

OF WONDERS

TWO ESSAYS ON THE NATURE OF REALITY

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1. The Metaphor of Oneness

WHERE THE MYSTIC WHO DIDN'T EXIST TAKES HIS PUPIL
ON A NIGHTLY TRIP TO THE HEART OF THE UNIVERSE AT
THE DISCOVERY OF THE SELF.

There once was a sacred conversation that took place between a Mystic and a Pupil where a certain Wisdom was passed that dissolved the created into the Creation. The Mystic held queer views for he existed beyond space and time both. The Pupil's ears and Mind were open wide, eager to collect the dew of Knowledge. The words that follow were spoken between a clear night sky and the sand of an island far at sea.

'Put out the fire, my child. The stars want to be seen.'

The Pupil obeyed in precipitation, as if he knew something strange was about to happen. The Mystic pointed a dry reed stem at the sky.

'Isn't it most peculiar how the agitated light from a fire here on the Earth prevents us from seeing the more subtle light of the Heavens?'

'Most peculiar, Master', he replied while pouring sea water on the embers. And so did the Pupil miss the first drop of dew imparted on that fated night.

When the smoke had cleared, the stars started speaking, first in whispers, then in songs, luring the two men ever closer. The Mystic broke the silence.

‘What do you call a cluster of stars?’

‘A constellation.’

‘And a cluster of constellations?’

‘A galaxy.’

‘And a cluster of galaxies?’

He hesitated a moment. ‘The Universe?’

‘Precisely! When you gaze upwards your eyes see one thing, but your Mind wanders. It is your privilege to decide whether you stare at the constellation, the galaxy or the Universe in its entirety, whichever strikes your fancy. I motion that we study the latter, if you would be so inclined.’

‘I would love that.’

With his reed stem, the Mystic drew a line in the sand between the two of them.

‘You are sitting on this shore, are you not?’

‘Yes, I am.’

‘And could we say that the shore is itself sitting on the Earth?’

‘We certainly could.’

‘Then I suppose you won’t argue when I say that the Earth is itself floating in the ocean of stars that form the Universe. Therefore, your reason tells you that you are sitting on the Universe. The frenetic dance of the Heavenly Bodies spins the wheel of the primordial mechanism, dragging your helpless body along. Your expression reveals contemplative bewilderment. Does the sudden change of perspective confuse you?’

‘More than confused, I’m humbled. The thought alone gives me vertigo. If the Universe could see, it would value me but a grain of sand.’

‘Oh but it *can* see! That is the selfsame idea I was about to advance.’

‘How could the Universe see if it has no eyes?’

‘There is something you must have overlooked, for eyes, it has many. Let us follow your proposition. Let us assume the Universe has no eyes. What does the Universe have then? What is it constituted of? From the finest to the grossest, is the emptiness sprawling between the Heavenly Bodies a part of the Universe?’

‘If emptiness can compose anything I suppose it is a part of it.’

‘Is the incandescent fire of the stars a part of it? Aren’t the stars what we think of when we contemplate the Universe? And what about the rocky planets and their satellites, are they a part of it?’

‘Assuredly.’

‘Including this planet! Then what about the mountains and the rivers?’

‘They are certainly a part of it.’

‘The plants and the forest, now these, our human Mind, in its illumined Wisdom, considers them separately. Why is that?’

‘Because the grass, the bushes and the trees are alive.’

‘Exactly! They live and they die and in their decomposing matter new plants are born. The cycle last for as long as there is water to satiate them and sun to feed them. So we agree that the plants are part of the whole. Then what about animals? The insects, the worms, the fishes, the birds, four-legged creatures and every animal we fashion as living beneath us, are they also apart of the Universe?’

‘With all due respect, I see the trap you are laying before me, my Master. Aren’t we animal ourselves? Isn’t this where you are leading me?’

‘I expected as much from you, my boy. Where do you propose we draw the line between what is and what isn’t a part

of the Universe? Where do you draw the line between what is a part of the whole and what sits on top of the whole, like you are sitting on the sand of this very shore?’

With the tip of his reed stem, the Mystic tapped the line in the sand between them.

‘Can you even a draw a line that isn’t arbitrary? How different are you from the primitive ape that you, almighty man, purport to uplift yourself above the gravitational vortex of Creation? If an analogy were to be drawn with the human body, the fingers are the hands and the hands are the body. Therefore the fingers are also the body. Conceptually separating them would be a fruitless endeavour. Likewise, you are a part of the whole. Your tendency to sever yourself from the *prima materia* is why you are lost. It is the reason why you feel powerless when confronted with the infinity of space and time. You feel estranged. But the Universe *is* you. You said it has no eyes to see, well, my dear child, don’t you see? The Universe *does* have eyes: yours.’

The profound gaze of his Master hammered the message deep within the young man’s soul.

‘And if the Universe is you,’ he continued, ‘then when you gaze at the stars, the Universe is looking at itself. We are, collectively, the all-seeing eyes of the World. I would be so audacious as to advance that we exist precisely so that the

Universe can witness itself, that God created men and women because He wanted to experience the concrete. The Universe is animated by a boundless curiosity to experiences itself in its entirety. In every corner of the ocean of stars is a Wave waiting to collapse. We are the consciousness of the Universe, its eyes and ears. Our experience is as much a gift from the Heavens to the mortal as it is a gift from the mortal to the Heavens. Every moment is a present.'

The young man stared deep into the overhanging abyss crushing him in its immensity. He could feel the Void staring back, but he withstood it, for the new-found Knowledge gave him the courage.

'Are you coming?' asked his Master who was already well on his way. The Pupil jumped on his feet and, with the sole of his leather sandal, erased the line in the sand. The shore and the Heavens came together to fill the emptiness that the two companions had left behind.

2. The Observatory of Panoptes.

WHERE THE MYSTIC WHO DIDN'T EXIST MAKES
EVERYTHING LIKE UNTO HIMSELF.

A nightly cool air carried the smell of myrrh from the other side of the dimly lit observatory. The Master ignited a pair of candles while softly singing of this deep growling voice that sounded like it originated from the depth of the cosmos. With a gentle gesture he invited his Pupil to take a seat beside him.

The young man sat on his heels next to his Master. On a low table was the most fascinating object he had ever seen. He had always been captivated by the complex arrangement of copper rings and orbs hanging in perfect equilibrium. When his Master permitted him to touch the device, he would push one part and watch the whole come to life in a preordained effort to keep itself balanced. The Astrolabe sphere was sitting near the window beyond which sprawled the stars it imitated. The Mystic noticed his fascination.

‘The Astrolabe is only a teaching tool. Need I remind you? You be sure you don’t forget. The Astrolabe sphere isn’t the stars. It is merely an *image* of the stars.’

‘I know. Yet it is such a beautiful contraption.’

‘And so is the Universe.’

In a moment suspended in time, the Mystic retreated in silence. The young apprentice waited patiently. It came to his attention that his own silence must have been deaf compared to the silence in his Master's Mind. The wise man's introspection was as humbling as the immensity of the Universe. What he wouldn't give to hear that silence.

'Now might be the appropriate time to bring a certain wisdom to you attention, my child. You may be ready to hear it.'

The rush of excitement pushed the Pupil to adjust his position on his heels, as if being well seated would somehow prepare him better for the Knowledge he was about to receive. Curiosity took the best of him.

'I can't tell if I'm ready, but I burn to know.'

'Very well then, my fiery friend, hear this. Earlier I mentioned the Astrolabe sphere was only an image of the stars. Has it come to your attention that the Astrolabe is also an image in and of itself?'

'In what way?' the Pupil asked, puzzled.

'It is a serpentine path to my meaning, so stay alert.'

He paused and gathered his thoughts.

'The Mind is the centre of our Knowledge. It is where everything we experience is processed. But what is experience

itself if not the product of our senses? And of our thoughts of course.'

'That my experience is the product of my senses, I can visualize, but what about thoughts. Would you show me an example?'

'Memories are an active part of experience. Something you see might unlock memories that were previously lost to you and those might colour the experience in a specific way. Another example would be deduction. A smell of food might inform you that your host is about to have dinner and you might want to politely excuse yourself. Wouldn't you agree that in both those cases your experience was the product of senses and thoughts?'

'I understand your meaning now.'

'If your experience begets Knowledge, then what you know of me comes to you from your senses. You have looked at me, you have heard me speak to you and, with every conversation you and I had, you constructed a mental image of who I am. It goes without saying that the image of me in your Mind isn't the person I am, no more than the Astrolabe is the stars. The Knowledge acquired by seeing the World around you constitutes what we call Reality. In other words, Reality is only in your Mind.'

Silence is the school of the wise, so the Master remained quiet. And only when the seed of Knowledge he had planted sprouted did he continue.

‘Do you see that plant by the window?’

The young man recognized white sage, carefully pruned and cleaned.

‘When you look at the plant, what you truly see is an image of the plant, in our Mind. You have no way of knowing the plant other than through what your senses reveal. The actual plant, the object that causes the vision when you look at it, cannot be known. This is a deep Wisdom, my child. Don’t overlook it. For it is true for every plant you have ever laid your eyes upon and it is true for every single object you have ever laid your eyes upon, at any time, at any place.’

Lifting his palms, the Mystic invited the Pupil to look around. The young man complied like under a spell.

‘Look at the room around you; observe the observatory. See it not as walls, table and bookshelves, but as an image devoid of concepts. It might take a while, but persevere for the Wisdom therein brings the Equanimity of a new-born. Keep trying.’

He knew without a doubt that his Pupil was gazing at the naked truth for a profound peace blurred his expression even as a mist.

‘Now that you recognize it, now that you can successfully contemplate the Universe unfiltered by the concepts of the Mind, what happens if you look at your own body?’

In trance, the Pupil looked at his hands.

‘I feel strange, my Master. This Reality you are showing me is both foreign and eerily familiar.’

‘You have seen it before, back when there was no concept you could apply to your experience, back when you lived every moment as a present, back when you were a baby.’

‘Do I even have a body?’

‘That, you cannot know. What you *do* know is that you have an image of a body in your Mind. As far as you know, my boy, you don’t have a Mind in a body; you have a body in a Mind. In your essence, you are a Witness. Your entire existence is a string of images in your Mind. And the source of those images lay ever out or reach, for it is a Wisdom that cannot be known. Some fragments of truth can be inferred from the aspects of Reality. Space, time and self are filters that aim at simplifying the Universe as perceived by the senses. Your brain oversimplifies the Universe into an easily manageable mental representation that favours your survival with minimal effort. You filter space in three dimensions to protect yourself from the threats in the physical world. You filter Reality by time because perceiving every moment at once would be too

overwhelming a task for your Mind and even if you could, it would only be a distraction. Finally, you filter by way of the self so that the Universe may witness itself through many eyes. The many veils can only mean one thing.'

'What is that?'

'That there is no Absolute Truth that an individual can know. I see the fire of curiosity inside you. It is good. It is the curiosity of the whole Universe. Attend to it with the utmost care. But always remember that curiosity can never be fulfilled. Mysteries are not meant to be unveiled; they are meant to wonder. And therein lies the Secret of Secrets.'