

# Help in Italian

by [Petrus Tornarius](#) (January 2023)



*Boy Drinking*, Annibale Carracci, 1582–83

*Life is a self-sustained chemical system capable of undergoing Darwinian evolution.* –astrobiological definition

**The neuroscientist Anil Seth**[\[\\*\]](#) contends that consciousness is best thought of as a controlled hallucination. If so, *control* must be the key calibration that makes the prospect work: too much and you end up aping Mussolini; too little, the comedian who, finding himself in Venice and in danger of drowning, bawls: “Help in Italian! Help in Italian!”

*Aiutaci!*

[\[\\*\]](#) Anil Seth, *Being You: A New Science of Consciousness* (New York: Dutton, 2021). The comedian was Harry Secombe (later Sir Harold Donald Secombe CBE) as [Neddie Seagoon](#) in the BBC’s much-loved 1950s series *The Goon Show*. *Aiutaci!* = “Help!” in Italian.

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**Petrus Tornarius** is the latinized name of the South African American poet Peter Dreyer—a form often used by some of his medieval German ancestors. He employs this pseudonym to sign poems he thinks “worth publishing, but perhaps a bit *infra dig.*” Dreyer is the author, among other books, of *A Beast in*

*View* (London: André Deutsch), *The Future of Treason* (New York: Ballantine), and *Martyrs and Fanatics: South Africa and Human Destiny* (New York: Simon & Schuster; London: Secker & Warburg).

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