

Nietzsche and Contemporary Philosophy of Science

By Udayan Debasis Das

STAFF WRITER

2011 Sawyer Philosophy Lecture in Science, Technology and Society, presented by Ronald N. Giere

Dr. Giere did not encounter Nietzsche until the '90s. When he was at Oberlin College getting his Bachelor's in Physics in the '60s, Nietzsche and his philosophical theories were not being taught there. Similarly, when he was pursuing graduate studies, also in the '60s, Nietzsche was not being taught at Cornell. In fact, Giere mentions the fact that Nietzsche has hardly ever been taught in professional philosophy departments in the United States since the Second World War. The reasons being manifold: Nietzsche not being a "professional philosopher" but a philologist; unjustified connections made between Nietzsche's philosophies and Nazism; and perhaps even the fact that he was German, among others. What is interesting, however, is to consider Nietzsche's contributions to the philosophy of science discipline as it stands today, and the extensions that Giere draws from Nietzsche's work.

At the heart of this is the question of scientific truth, or truth in general, the notion of truth itself, in all its metaphysical implications. Though scientists find it hard to accept that there may in fact be no such truth to speak of, there is nevertheless a body of work within philosophy, and particularly philosophy of science that seems to suggest that. Nietzsche held a belief that was similar, long before the rest of the philosophy world had "wised up" to it. Nietzsche even went as far as to say that the religious zeal of the Christian period was replaced by a zeal for the truth after the enlightenment. All this was stressed during Dr. Giere's rather entertaining presentation.

Nietzsche also observed that in the light of the realization that such a metaphysical truth

being non-existent, and thus, true objectivity being impossible, it is time to take a wider view of objectivity, one which takes into account perspectives, each individual's, each culture's, etc. To Nietzsche, there is no seeing without a certain perspective informing the act of seeing, thus the knowledge derived is dependent on that perspective. Moreover, he says that the more perspectives of a certain thing are taken into account the more completely objective our (I suppose by "our" is meant "our human") conception of that thing becomes. Thus, it is necessary to take these varied perspectives into account (because different perspectives yield different truths) rather than insisting on one particular perspective being the correct or infallible one. The truth as we know it depends upon the world that we see.

Dr. Giere has therefore been working on a theory of Scientific Perspectivism in which he aims to account for this assimilation of multiple perspectives in the creation of knowledge. This although challenging to a scientist who believes in perfect truth or perfect objectivity, need not be as unsettling to most contemporary practitioners in the discipline; for, as Dr. Giere points out, the business of scientific modeling, for example, is not fruitless: one should not expect exact replicas of natural behavior, but adequately similar model behavior is informative and useful. An understanding of the history and philosophy of science need not bring down the scientific discipline as it were, but being better informed scientists enables us to become better scientists because we understand the processes involved.

Ronald N. Giere is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota, and a former Director of the Center of Philosophy of Science at the University of Minnesota: <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~giere/>; the 2011 Sawyer lecture was delivered at the MTCC auditorium on Friday, February 25, 2011.

Vegetarian Cooking Classes on campus

By Utsav Gandhi

CAMPUS EDITOR

Matar paneer is a simple yet tasty vegetarian dish from the northern part of India around New Delhi and Punjab. Pair it with a piece of naan or chapati to make a full meal, or add potatoes and serve with rice - completely your choice! It consists of paneer (homemade cheese) and peas in a sauce that's both sweet and spicy. First, the cottage cheese is prepared in the traditional method. The base is prepared with cumin seeds, garam masala, vine ripened tomatoes, green peas among other things and paneer cheese cubes are added for stir frying on high heat. This recipe is courtesy of the Vegetarian cooking classes on campus, facilitated by Ms Kirtida from the ISKCON Temple in Chicago, which are scheduled every Wednesday from 6 to 8 p.m. in the Gunsaulus Hall First Floor lounge. Contact vedicvis@iit.edu for more information.

Week 2: Matar Panir

Preparation and Cooking Time: 45 minutes
Serves 5 or 6 people

Ingredients:

2 table spoons ghee or oil
Half teaspoon black mustard seeds
5 teaspoons cumin seeds
3 tea spoons minced fresh ginger
1 or 2 hot green chilies, minced
8 large ripe tomatoes finely diced
1 table spoon ground coriander
1 tea spoon turmeric
Half tea spoon ground fennel

Half tea spoon garam masala (An Indian spice, available at any Indian grocery store)

1 tea spoon brown sugar

3 table spoons chopped fresh coriander leaves or parsley

1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint leaves

Homemade curd cheese (paneer) made from 8 cups milk, pressed until firm and cut into half inch cubes.

Ghee (clarified butter, available in Indian grocery stores, ideal for deep frying because its smoke point (where its molecules begin to break down) is 250 °C (482 °F), which is well above typical cooking temperatures of around 200 °C (392 °F) and above that of most vegetable oils.

2 cups cooked fresh or frozen peas

2 cups whey or water

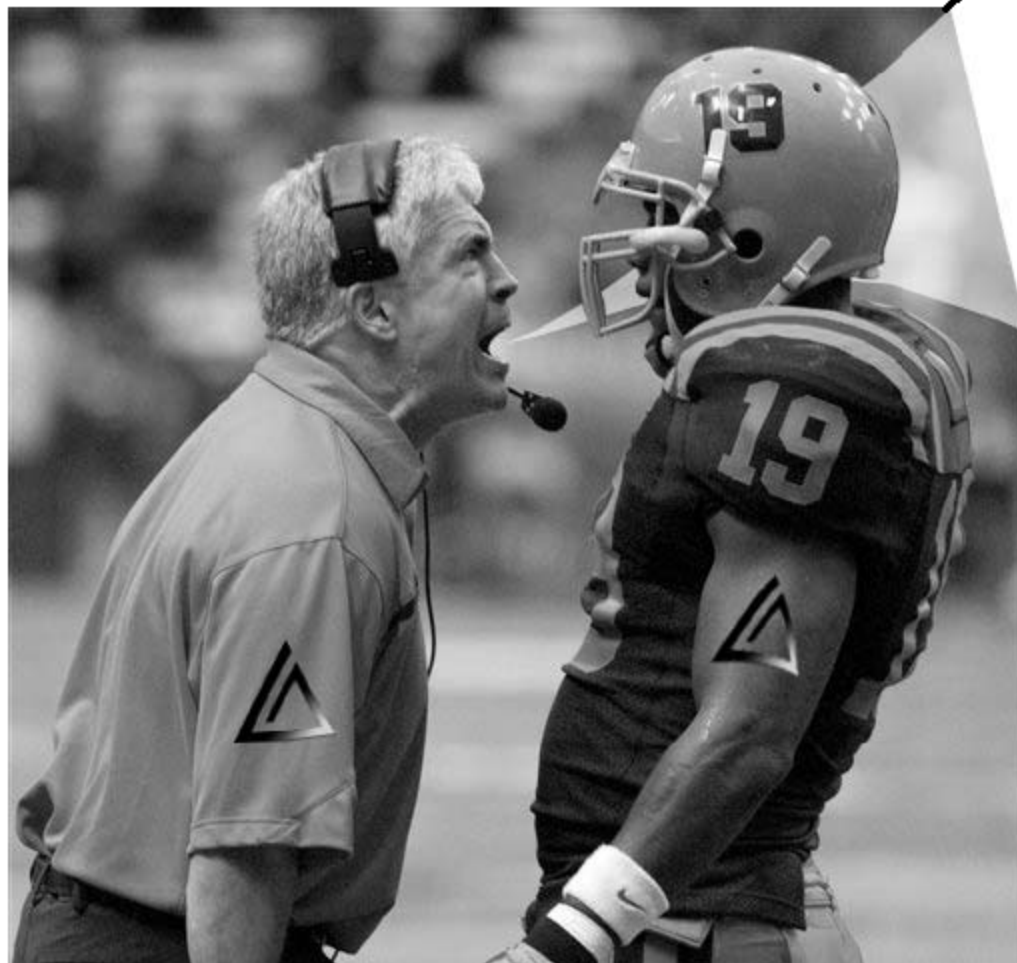
2 table spoons tomato paste

1.5 tea spoons salt

Directions:

1. Heat 2 table spoons ghee or oil in a 5 quart saucepan over moderate heat. Sauté the mustard seeds until they crackle. Add the cumin seeds and stir until they darken a few shades. Add the ginger and chilies and sauté momentarily. Add the chopped tomatoes, powdered spices, sugar, and half the herbs. Partially cover and stirring occasionally, simmer for about 15 minutes or until the tomatoes break down and turn pulpy.
2. Heat the ghee or oil in a pan or wok over moderately high heat. When hot, deep-fry the cubes of paneer cheese a batch at a time until golden brown. Remove and drain.
3. Add the peas and water or whey to the tomato and spice mixture. Boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook uncovered for 5 minutes. Add the tomato paste and salt and mix well; then add the paneer cubes and simmer for 5 more minutes. Before serving, add the fresh herbs. Serve hot.

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**Register for this event
by February 29th!**

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The Big Game

10 - 2pm

MTCC Ballroom

**March 5th
2011**