

Talk

We can start from many directions. From science, Einstein's work, or Newton's. We can start from Buddhism, or the religions of the West, severally or taken together. From laughter, or sports, or film marketing, or cancer chemotherapeutics. We can even start with torture. All are needed, but any one direction will give keys to all.

Aristotle advised to begin at the beginning. The beginning was a swimming pool at noon on a bright mid-summer day.

And it began with what became the preface to my first philosophical work, *Considerations On the Nature of Things* (1986):

Mark Fidrych, the pitcher, with bases loaded and the game in the balance, calmed his nerves with thoughts of universal death, in 10 or 20 billion years.

Shakespeare, and more clearly still Sakyamuni, discerned that, if all is time, and time is change, neither time nor change could be what they appear, could be anything at all. The world of the Western God, seen from on high, as of the Buddha, seen from anywhere, is a world without concepts. In such a world, from such a perspective, disease, old age, and death find resolution.

But this surely is our world too. And so the question returns: What is time?

Philosophy has no ulterior motives. It's not here to build bridges, or bring consolation. But only to seek the incontrovertible, the irresistible, what cannot be denied. If it turns out that nothing is incontrovertible, then that becomes the circumstance that demands explication.

It will turn out that the incontrovertible oversees the building of the best bridges, and provides the strongest consolations.

But these are offshoots of its ultimate concerns, as science itself—the logic and methods of modern science—is an offshoot.

What is an offshoot? A heuristic—a device, an approach, that promotes discovery. Heuristics are useful to us—they help us survive, and even flourish. But they are mythologies—formulations that cannot be incontestably affirmed. Mythologies that endure are typically strong. Egyptian mythology built the pyramids, which reigned for almost 5000 years as the tallest human structures on Earth. Modern science put men on the moon. But mythologies, whatever their power, are not decisive. Only the incontrovertible rises to the level of our overarching needs—what religions have called salvations. We'll get to this soon.

How does the heuristic aspect of science show itself? If the bridges we build on its principles collapse, our science falls too. Science falls if technology fails. Philosophy, in contrast, goes down with a porous logic. Newton famously wrote of an ocean of truth. A single hole in our logic and we, in philosophy, drown.