



National Centre for STEM Education Lecture Series

A talk by Professor Conleth Hussey
Head of Department of Civil Engineering & Materials Science
Wednesday 13th May 12:30, Room A1-065

TITLE OF THE TALK: FROM THE JOY OF SETS, AND THE MATHEMATICS OF LOVE ... TO THE LOVE OF MATHEMATICS!!

Abstract:

While Plato had the intuition that “Anyone who does not begin with love will never understand what philosophy is,” this talk starts from the position that “Anyone who does not understand mathematics will never understand what love is!”

When the Mathematician Georg Cantor (1845-1918) created his transfinite set theory, and discovered that he could locate a first infinity (Omega) beyond the finite, as the first of an uncountable number of higher infinities, little did he know that his discovery would provide the paradigm for the understanding of truth procedures in the four domains of art, science, politics, and love. Representing an interruption to the rules of succession and repetition of the natural whole numbers, Cantor’s Omega has the hallmarks of what the French mathematician and philosopher, Alain Badiou, refers to as an event.

That the nature of science is that of a truth procedure is witnessed by the fact that the history of its advancement is peppered with such events and epiphanies. Badiou, who is undoubtedly Plato’s successor as the modern philosopher of love, explains “Starting out from something that is simply an encounter, a trifle, you learn that you can experience the world on the basis of difference and not only in terms of identity... In today’s world, it is generally thought that individuals only pursue their self-interest. Love is an antidote to that. Provided it isn’t conceived only as an exchange of mutual favours, or isn’t calculated way in advance as a profitable investment, love really is a unique trust placed in chance.”

This talk is suitable for all, particularly those who are petrified by mathematics. Taking a rollercoaster ride from Prufrock to the Windows of Wonder, from Socrates to Lacan, from Archimedes in his bath to Roentgen’s discovery of X-Rays, from Cantor’s conjuring up of Omega from the void to the mind-numbing back-breaking content of modern textbooks, this talk will re-enchanted your appreciation of mathematics as though you had passed through a Tunnel of Love.



Biography

Prof Conleth Hussey is a subject of truth, which he pursues in each of its four domains of art, science, politics and love. His fidelity to science through research student supervision, publication, and teaching, led to him to become the first UL academic to achieve his higher doctorate for work actually carried out at UL. His fidelity to emancipatory politics has led to a suite of public lectures on the current economic, ecologic, and humanitarian crises in which he has developed a unique insight into the money issue.

An incurable romantic (whose fidelity in love is his own affair!) his current interests are: the relationships between post-Cantorian set-theory and the fundamentals of the quantum theory; the mathematical physics of the quantum properties of fields and materials; and the re-enchanted of mathematics and science education at all levels.



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