is the oldest of all
- *it belongs to the origin or the beginnings.*

In any case our thoughts are like our children
- *they come, not* from *us, but* through *us.*

Our thoughts make their Appearances in the same way as everything else
- *they arise out of the transcendent and mysterious ground in which all things have their origin.*

This manner of their Appearance is what the author wishes above all to acknowledge concerning his own thoughts.
- *and he does so by the inclusion of the term "per" before his name on the title page.*

The Laws of Appearance, then, is a gift to us, manifested through the corpus of

Clive Pearson:

For him:

- The laws of appearance are not immediately cognizable, and yet, when so cognized, transcend any “conventional world-view.” Indeed, they actually “defy” this world-view. They are observable, as well as confirmed or “justified by insight.” All phenomena are governed by these laws of what is “made manifest” – thus appearances - most especially human beings in relation to the transcendent.
- Appearances correspond to a light-derived reality: like the latter they *illuminate* reality. They are formal signs, which are the ground of truth and as such, they: “are the grounds of knowledge as well as of being.” Yet they are also intentions, thus they consist of a complex subject-object totality. There can be no independent subject or object.
- Given that such appearances are indeed states of subjective awareness of objects, they are also certifiers of identity onto both subject and object, thus they reveal the many *forms* of consciousness itself (“the one and only mode of Being”) as a synthesis of both poles. These are, then, “states of *self-awareness*.*”*
- Following this, the “finite exemplar of all the complex forms of consciousness” is the “human person.”
- Appearances, then, are sources of radiance like light or heat, and are also governed by time, temporality, change; ranging “over both the actual and the possible”, and thus they also make manifest “the absolute (and therefore eternity) itself”, in contrast to “the temporal and relative.” Appearances continue as eternal activities inside time itself.
- Everything revealed is “identifiable” via this intrinsic radiance of appearances, given that constant change does not repudiate the identity. Once identified, facts are transformed to “cognitive data.” Appearances, by further extension, “allow everything its place” or space, as given by time “along with things themselves.”
- Appearances, then, as well as being “bearers of meaning and truth” also allow for the assertion of such truth(s). They therefore: “encapsulate…perception, imagination and emotion”, all of which are meaning inducing. Truth is quantifiable according to facts and therefore to

meaning(s) as becoming unceasingly uncovered.

- Such appearances inherently oblige humans to activate moral choices and responsibilities and as such: “encompass the phenomenon of conscience”, and thus human freedoms, in concord with: “(divinely established) moral imperatives.” Love and duty and – more significantly – human freedom are further phenomena encompassed by appearances.
- Being therefore paradoxical in nature, appearances reflect also the: “mystery of the divine” (God) and – ultimately – “(re) present the titanic cosmic drama, namely, concerning the reconciliation of man and God”, because humans too, have a: “sacred responsibility – for [the human being] is the medium through whom God is known.” Human conscience inevitably and ceaselessly comes into play.

This is the intense and ekphrastic, eschatological and pantheistic philosophical vision of Clive W I Pearson. A tragedy of modern ‘Western’ philosophy is that this somewhat isolated natural philosopher, after spending years ruminating high in a university clock tower, later set it down at his home, well after after his own ‘philosophic’ peers had formally disavowed and ignored what he had always been compelled to say.

From this, I suggest, then, that philosophers re-assess far more rigorously the very essence of their craft - openly, unselfishly, relevantly – so as to avoid such transgressions of what Philosophy is, what Philosophers necessarily should be, what they might be saying. Such a process may well save it from hermaphroditic oblivion and restore credit to those who suffered from its myopic, over-analytic Gaze.

Such an individual in this case being Clive Pearson, Australasia’s very own and perhaps first Existentialist philosopher, who is more than fully deserving of re-establishment, recognition and respect.

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The Laws of Appearance

a treatise on the phenomenon of being

produced
on the model of a cinema script

and

directed
towards a philosophy of time and consciousness

(per) Clive Ingram Pearson

Lawa'ih Publishers