Wittgenstein, Greek Organicism, Chaos, and the Center of Life

_a talk by_

Richard McDonough
Assoc. Lecturer of Philosophy, English Composition, Physics in Arium Academy

Philosophy Resource Room (AS3 0523)
Tuesday, 2 June, 2009, 2:00–4:00 p.m.
(Moderator: Dr. Cecilia Lim)

**Abstract:** Virtually all commentators read paragraph 608 of Wittgenstein’s _Zettel_ (Z608) as suggesting that the orders of language and thought may emerge from physical chaos in the neural center (hereafter “the orthodox interpretation”). Some commentators see Z608
as anticipating connectionist theories of the neural architecture. Others raise the specter of causal indeterminism in the brain. Some see allusions to Köhler’s theories of electric brainfields. Colin McGinn sees in Z608 the suggestion that there may, for all we know, be a pile of sawdust at the neural center, etc. These are all quite implausible interpretations since it is among Wittgenstein’s main themes that it is not the business of the philosopher to advance “any kind of theory” about “hidden processes.” Whereas the orthodox interpretation implausibly reads Wittgenstein as if Z608 is a bit of armchair cognitive science, Wittgenstein told Drury that he cannot help seeing philosophical problems from a religious point of view. The present paper argues that the key concepts in Z608, the center, chaos, nothingness, and emergence of order from these, are among the most basic religious concepts in the Western intellectual tradition. When Z608 is read “from a religious point of view,” it does not appear to be the implausible bit of a priori speculation that it has seemed to some to be, but, rather, links Wittgenstein’s way of thinking with a set of archetypal religious concepts and images that trace to the very beginnings of the Western intellectual tradition, predating even the beginnings of philosophy proper, and sheds new light on Wittgenstein’s distinctive way of thinking.

About the Speaker: Richard McDonough got his Ph.d. degree of Philosophy from university of Cornell in 1975 and is currently an Assoc. Lecturer of Philosophy, English Composition, Physics in Arium Academy. He has published The Argument of the Tractatus (SUNY Press, 1986), Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time (Peter Lang, 2005) and approximately 40 papers and 11 book reviews in refereed books and journals in philosophy, psychology, and linguistics.

ALL ARE WELCOME