Philosophy

Ton Haarmans · Wide Open Windows



In the nineteen-seventies I studied philosophy for five years at the University of Amsterdam. With full dedication. I was not looking for critique, but for ground. Not for disruption, but for coherence. I wanted to find a conceptual framework in which everything could take its place: the universe, the self, knowledge, meaning, experience. I was looking for a system capable of carrying the whole.

I attended every lecture, took part in all the seminars I enrolled in, and read obsessively. Philosophy was not an intellectual pastime, but a serious attempt to order the world. To build a coherent image in which what I experienced could become intelligible.

My philosophical orientation was broad. Otto Duintjer, Karl Jaspers, Henri Bergson, Teilhard de Chardin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Robert M. Pirsig. Later Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Paul Feyerabend. What attracted me at the time was not their subversive force, but their promise: that thinking could provide orientation. That a coherent framework was possible in which the many could be integrated into a whole.

During my graduate phase I immersed myself in Jung. Archetypes, the collective unconscious, synchronicity. This expanded the project. The world no longer appeared only rationally orderable, but symbolic, layered, deepened. Still, the underlying movement remained the same: the search for coherence.

From there, other traditions entered the field. Time, Space and Knowledge by Tarthang Tulku. Comparative philosophy. Taoism. Zen. Hindu traditions. Again, not in search of rupture, but in the hope that they would confirm the existence of a more fundamental order, a deeper framework in which experience could be understood and inhabited.

In retrospect, I see how strong that movement was: the desire for a world-carrying image. For a position from which the whole might become visible and livable.

And yet something began to chafe. Not theoretically, but existentially. What did I myself have to say? I could move within systems, but not speak from a lived necessity. I was in my late twenties. Driven, but without real weight. I see that only now. After five years I left the university, somewhat embittered, as if thinking had not brought me where, unspoken, I expected to go.

What followed were years of displacement. Political activism. Then an Indian guru. Later neo-advaita, satsang, Douglas Harding, Jeff Foster. In hindsight I recognize the same movement: the hope that somewhere there existed a position from which the whole would finally illuminate itself.

The essential turning point came much later. With the work of Robert Saltzman, Shiv Sengupta, and Joan Tollifson. Not because they offered a better framework, but because they made the framework itself problematic. There, not a new worldview began, but the seeing-through of worldviews. Not a more refined system, but insight into how systems arise at all.

What became visible was not “the truth,” but the process by which truth appears. Not the self, but how a self takes form. Not the world, but how a world stabilizes as experiential reality.

In retrospect, my actual subject began there: appearance. How certainties establish themselves. How mindsets configure experience. How orientation arises. And also: what happens when that mechanism begins to show itself.

From that point on, my relation to philosophy changed. No longer the attempt to construct coherence, but the craft of making coherence visible. To investigate how realities are built, sustained, and defended. And how they can loosen.

Today, philosophy’s field of work is, for me, not the construction of systems, but their illumination. The borderland where worlds appear and lose their self-evidence. Where orientation tilts. Where clarity and disorientation touch.