

Upbuilding and Awakening Dr Gindi's Sculpture and the Human Condition

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The sculptures of Dr Gindi are primaeval in the sense that they reintroduce us to ourselves as natural creatures, living in organic unity with the earth. It is this awareness, more than any kind of political or economic identity, that is our identity as human, that endures and is the source of resilience. Dr Gindi's sculptures challenge the idea, found among the prognostications of techno-science, of an emerging post human being who rather than accepting the free gift of human existence, rebels against it in favor of something self-made.

In André Malraux's novel *La Condition humaine*, Kyo Gisors does not recognize his own voice when he hears it on a recording. In a sense he did not know who he was; the conditions of conflict had intervened and in his situation he did not know himself. Our relationship to the world, the actual situation of our place in the world, informs how we see ourselves.

As John Berger has pointed out in *Ways of Seeing*:

"It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world."

How we see the world, and consequently how we understand who we are, derives from the accumulation of experience. In the novel, Kyo explains to his comrade Tchen:

"My father believes ... that the essence of man is anguish, the consciousness of his own fatality, from which all fears are born, even the fear of death."

The fact of human mortality defines the human condition, but the possible responses go beyond anguish, or the effort to fabricate a new form of existence, or to escape the earth altogether.

In his *Thesis on History* Walter Benjamin offered the puzzling aphorism:

"History breaks down into images, not into stories. Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of the past."

Perhaps this means that there is not a contract, no testimonial, no logical algorithm that empowers us to control our destiny.

Rene Char in an aphorism quoted by Hannah Arendt offers:

"Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament"

In history we are suspended between past and future; the human condition is something like walking a tightrope. Where do we find our sure footedness?

Art images, as Berger says, embody ways of seeing. Images, works of art, teach us how to see and thereby how to understand the human condition and how to live the good life. How to walk a tightrope, as it were.

At the intersection of these three traits of human experience, self-recognition, historical consciousness, and our situatedness in the world, the human condition is defined. At the same time there is an altogether human tendency to try to escape from our condition. This tendency, exacerbated by the modern age, and fostered by Cartesian dualism and modern scientism, is contradicted by Dr Gindi's contemplative sculpture.

Martin Heidegger in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* argues that works of {insert: art} reveal truths that are both from within the artist —consciously or not— but also reside in something like Jung's *collective unconscious*. The work of art is not a passive object, something we perceive through the senses and make a record of for future reference, but something that engages us, not merely demanding our attention, occasions dialog and conversation. Someone once said, works of art are like human beings. As such they enter into the domain of the living.

The human condition is where we find ourselves and we pay attention to it from our own particular point of view. It seems natural; where else would we be? At times it delights and at other times it threatens. Growing up in part is a process of accepting our condition, and when we realize that we are not solitary individuals but share these conditions with others, it becomes our shared condition. Eventually we make the philosophical move to the general notion of the human condition. This is not an ordinary abstraction: every aspect of what we call the human condition is present as concrete, lived experience, not something posited by *abstract* thinking. The human condition is determined and conditioned by the environment in which humanity is situated and thrives. This of course is the natural world, our abode on earth. Hannah Arendt put it this way:

“The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other living organisms.”

In the prologue to her profound treatise entitled *The Human Condition*, which appeared shortly after the Soviet Union successfully launched the first extra-terrestrial satellite, Sputnik, Arendt noted that the occasion was marked by its assessment as a step toward escape from the earth. This reaction, she says:

“was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the first step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth.”

It was as though the greatest achievement of humanity was a step toward denying an aspect of the nature of humanity itself.

The work of the artist, no less than the philosopher, presents us with an account of the human condition. Indeed the artist may better than anyone reveal elemental truths about our humanity. Hans Jonas, a philosopher and good friend of Hannah Arendt, argued that it is *image making* that sets humankind apart from other living creatures. It is through image making, Jonas argues, that we, humankind, come to grasp our existential relation to the world.

Dr Gindi in her work engages us on all of these levels. Her sculptures certainly affirm that we are at home on the earth, and that in this, our natural environment, the human condition, and all life, of which human life is far from the entire story, is bounded by mortality. These two aspects of the human condition, that we are living and mortal creatures and that our home is the earth, are always palpable — however we might wish to avoid them — in Dr Gindi's work.

Discussing her 2021 exhibition entitled *We Are All Part of Nature* Dr Gindi has explained:

“Embracing grief and preparing for infinity impacts our whole life. Living is nothing but a rehearsal of our waning, consciously and sensuously. Set into nature’s cycle. In thinking about decay and venerating infinity, we are contemplating about ourselves – and we live on, in a rather non-scientific, non-Cartesian manner.”

Dr Gindi’s sculptures challenge us to recognize and embrace this the human condition. As we look at her sculptural renditions, we see and feel who we are in the fullness of our natural being. The anguish of Kyo Gisors may not be fully ameliorated but it need not result in paralysis of despair. Kierkegaard in *The Sickness unto Death* saw despair as the psychological basis for upbuilding and awaking. This requires accepting the human condition, the very challenge Dr Gindi’s sculptures leave with us.