

Georges Kassabgi

♣ ♦ Winter
Letters ♠

*seeds for a philosophical debate on the reality
of human nature and behavior*

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This work continues the author's interest in a philosophical debate about the reality of human nature and behavior.

It started with a preliminary version of this book, released in September 2002 under the title *The Dead and I — Winter Letters*.

The main objective with this revised version is to obtain additional feedback: questions, discussion notes, and reasons behind readers' resistance to and/or resonance with the contents. This continued interaction with readers will be recorded in a Journal and may lead to a third publication.

There are two parts. The first contains the description of certain events among those with long-lasting impact for the author. In the second, these events can be imagined like nutrients in the soil providing unexpected bursts of energy to the old apple tree... watch then the new buds, followed by flowers and fruits *maybe*... as the author continues to reflect on this fascinating subject.

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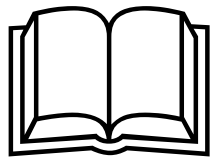
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Book One

winter letters... from heart and head

*not memoirs not stories... events identified
now unearthed from the past with care
revealing old bonds as part roots*



Seeds

winter letters... from head and heart
a compelling need to understand
for fewer stones to be left unturned
but humor will prevail



not memoirs not stories... events identified
now unearthed from the past with care
revealing old bonds as part roots

first my mother in Romania
recalling her views on a balanced life
with her fondness for certain authors

all still alive... Zweig Turgenev
and Goethe and the poet Eminescu
she learned to see and grow the natural

life changed place and with grandparents
who uncovered in me potential wisdom
to look past the surface and see the core

reality has an origin oh... way back
it does not start with here and now
how are we to see through the pasts

with bonds a distant recollection
an unexpected encounter and light
Epsilon and... his primal forces

who cherished imagined dialogues
in retrospect many views rekindled
what has been learned but not acted on

things and lives come to us then go
to many we owe... others we may forget
a few we want never to meet again

but some beloved and always alive
confide an enduring presence
we embrace especially after they die

one event pictures life on earth
will happiness always end in sadness
the greater the one the heavier the other

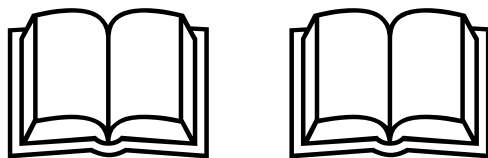
this can be true for a place as well
Old House trees and lovely creatures
all in Wolfeboro and in... Patagonia

theories abound of nature and behavior
but a new one may challenge their basis
too many forces for anything to last

so my winter letters start with the seeds
ask many questions to probe assumptions
how far will they lead us to understand



to my ancestors parents and family
to teachers authors and dearest friends
to all who gave me the good seeds
to you who will help me grow them



Book Two

winter letters... from head and heart

*what lies ahead is more reflection
in the pursuit of caring crossing pruning*

*traveling far to improve knowledge
resistance here and resonance there*

...



Seeds Plus

winter letters... from heart and head
a compelling need to understand
for fewer stones to be left unturned
but humor *must* prevail



not memoirs not stories... events identified
things and lives creating the moment
like seed and soil making the tree

what lies ahead is more reflection
in the pursuit of caring... crossing
pruning... growing the promise of sprouts

traveling far to improve knowledge
resistance here and resonance there
with small and great who aided my task

love... happiness... ambition... sex
boredom... survival... guilt and more
are things in the world of body and soul

and elude definition though help somewhat
when philosophizing on how we behave
why look at self alone and not deeper

a starting point with body and soul
seems like saying no to evolution
and no-no to twenty billion years

atoms do not think
neither can genes or organs
but they are where movement is

we are layers in space and time
with physical laws... geometry and more
ensembles of atoms and primal forces

harmony... power... loss... giving
all tempered by the music from within
the best each ensemble can do and tolerate

we can entrust our soul and our faith
or understand primal forces at work
driving change and movement... that's life

with this idea... a new picture
nature as it started... its primal forces
move atoms to mankind and back again

so my winter letters ask many questions
probe our sense of force and tolerance
layer by layer... within and without



to my ancestors parents and family
to teachers authors and dearest friends
to all who gave me the good seeds
to you, who will help me grow them

When a neighbor in Wolfeboro asked about my writing project, I explained it is to recall events with lasting impact and involving important “dead” — people and things — in my life. Then philosophize with friends and their friends. The premise being that most available theories on human nature and behavior have left me with more questions than answers, based as they are on one or another combination of body and soul, material and spiritual, and their related assumptions.

He interrupted me: “Reminiscing may be good for you. But what is there to debate beyond war, survival, reproduction? Beyond eating and sleeping and enjoying whatever you do whenever you can — despite the many vagaries of life? To act is more fun and meaningful than to philosophize, to reason with limited knowledge, to think. Indeed, I am always at peace when I repair any object in or around the house. Or take my sailboat out across the lake.”

Voltaire (1694-1778) came to mind, and I amused my neighbor by quoting what the great man had said when someone asked him if people would really be interested in a philosophical debate: “People work six days a week and on the seventh day they like to go to the cabaret.” But I was also reminded that Voltaire warned: “How to bore your readers is no secret; just tell them everything.”

The neighbor’s central point is that we ought to have few and simple rules. I agree with him except that I am not sure we have correctly identified the rules. How could my questioning the validity of certain assumptions be superfluous? Where would we be if action was not preceded by reasoned knowledge, i.e. observation followed by thought, debate, research, critique and more thought? Sailing beats thinking — big time. There seems to be no doubt about that. It shines in comparison: each instance requires action and one action only will be the one that works well. But sailing without thinking will take you where you don’t want to be. And what kind of boats would we have without all the thoughts necessary to plan, experience, and build them?

So let’s look deeper. We all know the chicken-and-egg question, and that if you gather ten experts on any given subject regarding human behavior, you’ll come out of the discussion with more than ten opinions. The problem then may not be so much with philosophy as with philosophers. Indeed, whenever an inspired author introduces *the* theory worth following, we rarely ask about its starting point (in evolutionary time): is it the first human being? or the heart? or a particular organism? or an immaterial thing, the spirit, the mind? And even less about the related assumptions (which are then maintained as doctrines): there are many gods vs. one and only one; or, there are mysterious supreme forces; or there is life after death and we are all interconnected.

*a starting point with body and soul
seems like saying no to evolution
and no-no to twenty billion years*

Millennia before Voltaire, people regarded earth, air, fire, and water as the starting point. Instead, he and many of his fellow philosophers of the time concentrated on body and soul as most religions do.

Closer to our own day, rapid progress in the interdisciplinary sciences and in the humanities has given rise to new ideas. Many researchers focus on genes and the psychobiology of personality; consider life as a matter of chemical reactions; and look upon evolution as dealing with the way life forms relate to one another in physiochemical terms..

But despite Darwin's and Freud's theories, centuries after Shakespeare, Descartes, Kant, Jung and others, experts and scholars still argue about the reality of human nature and behavior with limited common ground in sight. Meanwhile, we have become pretty good at, say, understanding an earthquake.

None of this will make any difference to my neighbor's interest in sailing, nor is there any chance it will dampen a person's passion for this or that. Has it ever explained what's behind human behavior? Yes, to a limited extent. But, as many would agree, how much it has actually been useful in our daily lives will depend on a lot of other things.

What then if we go about that understanding anew, like what we did with earthquakes; that is, as deeply as possible into the subject? To the deepest levels of what exists around us; indeed, go and find the invariables in its foundation. We'll therefore talk about the starting point and the related assumptions needed to allow a new theoretical development to follow. Specifically, we'll look back in evolutionary time — *not* for smallness' sake — to atoms (elements of matter; the building blocks of molecules, cells, and genes and all other cellular structures) and what is crucial in defining their inter- and intrarelations.

I ask the reader to not try to rush through. Indeed, the path can be winding and no one should expect some final scene that will tie everything together in a package. That is not here. Instead, join me in trying to explore ideas. If my book succeeds in opening the debate about a valid starting point and its related assumptions, research and further thinking will be called for. By the way, this approach to understanding the reality of nature and behavior is meant to apply to all known cellular structures — vegetal, animal, and human. All I want is to be able to sow the available seeds. They might grow into sprouts followed by development and expansion — thanks to additional contributors whose views will either be in resonance with or show strong resistance to mine.