



Noising the atmosphere



**English
podcast transcript**

Noising the atmosphere with Raymond Geuss

What the life of the rose tells us about the meaning of life

English transcript

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ES: Hello and welcome to Wisdom Talks, the podcast accompanying the METIS project, the internet portal for intercultural wisdom literature and wisdom practices, to be found on www.metis.ethz.ch.

My name is Eliane Schmid and I will be hosting today's conversation with the philosopher Raymond Geuss and with the METIS initiator, Michael Hampe. They address an underlying question that has been touched on but never quite expanded on in our Wisdom Talks: What is life or what is the meaning of life? This is rather blunt, yet we have often talked about how to live a happier life, a fulfilled life, how to make decisions we can find peace with, how to feel at ease in general. But the nitty-gritty of the meaning of life deserves to be looked at in depth, especially also in connection to wisdom. Our expert connected via video phone from Cambridge, Raymond Geuss, has agreed to delve into this topic with me. Professor Emeritus Geuss has researched and taught at Cambridge University in England and continues to live and ponder the meaning of life. Professor Geuss, thank you for joining me today. And also Mr. Hampe, who's here with us today, thank you for joining me.

MH: Thank you.

RG: Thank you for the invitation.

ES: In a previous Wisdom Talk with the former combatant Daniel Trusilo, we referred to you, Mr. Geuss, in the sense that I said: "Life is a game, life is war." – "But life is not a game." Mr. Geuss, life is not a game, why is that? There seem to be a lot of parallels.

RG: Yes, of course there are a lot of parallels. There are more parallels in some societies than there are in others. But nevertheless, it seems to me that there is one absolutely fundamental difference, which is that a game is an activity that's governed by rules. You're not playing chess if you're just pushing pieces of wood around the table. You're only playing chess if there are recognized principles and rules that you follow. And that means rules that other people can observe to have been followed or not followed. There's a correct way of doing it and there's an incorrect way of doing it. That seems, to me, to be central to the notion of a game. And the main distinction then between a game and life is that, in my view, life doesn't have rules in that sense.

A game has rules when someone has specifically made a decision to set up those rules, there's someone who sets the context. There's someone who says, the International Chess Society says these are the rules of chess. There's no such person who sets the rules for life. Life is, I would say, human life is characterized not just by the fact that we can, if we wish, set up rules, we can decide to structure our activities in a very particular way according to a set of rules, we can set up the International Chess Federation, but we can also depart from those rules in acting. We can change the rules, we can change the parameters, we can change the context.

And this ability that we have both to follow rules and to fail to follow rules and to shift rules, to change them, is it seems to me what makes us human. So life is not an entity that can be understood as a whole in an interesting way as analogous to a game. It's a different kind of thing. It's the conditions for setting up games. And as such, a set of conditions for setting up

games, it has a different standing altogether. And to try to reduce it to a game is to misunderstand something very important about it, which is who sets up the rules.

ES: Now, if I remember correctly, Aristotle said though that people are animals following goals or they strive for goals. And I realize that there's a difference between the rules and the games that you just described before. But I would like to dig a bit deeper in the sense, what did Aristotle mean in that case when he said that people are striving for goals, how can we bring goals and rules in connection or not? Are these two different things?

RG: I am afraid I take a very different approach to life from the approach that Aristotle takes. I don't deny that we are entities who can give ourselves goals. That's a possibility. But I tend to think with the philosopher John Dewey, that people are actually better understood as animals. We're animals who live in an environment with which we are in constant interaction and that interaction can take a variety of different forms. The basic form of it is a kind of habitual behavior. A child habitually will look for the breast. We wouldn't say that the child had the goal of seeking his mother's breast and then pursued that. That is, we can say that, if we wish. But if we say that what we're doing is we as the external observers, as adults, are looking back at the child and we're looking back at the child and we're saying: If I, an adult, were in the situation the child is in and the child were acting like that, then I would be pursuing a goal. The child is still human. So the basic way to think about the world is that we are human beings acting through the world in basically habitual ways, only when we're caused to reflect do we become conscious of the fact we set goals for ourselves. And that's always something that an external observer does. Now, we've been trained, because we're grownups, to internalize this external perspective. Part of growing up is not just that we stop acting habitually and we begin to act intentionally, but it's also that we develop an inner monitor, we develop a possibility of acting according to habit and also at the same time taking a step back and looking at our action. But I think if you think about it that way, I think Aristotle's approach is too rationalist, if I may say, it starts from the wrong thing. And it starts in a way that prejudices the issue. It prejudices the

issue because it takes the setting of goals as natural and basic and objective in a way that it's not. It's reflective and secondary and external.

MH: But isn't there a term like 'success' that we often apply both to games and to our life, that you say that you are successful in chess if you have caught the king, say. And couldn't you say that Aristotle meant that you are successful in life if you have become happy? So happiness is a success criteria for life as checkmate is a success criteria for chess. And would you say, Raymond Geuss, that there aren't any fixed success criteria in life? There might be success criteria in games, in some like chess, perhaps not in other games where you just throw a ball against the wall or so, but in life there is not such a thing as a successful life and an unsuccessful life.

RG: There are two things I'd like to say about that, if I may. The first is: I think language is a very, very open phenomenon and a very malleable phenomenon. And the central phenomenon in language is our ability to extend it metaphorically. So it's true that we generally speak of life being a success, being a success at games, but remember that this is an instance of a concept of success being metaphorically extended just as we could actually metaphoric – and we actually do in some languages – metaphorically extend success to apply to the natural world. I can say that my cat succeeds in finding the mouse. You say the same thing in German: "Es gelingt ihr, die Maus einzufangen." And so that's the first thing I want say, that the malleability of language is a really important phenomenon. There are no natural limits to the meaning of things. Meanings can always be extended. That's a basic fact about language that the philosopher Wittgenstein made very strongly in his late works.

The second thing is, you're absolutely right, Professor Hampe, that my basic attitude is that the Greeks were wrong to think that the model of craft production – and that we are wrong to think that the model of games – can be applied to a human life as a whole. I can say I am a successful cobbler, I know how to produce good shoes even if I don't have rules for that. And I can say I'm successful at producing good shoes, therefore I have a kind of skill. Plato and

Socrates wanted to say there's a similar thing for human life. You can be a good shoemaker, you're successful as a shoemaker. Human life is a craft activity like that. You're shaping your own life. And in shape... and since you're shaping your own life, you can do it more or less successfully and we can say that about it.

MH: So is what you are saying that life is neither a game nor an artifact?

RG: It's neither a game unless you make it a game. Now, I externally can look back at what Tolstoy did and I can say the game we're playing is the game of trying to make your way through to the correct philosophical view, which is passivism. And he played the game very successfully because he lived his life, he had a lot of variation in his life, but he eventually got the right thing. He played the game successfully. But that's my comment on his life. And similarly, I can treat anyone's life as an artifact. I can say he led a beautiful, Alcibiades led a beautiful existence, but that is a retrospective external comment on that.

And as people have often pointed out, one of the problems with that approach is that a human life that I am living is not yet complete. And because it's not yet complete, I can't look at it in the same way in which I look at the life of someone who lived before. I can say how it ended for Tolstoy, I can say how it ended for Alcibiades, I can't say how it's going to end for me. So for all of these reasons, I think that these metaphors of rules, success and I would also say meaning, are inappropriate in applying them to your own life. They're useful only in the third person perspective in describing something else. And they are always limited. It's always a case of finding a limited context in which these things are well-defined. And if you expand them and use them metaphorically beyond that, you're going to have difficulty because you're going to lose your grounding in anything that can make you able to understand what's actually going on.

ES: So now you mentioned a couple of terms. We had 'success in life' and a 'beautiful life' as well. And here I would like to bring in 'happiness'. I know you will probably also refute that as

being the goal of life, but still, for example, Goethe allegedly stated that he was happy for around four weeks of his life.

RG: Happy man.

ES: Happy man. Or that's exactly what I wanted to say. So when can we say that that was a happy life? I mean people do maybe also put a social pressure on that. If you're not happy, you're not leading a good life. How would you contextualize this striving or this goal of happiness in life?

RG: Yes. Well, it won't surprise you to know that I think that happiness is a very, very ambiguous term. It can mean a number of different things. It can mean: do I get my actual desires satisfied? That's a perfectly reasonable sense of happy. I'm happy because I have my goals satisfied. It can also mean not just that I satisfied my goals, but I am satisfied with the satisfaction of my goals, which is something very different. In one sense, I'm happy if I win the lottery, say I've been trying to do that and that's my desire. In another sense, I'm happy if having won the lottery, I don't become revolted by what's actually happened to me and change my mind about it. So do I actually get the goal that I'm pursuing? Am I happy and satisfied with the goal that I have? And then there's another sense which is something connected to self-affirmation or self-approval. If I have internalized this external observer, as I talked about earlier, and I monitor my own life, do I approve of what I see? Am I happy if I approve of my life?

Now, I can approve of my life even if all of my goals remain unsatisfied and I can disapprove of my life even if I've realized all my goals because I find out they're no good. So happiness too, I think, we're desperately keen to think that there is some way in which there can be a judgment of self, of affirmation and approval on our life, which is objective. We want to say...it isn't just that I approve of my life, I find it worthwhile, but it is objectively worthwhile. And what I want to say is that that sense of objectively worthwhile is not available to us. We can have various

tentative, imaginative attempts to do that. I can think that there's a God who approves of me and I can distinguish between the approval I make of my life and the approval he would make of my life. But of course that's just a different way of saying I approve of it because I've just taken an imaginative detour and put this external Entity. And beyond that, I think we can't really easily go.

MH: So may I try another metaphor on you, Raymond? Which you probably will refuse as well, namely the metaphor that a tranquil life, a tranquility of mind is what makes you happy because unhappiness has something to do with having a stormy mind, being tortured by emotions, by memories and so on. As the stoics and many other philosophers following them thought that if your mind gets still, if it gets tranquil, then it becomes like a mirror and you can have the right...it's sort of internal objectivity and peacefulness. And that's what happiness supposedly really means. It's certainly also a metaphor, the metaphor for calm water. But nevertheless, it was a very common metaphor in Western philosophers' thinking about happiness.

RG: Yes, I don't disagree to that. I don't deny that people can pursue a number of different life goals and the pursuit of a calm, tranquil life of imperturbability, that's the term that they usually use to translate this Greek term *ataraxia*. Imperturbability, that's a possible life to live. But for some of us, we live in a society in which it's not obvious that that is a goal that we can even aspire to. I would like to cite this poem that I think is particularly profound by Brecht, I'm sure you know it, *An die Nachgeborenen / To Those Who Come After Me*. And he says, roughly speaking, in old books, they tell us about wisdom. Wisdom is not satisfying your wishes but forgetting them. But I can't do that. I can't do that. We live in a technological world.

I think here, I was very influenced by the philosopher John Dewey, who distinguishes two kinds of arts. He says there are arts of acceptance and arts of control. There are ways in which I'm set, I'm encouraged to accept the world as it is and get as much calm from acceptance of the world. I learned to accept it. And then there are arts and traditional philosophy and wisdom

literature is overwhelmingly like that. I become wise by learning to accept what I cannot change. But then there are arts of control, which are basically technological arts. There are arts that allow me not to accept what's there but to change what's there. And now Dewey thinks that the relation between these arts of acceptance and arts of control has varied historically. In pre-technological societies, it makes perfect sense to strive for imperturbability, for an ability to accept what's there because you didn't have technological ability to change the world. So what would be the point of pursuing a technological fix that you couldn't actually successfully complete?

But in the modern world, we're different sorts of people. We have to start from where we are. We can't make ourselves ancient stoics. We've got somehow to deal with the fact that we are constantly all involved in changing the world in various ways, in intervening in the world. And I think if we wanted to speak of wisdom nowadays, it would have to have something to do not with learning to be calm and to accept the world as it is, but to get some kind of balance between acceptance of things that can't be changed and an appropriate technological intervention in nature and an appropriate attitude toward our society. I come back to these three things, once again, my soul, society and nature. Wisdom would have to be some way in which I have found a method for progressing through life in the context of my attitude toward all three of these things, which puts them together in a way that is satisfactory. I think that's about the best I can do at the moment.

ES: I would like to go deeper into this because now you spoke about technology, you spoke about society and a current phenomenon that is influencing a lot of people is, for example, Instagram and all these motivational quotes that are thrown at you day by day, helping you to become a better person. And every day you should strive to become something more, something better, to not just exist but be something more than you were before. Now, how would you put this into context of what you just said before? Because obviously we're in a constant change. It's a very fast change and it can also be a pressure, I believe. How would you put these modern wisdom quotes, if we would call them that, into this context of the older philosophers or how would we adapt this?

RG: Well, again, I think it's an instance of roughly speaking activity and passivity. It's a question of adapting to things or trying to change them. I see, now this is a tremendously big speculative leap, and I know that any philosopher worth his or her salt will pull me up on this, but I'm going to say it anyway because we're among friends. I think there is a kind of congenital, what do I want to say, *Wahlverwandschaft*, a kind of elective affinity between the motivational structure that you've described, always striving, always striving, always striving, and two other things. One is the arts of control, the technological fix that I've talked about. But the other is the productivist structure of our economy, the structure of an economy that depends on constant production, constantly increased production, constantly increased consumption. There's a kind of affinity between this ideal of personal growth as being constantly striving for something more and those two things.

And I would say that, well in this point, I shift from the existential to the political, that's not going to work. The environment is going to stop us with that. Now you can say of course, ah, constantly striving, constantly striving, doesn't mean the Faustian striving toward getting something more in the world. It doesn't mean consumerism. It means working on oneself and shaping myself. And of course, it's another instance of my general thing about the almost infinite malleability of these concepts and the concepts in philosophy...the difficulty with the concepts in philosophy is that they're very general and therefore they're infinitely malleable and you have to treat them with the most exact precision. So if you interpret constantly make yourself better, et cetera, then of course that's a perfectly reasonable goal for someone to pursue.

I would prefer to talk about disciplining of the self, disciplining of my needs, disciplining. And I think that's going to be something that actually will be imposed on us. It won't be a choice because one way or another we're going to have no alternative to that. Well, we will have an alternative to that, which is to allow the whole of the environment to collapse and become scavengers in the ruins of our former civilization. But if we avoid that fate, we're going to have to learn to discipline ourselves and discipline the structure of our needs and our desires and make ourselves more and more able to deal with limited resources and to control the

generation of needs beyond what can be satisfied by that. I'm sorry, I know that's not very satisfactory, but that's the best I can do at the moment.

ES: No, I'm very intrigued actually also because you brought together what I believe should go together is philosophy and politics and the current problems we're dealing with now, and these social media quotes that I was alluding to before, they all strive for people to become better, but most often they're linked to becoming better through a specific product that you consume. And as I understand you, you're actually talking about that we should go against this in the sense that we should strive – if we want to – become better people or more disciplined people or whatever. And if I understood you correctly, does this mean that ideally we would still, if it helps us for ourselves, pursue these strivings to become better, but in a reverse way in the sense that we don't need to follow these quotes to buy things to become better, but in the sense that we start actually actively looking at our environment and adapting to the needs of the environment?

RG: If I may just say, I'm not a preacher, I'm not a priest, I'm not trying to prescribe goals for anyone, I'm trying to get understanding of the world. So I'm not saying don't be a consumerist. It's not my place to say that. I'm merely pointing out that if you look at the way society is organized now and you look at the environmental costs of that, that seems to me to be almost a natural scientific fact that that will not be able to continue. We simply will not be able to do that. Now, I'm not preaching any reaction to that. You could say ok, yes, the worst thing about the current situation I think is that people who are very rich, it's rational for them perhaps now to continue to consume.

Because if they see, as I think many of them do, that this is all going to fall apart in a couple of years, they probably think: Well, why not? If it's going to fall apart anyway, why don't we continue to stand up here on the top and skim the cream off the top of the milk because then when the catastrophe comes, at least we'll be sitting in the same boat with everyone else, but we'll be sitting first class. So there's a kind of rationality about their continuing these things.

So I don't want to go into any of that. But as far as the question of the guidance of one's life is concerned, I also don't have any guidance to give to people. My project is exploratory and imaginative and one directed at understanding of what the possibilities are. And I suspect, and what I'm suggesting, is that one possibility is to succeed in imposing a kind of discipline upon ourselves.

MH: Sometimes it is said that if a development is disruptive, if there is a sudden stop, if things are not going smoothly, that might be a source of suffering. So if we want to avoid suffering, we should avoid disruptions. If we would go on consuming things in a very excessive way and if nature, whatever that is, will stop us, there will be a disruption and this disruption will lead to suffering and therefore we should avoid it. So how would you take stance to this attitude that we should be keen on running things smoothly in order to avoid suffering?

RG: Well, that of course is a two-edged sword. Yes, if we disrupt the current form of social and economic organization, there will be lots of pain and suffering and that will be terrible, terrible. If we don't, what's going to happen? We won't just have suffering, we'll have the end of organized human life. And that will not be without suffering. So I'm very sensitive to the point that you raise and I think it's a very good one, but I think as with many of these things you have to see you can't just look at one side of the situation. You have to look at the trade-off between different sorts of outcomes in that case. And suffering, I'm going to say something that's terrible, but I'll say it anyway, we're not going to get rid of suffering. The poor are always with us. Well, suffering is always going to be with us. We can try to minimize it, we can try to palliate it, we can try to control it. But the idea that there's a completely anodyne way of living a human life is wrong. Human life is a process of, again, I go back to Dewey, of harmonious action and disturbed action, harmonious courses of action and disturbed courses of action. Or William James says it's like the bird who perches on the branch and then flies away. Perching on the branch, we're happy, flying away, we're disrupted. Or my actual favorite is, this is something I read in Friedrich Schlegel, I think, where he says that Kant is wrong. It isn't that human beings can make rules for themselves and subordinate themselves to the rules, the categorical

imperative, and that this is what constitutes their humanity. What constitutes their humanity is the fact that they have that power and they also have the power of failing to follow the rules and changing the rules. And he says, this is like the systole and diastole of the heart. The is the heart's throbbing, the lifeblood of our spiritual life. We make rules for ourselves. We have a natural tendency, it seems to me to make rules. There's nothing wrong with generalizing, the inclination we have to generalize is perfectly human and natural and good. But equally important and natural and good is the fact that we can see that these generalizations often don't work and we have to have both of these movements in order to have a healthy life, it seems to me. So you're right, we have to have some attitude towards suffering, but I think the attitude towards suffering, the only one that's realistic is one that tries to minimize it and control it and palliate it. And the idea that we can go through life without suffering and, frankly, without imposing suffering on others, that's not my experience.

ES: Now you gave me a nice lead over to discuss the question of life and the question of why. So we talked about what is the meaning of life before, or we tried to go deeper into that topic, although it's, as we found out, so multifold. But now you wrote an essay, 'A World Without Why', and you quoted the mystic Angelus Silesius. And so the quote that you mentioned there is that: "The rose is without 'why', she blossoms because she blossoms, she pays no attention to herself, does not ask if anyone sees her." So how would you then describe or how would you explain this quote and this world without 'why'?

RG: We start concretely with particular concrete practices. Those practices give us meaning. I open the door in order to pick up the newspaper. I stroke my cat, I put the food from my cat so that my cat can get the food. I have clear procedures, I have rules that I can follow. I have goals. I have a meaning. This is a meaningful activity. I put the food there so that the cat is fed. Now, as I said, it's a natural human tendency to try to generalize from that and to say just as I put the food for the cat every morning, that's a meaningful activity, so similarly, my life as a whole can be seen as an activity, a rule-governed activity, having meaning and having a goal just like the activity of feeding the cat, but just "grossgeschrieben", "en majuscules", in capital letters.

What I want to say is 'no'. If you actually move from the concrete meaning giving context further and further up, the further up you get, at a certain point you will lose meaning. You won't get better meaning, you'll lose meaning. And at a certain point, the meaning structure won't have any purchase. And we say this in English. It doesn't have any purchase. If I'm trying to turn something and I can't get a grip of it, I don't have any purchase on it. The meaning structure at a certain point of generality will not get any purchase. And what you will see if you move up to God's point of view, if such a thing existed, you won't see a particularly meaningful life, you'll see something that is utterly meaningless. You'll see simple brute facts that have no explanation, they have no 'why'. You will have moved through generalization beyond the sphere at which all of your conceptual resources still have purchase and you will be like the rose.

The rose is just there. Note the rose has not yet learned to become an internal observer of herself, just as we grow up become internal observers of ourselves. "Sie achtet nicht ihrer selbst", she doesn't look at herself, she doesn't ask any questions. So she's both not an internal observer of herself, an internal monitor of herself, nor does she stand in relation to someone who's asking a question or answering a question: "Sie fragt nicht, ob man sie sieht." It's out of that. And it's just sheer, random, brute fact. And if I may just say, in the essay, I then say, well, look, the other way of thinking about this is: concentration camp, meaninglessness. And the problem, that is, we all know the history of Primo Levi who was in the concentration camp and asked the kapo: why -something. And the kapo said to him: "Hier gibt es kein warum," "There's no 'why' here." But as I said, that is absolutely wrong. The kapo gave the wrong answer. It wasn't that there was no 'why' there, there were plenty of 'whys'. It was that the kapo didn't want to give Levi an answer and didn't feel the need to give Levi an answer.

And it was the attempt to present something which was actually a human decision, namely to construct this concentration camp, that was a human decision, full of meaning, full of structures with rationality abundant, to construe that and present that as if it were the rose just standing and not. So what's wrong with the concentration camp is not that there was no 'why' there, there were plenty, there was more 'whys' than you would want. The authorities didn't have to tell, didn't feel they needed to say anything to Levi because he was considered to be subhuman,

therefore not in the context in which you needed to give *Rechenschaft*, you didn't have to give an account of yourself to him. But that was not right. So that was the point of this comparison in the essay you're referring to.

MH: Can I just have a follow-up on this problem of how to deal with meaninglessness? But perhaps you've said it now already, but I would like to ask the question again. You can say if you reach a realm of meaninglessness, then you don't have to give justifications anymore. You don't have to justify why you are here, why you are doing something. So you are saved, you have reached salvation if you would like to use a religious term. That would be a positive interpretation of meaninglessness, which I believe Angelus Silesius was pointing to. The other possibility is that meaninglessness leads to nihilism. There's nothing there, there's nothing anymore, so nothing has a point, so I'm in an empty void. And how do you see these different tones, these emotional tones that are connected with meaninglessness?

RG: OK. You've quite rightly pointed out that there are three different things, where I just talked about two. I'm sure you're right about Angelus Silesius, he was writing in the Baroque period, he was a religious believer and he thought he was describing in this world without 'why' the state of either complete innocence or complete salvation. In a way, it's often been pointed out, it's like nirvana. It's like the Buddhist ideal. You are completely outside a realm in which even the question of 'why' can arise, your in a state of blessedness and salvation. And I said that that was different from the case of the concentration camp.

Now, as far as nihilism is concerned, again, the nihilism that interests us I think is a nihilism that's active. The nihilism that interests us is not me sitting in my room thinking nothing is really of any meaning. "Do me something," as we say in New York, OK, I think it all means nothing, but that's not the nihilism that's actually really interesting. The nihilism that's interesting is what Nietzsche calls practical nihilism.

MH: So people wanting nothing and therefore becoming destructive. They still want something and so they destroy everything that has meaning. That's what you meant?

RG: Well, as you know, I would take that to be another instance of the concentration camp example. That is, I think that if you actually look at people who are acting, it is not a correct analysis as long as they're doing anything. It's not a correct analysis of what's going on there, that they really believe in the value of nothing. It's not really right that they believe in the value of nothing. They don't believe in any of the values we accept, but that's a very different sort of thing.

And what I would say is the practical nihilist is like the concentration camp guard who actually has a rationale depending on various views about antisemitism and eugenics and various other sorts of things. He hasn't, but is pretending that he believes in nothing and acting in that way. So that would be the way I would try to go about this. I actually did a podcast on nihilism at one point that's on the internet. I don't mean to be a self-promoter, but anyway, I tried to say why I think the problem of nihilism is a pseudo problem, and if you unpack it, you'll see that nobody actually believes in nothing.

ES: Thank you very much actually for referring to the podcast you did on nihilism, and maybe we can add that to the show notes for our listeners so they can dig deeper into that as well, since you already started describing all of this. Now, this was a very thought-provoking podcast and time is slowly running out. But now maybe to lighten the mood a bit for our listeners – I don't want to stop them from pondering all these very important questions – but just to have something to hold onto, we are in the context of wisdom and wisdom traditions and philosophy, most of all. And I would like to ask you, because I know that you have these three definitions or three approaches to philosophy, could you maybe relate them to us, to our listeners, so we have a starting point maybe on something to help us guide us through these difficult questions as well? What is philosophy? How can we use philosophy to think about all these questions?

RG: I'm afraid I'm very bad at giving answers to general questions like that. All I can say is I think it's a very, very important function of philosophy to help us to clarify our attitude toward things

in general. And we need to make our way through the world. Not all of us are reflective. There's nothing wrong with that. You don't need to be reflective, but we are forced by our society to become reflective in various sorts of ways. And being reflective, we can't simply go ahead and do things. We have no alternative, but to give ourselves an account of why we're making our way through the world in this way.

And I would just say that philosophy can help in those three dimensions. That is the sort of existentialist thing about taking care of oneself and attempting to clarify one's own priorities, et cetera, the attempt to get some general sense of what the world is like and knowledge is like and technology is like and natural science, and in the social and political dimension. And the world of philosophy, the books out there, none of them contains the last evangelium. They're all to be used as tools, but many of them are tools that are highly, highly useful. And you use them as you see fit and make the use of them that seems appropriate for you. Again, in the context of philosophy as an individual enterprise, you make use of them to deal with your life as best you can.

Then there's another perspective, which is what's the social consequence of all of this thing? And it might turn out to be the case that politically it's not best that people make their way through life by reflecting in this particular way. I don't want to discuss, I haven't discussed that actually, but I think one has to see both of these aspects. One has to see, roughly speaking, all three aspects, the self-help aspect of philosophy, the protoscience aspect of philosophy and the political and social aspect of philosophy. And only if you see all three of them and somehow can find a way to some kind of attitude that lets you go through and assimilate as much of that as possible, well, that's what I would recommend to people. Although, I don't like recommending things.

ES: So I won't take this as a recommendation, I will just take it as something I would like to think about.

RG: It's noise in the atmosphere. Static. Static onto which you can project your own meanings.

ES: So then I will invite our listeners in that case to go find their own meanings to think about how to deal best with life. And I would like to thank you very much, Raymond Geuss, for explaining all these things to us and Michael Hampe for asking these valuable questions as well. Thank you very much for joining me today.

RG: Thank you. Thank you for the invitation.

MH: Thank you.

ES: At this point, I would like to thank our listeners for joining us today and also invite you to follow further Wisdom Talks as well as to curiously plunge into the multitude of texts and further podcasts that can be found on our website, www.metis.ethz.ch, the internet portal for intercultural wisdom literature and wisdom practices. You can also find more information in the show notes. Thank you very much for listening and goodbye.

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