ego and individualism
Editor’s Message

Welcome to the first issue ever to have a cover in color!

This issue’s theme is ego and individualism. From the Buddha to post-modern philosophers, thinkers throughout human history have inquired about the self, asking questions such as “who am I?”, “does the self exist?” or “what is the proper place of the individual in society?”.

Such questions are timeless and universal. But in today’s consumerist society, questions about the self have taken a new meaning.

Consumerism, as it is advertised on TV and other mass media, promotes the idea that we can all reach happiness simply by satisfying our material desires: “just get that new shiny silver SUV and you will be happy”.

There is something fundamentally wrong with the ideology of “me, myself and I”, in that it places excessive emphasis on selfish material wants. But to critique consumerism effectively, we need to question the basic assumptions upon which consumerism is based, and ask: Are we the center of the universe? Should our goal in life merely be to satisfy our personal desires?

RADIX ONLINE

Check it out on our uber-cool blog:
mcgillradix.blogspot.com

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This issue is printed on 100% recycled paper. To help us save paper and print less, pass this along to a friend!
My purest experiences of the unfragmented white light of emotion have, in an inexplicably literal way, punched me in the face with a sense of awe that is inevitably and essentially all-encompassing in its dissolution of division. In an instant I am somehow blown open and, with shards of everything I thought I knew suddenly strewn haphazardly about, I become a filter-less recipient of a paralyzing yet energizing knowledge that floods my being through every pore of every realm within which I exist. Left with no conceivable alternative, I surrender my brisk walk from the Milton gates to Second Cup and submit to being swept up by, with, and into this energy of oneness which abruptly reveals itself as the source, current state, and future of all existence. It is sublime tranquility and insurmountable power; disguised and naked all at once. It inhales paradox and breaths out unity; dynamic and eternally unchanging. A slice of certainty pierces my impression of separateness from this unexpected experience, and in that crystallized instant I am suspended in boundless liberation.

And naturally, after a duration which I simply cannot bring myself to subject to the subjectivity of categorized time, I feel this flashflood of awareness seeping out the very pores from which it entered and rendered me its subject. And naturally, I have no choice but to watch it drift beyond the quickly reassembling framework of my consciousness. A familiar stranger which I am simply not equipped to host for longer than breathe in, breathe out, a tear in my eye, an internal sigh, breathe in, breathe out- it's gone. And naturally, I cling to a shadow of the already distant experience, afraid to let it go and afraid to hold on too long. Afraid of changing and afraid of staying the same.

And then, I'm me again- Amy Soberano, McGill student from Toronto. Dust and divinity. Everything and nothing. Breathe in, breathe out.

I open my eyes, but I know that they are closed. I know because the layers of duality have once more settled upon the world, draping the rise and fall, the ebb and flood of white light with distinction and division. Once more the world has dressed itself up in cloaks and masks, in gowns and rags. Once more the world has become a grand masquerade ball, with each of us dressed a part. And yet I cannot fault apparent reality for its nature, for this costume party is of my own design. This world is an eternal canvas upon which I have projected my internal fragmentation.

I know this because every so often, with no ostensible warning, a tidal wave of united energy rushes through me, sweeping away illusory layers and revealing the holy wholeness that exists just beyond the grasp of my current consciousness. In that instant I am cleansed of categorization and palpably aware of that which I am blind to. I feel fundamentally drawn to strive toward sustaining such experiences, toward molding myself into a space through which such unharvested reality can flow freely and emerge untainted. And yet, I hesitate. The force within me that has labored since infancy to construct a reality reliant on divisive navigation is deeply reluctant to allow its efforts to be dissolved. I churn with tension at the sight of newborns, the embodiment of that which I cannot free myself to strive for: a world of wonder, an identity infused with indivision, a blank palate of perception.

My purest experiences of the unfragmented white light of emotion have, in an inexplicably literal way, struck the truth chord of my being and continue to resonate long after the vibrations cease. And so for now, as I go about my infinite little life, I simply hum along- almost always slightly off tune - with the chorus of creation, striving to strive for the symphony of synergy and thereby, someday, to find indivision in my individuality.
What is faith? Some might answer that faith is what we believe about God, the soul, the afterlife without relying on reason or empirical evidence for a proof.

According to this first definition, then, a Christian is faithful if he or she believes that Jesus is the incarnation of God, God made flesh; that he resurrected after his crucifixion; and that he accomplished numerous miracles, including walking on water, giving sight to the blind and feeding a crowd with a few loaves of bread.

Needless to say, such beliefs do not spring from logical reasoning or empirical evidence. To believe in a miracle is to accept that the extraordinary event really happened, without being able to explain how it happened, not even to oneself. Hence the phrase "leap of faith": in order to have faith, one must leap the gap separating reason from belief - one must give up reason to find God.

But, as Marcus Borg explains in *The Heart of Christianity* there are other ways to think about faith. In his book Borg attempts to redefine faith, not as a compound of beliefs, but as a process of transformation.

For Borg, belief is only one aspect of faith, and a rather inessential one. According to him, belief can even obstruct understanding of sacred texts superficially. And he uses a plethora of examples taken from the New Testament to prove his case.

Take the wedding at Canna at the beginning of John’s gospel, where Jesus turns water into wine. If we take this miracle literally, the story appears trivial. Jesus turned water into wine so people at the wedding could get more drunk and have more fun. Not very enlightening, is it?

If, on the other hand, we interpret this miracle symbolically, we get a much richer picture. For Borg, the turning of water into wine signifies the transformative power of the message of Jesus, and tells us what Jesus represents for the world: a reason to rejoice. The miracle itself is not the point of the story; rather, it is a clue to the real message. So belief in miracles no longer guarantees faith. More: faith does not require belief. What, then, does faith really mean?

For Borg, faith is more about how we live the teachings of religions than about whether we believe in particular religious narratives. In the case of Christianity, Borg says, the narrative of the death and resurrection is more than a "miracle report" - it is a symbol for how the Christian life should be led. To be Christian, he claims, is "to die to an old identity and to be born to a new identity" - to shed our personal attachments and open oneself to divine love. You may (literally) believe in the resurrection of Christ - but how much does this belief weigh if you do not follow his example of love and compassion?

Symbolic interpretation does not exclude belief, and Borg makes no attempt to dismiss belief altogether. But for skeptics like me, who cannot believe that Jesus actually turned water into wine, or that he really was raised from the dead, Borg provides an alternative method for understanding the true message of religions. And for that alone, Borg deserves a thousand thanks.
I just came out of the slaughterhouse—pigs.  
They were hung upside down by their hooves,  
Split open  
with a circular saw and their insides,  
On a tray circulating with their bodies—their #'s.  
We're all dressed in white—shirt, pants and lab coat,  
Even hairnet and helmet.  
From the pile of bloody insides, we cut out the ovaries.  
At least these will get to be used in scientific experiments.

We are so industrious as a society,  
Some of us specialize in teaching, others in growing crops,  
yet others the butchers of our society.  
Splashed with blood, bovine water and chunks of raw flesh.  
How do these people go home to live their lives? Hug their children?

Seeing a truck full of pigs, still living and feeding,  
coming into the slaughterhouse, I feel for them.  
Their flesh against sharpened steel...
Every Wednesday at 7:30 A.M., Robin Lutjohann hosts The Big Idea, a half-hour CKUT radio show on religion and spirituality. Two weeks ago, Robin invited two co-editors of Radix, Joy Ding and myself, on The Big Idea. This exciting experience allowed us to share our enthusiasm for Radix with a new audience. And now, in this interview, it is our turn to ask questions, and his turn to spread the word.

Radix: How did you become interested in religion?
Robin: I was raised in several countries, my father being a diplomat, and so was exposed to very different religious perspectives early in my life. I witnessed first-hand both incredible loving-kindness and virulent hatred inspired by religions. I was fascinated by that and wanted to know more...and the bug has never left me since.

My upbringing, though, was secular. My parents were born Catholic but, like many young people in the hippie era, they rejected traditional religion. They did not baptize me, and until my later teens I thought I had no official connection whatsoever with Christianity. But then, in high school, I found out that my grandfather, who was still Catholic, had secretly baptized me in my kitchen sink! I have since asked several Catholics, some of them priests, whether I was Christian by virtue of this “undercover” baptism. To my surprise they answered that the baptism did make me a Christian. But since I was not baptized by a priest and I never underwent any Confirmation ceremony, I do not officially belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

Radix: Do you think there is a connection between this secret baptism and your interest in religion?
Robin: Maybe. Sometimes I like to believe that my kitchen sink baptism predestined me in a way to look for religion in unusual places, to expect miracles in the ordinary. If a sacrament can happen among dirty dishes, why can’t an encounter with a stranger on the metro, or writing a letter to a friend, or watching a movie turn out to be deeply sacred moments? I think I’ve always been comfortable with the idea that spirituality is not a clean-cut affair, and that it does not take place only in a separated “holy place”, but also in the very midst of life, as broken and messed-up as it may be.

But to come back to your first question, it was not until I reached high school that I really got interested in spirituality. At the age of 15, I read the *Dao De Jing* [the foundational book of the Chinese doctrine known as Daoism]. The *Dao De Jing* is an interesting book. Unlike some other sacred texts, it does not reek of seriousness and solemnity. Being written in few and simple words, its meaning seems accessible to the average reader. And yet, however many times you read it, the *Dao De Jing* never feels the same.

Radix: How so?
Robin: The first time I read the *Dao De Jing*, I was struck by the book’s ease in dealing with paradoxes. [The *Dao De Jing* is full of counter-intuitive sentences such as “the sage accomplishes without action” and “the way that can be named is not the way.”] So impressed was I, in fact, that I told myself: “this is my book,” in the same way that some Christians consider the Bible “their book”.

But when I read the book again in a course in university, my fascination mixed with skepticism. I found parts of the *Dao De Jing* unwise because they seemed to promote a worldview and lifestyle utterly incompatible with the everyday needs and stresses of the real world. This change of attitude reflects my personal development, as I have become more cynical and less idealistic—can you imagine, a 22 year-old cynic! Now, in any case, I have a more nuanced view of the *Dao De Jing*, but I acknowledge its influence on me—it is, after all, the first religious scripture I ever finished.

Radix: Your show The Big Idea inquires about many different religious traditions. You also emphasize the need for inter-religious dialogue. Aside from your multicultural childhood, what made you realize the importance of understanding others’ beliefs?
Robin: My girlfriend of several years is Jewish and from Israel, and therefore we do not share the same cultural or religious background. Although we accept and would never want to change each other’s beliefs, we do disagree on many things, including religious matters. Our conversations have sharpened my awareness of the fundamental tensions that exist between cultures. For me, inter-religious dialogue is not some abstract notion but a daily reality.

Radix: Can you give an example of the kind of difficulties you have encountered being with someone from another culture?
Robin: When I visited Israel for the first time, I met a very religious woman my age among my girlfriend’s relatives. I naively stuck out my hand to her, expecting a handshake...but she stared at me and kept still. A long and awkward pause followed. I did not immediately realize that, by avoiding the handshake, the woman was only observing the Orthodox Jewish rules of negiah, which forbid or restrict physical contact with members of the opposite sex.

My girlfriend and I live in the same culture and have similar expectations of life and relationships, but she, unlike me, was familiar with this religious behavior and knew how to behave around it. This embarrassing episode continues to remind me of the...
differences that exist between my girlfriend’s background and my own. I cannot erase these differences and pretend we are both blank slates. I have to work with them. This becomes especially difficult when we consider things like marriage, where our difference in personal faith really does come between us. (For instance, a licensed rabbi in Israel cannot marry a Jewish and non-Jewish person.) Precisely in that, though, lies the beauty and challenge of our relationship. These points of tension also attract me to her personality, and keep our life together interesting. Over-all, though, my relationship with my girlfriend’s background and my own. I can’t make them resist slavery. And a lot of progressive voices within the movement today are rediscovering this heritage. Current thinkers like Tony Campolo or Brian McLaren are good examples of socially engaged, intellectually challenging and self-critical evangelicals. By showing how the evangelicalism had served a great purpose in the past and is rethinking its present, I hoped to give my listeners a fresh outlook on this religious movement—even though I myself am not an evangelical.

“Religion has become a taboo in our society, people are afraid to talk about religion. Why? Perhaps because they are afraid of being convinced.”

Radix: What have you learnt from your experience as the host of The Big Idea?
Robin: I learnt, among other things, that the best way to widen a discussion is often simply to listen. If you turn off your inner chatter, you discover that the other who is talking to you is a person who thinks and feels, with all the beauty and messiness that being a person involves. And as soon as you make that discovery, you can no longer treat the other as an object. Your pride and complacency wane, and you become genuinely curious about the other’s beliefs. No longer do you ask, “Should I accept or reject others’ beliefs?”, but instead, “Why do others believe what they believe?”

Listening is especially important in inter-religious dialogue. I feel that religion has become a taboo in our society, people are afraid to talk about religion. Why? Perhaps because they are afraid of being convinced. Atheists may be afraid of listening to believers because they may realize that there is, after all, something more than this material world. Conversely, believers may be afraid to listen to atheists because they may realize that there is nothing beyond this world. The same fear may exist in people from different faith traditions. So, yes, there is a true risk in listening to others, namely that you might end up agreeing with them! And that is scary. Change is scary. Nevertheless, that is also the only way to grow as a person and as a society: to risk changing—your mind, yourself, your world—through encountering radically different perspectives. So, I really wish we were more daring as a society, that we would have the courage to listen.

After all, listening is not about tolerance, it is about appreciation. I don’t like the word “tolerance” at all. Tolerance is like avoiding a glance; it is a passive way to prevent conflict between people whose beliefs differ. To tolerate others, you do not need to know anything about them; you must simply refuse to harm them. But to appreciate others, you must get to know them, and that is impossible without listening.

Radix: What are some memorable experiences you have had hosting The Big Idea?
Robin: I remember most fondly the times guests brought in their own instruments and played music for us live in the studio. For instance, I did a show about the Hare Krishna movement and the monks who came in that day chanted for us, as did the Sufis on another occasion. We talked about homosexuality and religion once, and a friend of mine who is becoming an Anglican priest sang a tune she had composed about the importance of being true to one’s identity, even in defiance of authority. I think part of the great potential of exploring faith and religion on the radio, as opposed to magazine articles or books, is that here we can move away from the strictly intellectual aspect and showcase the limitless beauty of spiritual musical traditions.

In another memorable show, I invited Douglas John Hall, professor emeritus at McGill and world-renowned theologian, to discuss the “prosperity gospel.” According to the “prosperity gospel,” faith can bring believers not only salvation, but also health and material wealth. Hall forcefully argued against this idea that faith guarantees material happiness. “If you think religion is going to make life easy”, he said, “you’re wrong”. He insisted that the purpose of faith was not to evade suffering or the messiness of life, and that believers should not take religion as a refuge from the world. Then, at some point, Hall almost nonchalantly announced that he had cancer and that he expected to die in the not-too-distant future. I was touched by his calm statement of such dreadful news: here was a man who believed in a higher purpose but was not afraid to look straight into earthly suffering, even his own.

I believe that we need more of this kind of groundedness in religion today. Too often, religious leaders and institutions present themselves as holier-than-thou and above the fray and chaos and disappointment of ordinary life. Yet, in truth, they aren’t. Nobody is. And this in itself is comforting. I think, because it means that the Sacred meets us where we are, right here and nowhere else.

Interested?
Listen to The Big Idea online at http://bigideackut.blogspot.com.
We're getting an abortion today - 2pm.
Little one, please take care and come back to us when the time is right.
I'm sorry about the hassle and I'm sorry for our irresponsibility - I know it's unfair that you can't stay, but we're not ready to have you. We'll embrace you when you come again, I promise.
Goodbye little one.
I love you.

We embraced each other & cried with each other, words of wisdom, words of love passed between our souls. We mourned for the passing of this one and longed for the coming of the next - we will have our baby one day.

The sadness that penetrated us was incredible - we held each other tight, as though to squeeze out the tears and we breathed together, grew together.

Innocence lost.

- Anonymous
Individuals are like leaves on the tree of life: each leaf is unique, but all leaves are connected to the same trunk and roots. It would make no sense for a leaf to say "I am a separate entity, I am independent from all other leaves", just as it would make no sense for an individual to say he or she is separate and independent from everything else. Yet many of us hold this belief that we are separate and independent. Taking pride in our uniqueness, we are blind to our common roots. This way of thinking hinders spiritual growth: As long as we believe that we are separate and independent from the world, our consciousness will be limited to our own little selves.

But if we are all interconnected, what is the self, and what purpose does it serve? To begin answering this question, I would like to draw an analogy from the Buddha’s teachings on the nature of religion. The Buddha compared religion with a raft that can be used to cross the river of worldly misunderstandings and reach the shore of spiritual awakening. Once the other shore is reached, you must discard the raft – it would be futile to carry on walking with such a heavy load. So with religion: if used beyond its original purpose, it becomes a burden.

In the same way, the self is useful to survive the daily trials and tribulations of life, but in spiritual practice, it is a burden. The self is the foundation upon which we grow in full light and a refuge to which we turn when darkness comes our way. But there comes a time down the spiritual path when you must let go of the idea of self, and let your individual spark rejoin the collective flame. This requires you to let go of all ideas of yourself -which of course is easier said than done.

Here a parallel can be drawn with calculus, where the limit of a constant is the constant itself. In spiritual practice, you are the limit to your own progression: every concept that you define yourself with is an obstacle to spiritual attainment.

We should not go so far in deconstructing the concept of self as to advocate for its opposite, the idea of non-self. We should tread on the Middle Way: the idea of self should be balanced, not replaced, by the idea of non-self. We should strive to reflect on the dichotomy between the perceptions of self and non-self until we are liberated from the chains of the human ego.

The idea of self is a tool that enables initial growth on the physical plane. But if you truly desire spiritual growth, you must outgrow the habit of identifying with a narrow sense of self. There is no self other than that which you project onto the surface of your being: uplift the veil of illusions to behold the nature of your Higher Being.
WRITE FOR RADIX!

Every two months or so, we publish a student-written articles on philosophical, spiritual and religious matters. Using diverse forms of expression – writing, drawing, photography, etc, we hope to foster dialogue about issues that matter to you.

Regardless of your religious background or spiritual inclinations, Radix is made for you, by you. Here, you can discuss anything from God to Nietzsche to the spiritually elevating properties of peanuts. So take a deep breath, and let pen and paper meet.

NEXT THEME: STUFF

The theme of the next issue is materialism. How does society’s obsession with material wealth affect your life, or other people’s? Can materialism and spirituality coexist? Is shopping unhealthy for the soul?

Ideas? Write or draw or take photos for Radix.

Deadline: Dec. 31, 2009

Send your submissions to radix.chaplaincy@mail.mcgill.ca

Wrestling with Angels
Christopher Dragan

Do you know what it’s like to wrestle
With an angel,
Pulling at the feathers of his wings while
His face is beaming with a radiant smile of Divine Love?

Has it ever occurred to you, do you ever think about
The flexing, the push and pulling of arms meant to protect
While the sheep graze
Innocently by?

Only yesterday it seemed impossible to pin down
The body
Of a Non-body, and just now you’ve been left
With a nugget full of wisdom and a belly full of nervous bile.

Not until you’ve received this benediction
Do you leave the place, each your own way:
One with tears of joy and of pain,
The Other with a world of jealousies in his mind.

NEXT SILENT MEAL: BREAKFAST

Sometime in early-mid Dec (Date and place TBA)
Enjoying a meal with each other in silence, to appreciate the quality of silence together while cherishing the silent company of others. There will be talking after eating! Take a break from exams with some silence.
Questions and RSVP at smilenlaugh@gmail.com

Cause of Homelessness: Mental Illness, Gambling, Addiction, etc.

Domestic Violence, Drug/Alcohol Abuse
An Autumn Postcard
Simca Simpson

Just now today a maple leaf lay in the autumn wind,
Meandering down from Pittock Lake to where life would begin
I dreamed of far off places those before me dared not go,
No need for roots or bark, or sap, alone my seed I’d sow.

Forget the flow of steady waters where the rivers meet.
What use has Champlain’s Mattawa to conquer life’s great feats?
Notre Place is gone now, head south, head west, head east.
But don’t head north, your home’s not there. What fruits could lumber reap?

Where then shall pass my pilgrimage, Notre Dame du Bon Conseil?
Buga, Luján or Fatima? Or Pointe-aux-Roches, you say?
And in a gust the wind picked up, Kumuntome it said
And in old barren Matheson I found myself instead.

I missed still mother’s branches, where by wind songs I was nourished.
And asked why I had ever left, in absence what had flourished?
Oh way back then I’d always thought like cedars I could stand.
But now I crave Tomato Town, and Chatham’s Big Top Band.
The Muslim Students Association of McGill

We offer: weekly study circles, free Islamic educational materials, Ramadan services, lectures/conferences, library (Shatner building, room 430)

3460 McTavish Street, Rm. 14
www.msamcgill.com

St. Martha’s in the Basement

McGill Ecumenical Chaplaincy’s St. Martha’s shares a weekly informal worship and discussion, followed by a vegetarian supper. It is a welcoming place to form meaningful friendships, explore faith in an inclusive way, and bring sacredness to our lives. All are very welcome.

Wednesday from 5-7pm in the basement of the United Theological College, 3521 University.

For details call: 398-4104.

The Montreal Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
welcomes all for silent worship at 11 am every Sunday at the Greene Centre in Westmount (1090 Greene).
Directions are on our website.
http://montreal.quaker.ca

The Big Idea

Wednesday 7:30-8am
Talk and music about religion/spirituality
on CKUT 90.3 FM and @ http://bigideackut.blogspot.com

Volunteers needed!

The Yellow Door Elderly Project is seeking volunteers to work with seniors living in and around the McGill Ghetto. No major time commitment required — flexible hours, just a couple of hours per month! Great opportunity to contribute to community spirit.
If you would like to become a Yellow Door volunteer, call 514-845-2600 ext. 0 or email: elderlyproject@gmail.com

Montreal Diocesan Theological College
3473 University Ave.
Daily Christian worship—all are welcome!
Morning Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 8:00 am
Evening Prayer, Mon.-Thurs.: 4:30 pm
Eucharist Wed. 11:30 am (followed by lunch), Fri. 7:30 am
All are welcome!

Zen Meditation
McGill Chaplaincy
3600 McTavish, #4400
Wednesday 1-2 pm
(Discussion, Instruction, and Q&A at 12:45)

Hillel House
Attention, Jewish students and friends! Discussions on Jewish topics, Jewish feminist movement, social events, “ask a rabbi,” “Ghetto Shul,” Torah study, dating services, message boards, and much more!!!

3460 Stanley Street (Hillel library)
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rabbihillelca
www.hillel.ca

Rabbi House of Prayer
from becoming yet another overpriced campus cafeteria.
Located on the lower level of the Macdonald-Harrington Building in Room G6. Join “Save Architecture Cafe” on Facebook.

Want fair-trade/fair-priced coffee, or warm, fresh-of-the-day muffins and pastries? Support the architecture cafe!!

The Montreal Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) welcomes all for silent worship at 11 am every Sunday at the Greene Centre in Westmount (1090 Greene). Directions are on our website.

http://montreal.quaker.ca

Note: Services marked are only available during the school year.