

## Virtual Reality

### Bang! You're Alive

Last week when Mark Causey spoke to us about Neitzche he mentioned his recent decision to return to school to study philosophy, the love of wisdom, was motivated by his wish to answer the ultimate questions of life. Philosophy itself was born from such questioning, the desire to know the meaning of life and our place in it. When I made the decision in college to major in philosophy it was these same kind of questions that motivated me. I was mostly fascinated with the areas of *metaphysics*, the study of the underlying nature of reality, and *epistemology*, the study of knowledge. In essence I wanted to answer the question, *What is real and how do I know it's real?* Today, fifteen years later, I'm still asking the same question, and not any closer to knowing for sure what the answer is.

I have, however, spent a good deal of time speculating about the answer and have formed, what I consider, an educated guess. Although, I'm the first to admit my answer is rather vague, and, again, is mere speculation about a question that it seems none of us can answer with certainty as long as we remain bound to the limitations of our corporeal experience. Perhaps one day, when we shed this cloak of uncertainty, this cold illusion we call life, we will move into the warmth of absolute knowledge, the light of ultimate truth. Isn't this the idea of eternal life? The idea that heaven is a place of fullness and completion and therefore we shall have full and complete understanding of the great mystery that confounds and confuses us in life?

What if, on the other hand, the mysterious afterlife isn't as complete as we imagine it to be? What if it is in fact incomplete, and the whole purpose of our experience in life is to find the missing pieces of the cosmic puzzle so we ourselves can complete it? What if we are really explorers from a darker dimension, a universe void of light, sent into this world to bring back some kind of awareness? What if life is some beautiful gift, some magnificent opportunity to find enlightenment, so we can carry the torch of our enlightenment with us to the other side, to bring awareness to those awaiting in darkness for our return? Perhaps the Universe is unconscious, a sleeping giant completely unaware of itself, and life is its fantastic attempt to wake itself up, to become conscious, to become aware of its own existence.

This notion is not so unfathomable if we look to the origins of the natural universe as an example. As I understand it, scientist discovered the Big Bang theory while listening for evidence of intelligent life in the Universe. Instead their mammoth listening dishes picked up the garbled echoes of our very beginnings, the sound of creation bursting into existence. Then, over eons of time, the gaseous emissions of the stellar fragment we call Earth combined with the photosynthetic starlight of the Sun to form the amino acids which eventually evolved into the building blocks of life. If this is so, then the very scientist who discovered the Big Bang are themselves made of star matter, as are we all. Isn't this an incredible thought! The idea that human beings are an evolved form of stars with the ability to look at stars! This, again, lends weight to the idea the Universe is

attempting to awaken to itself, to become conscious of itself.

### **The Gods Must be Crazy!**

In mythology this idea is expressed in stories about earthbound gods like Jesus, Prometheus and Odin. Jesus is the story of a god who gets stuck on earth, quite literally when he is stuck to a cross. But as I have said before, it is in this experience of being earthbound, or stuck, crucified, if you will, that we are able to stick around and work on our hang-ups. In other words, the experience of being stuck on earth allows us a brief opportunity for introspection during which we might gain a fuller awareness of ourselves and the ultimate meaning of life. As a mythological example of human potential, the Jesus story becomes the story of each one of us. We are each a part of the Divine Cosmos, and have come to earth to wake up.

Prometheus also became bound to the earth when Zeus chained him to a rock for giving fire to humanity. Zeus, the god of the heavens, would prefer that human beings be left in darkness, blind to the meaning of our existence. Prometheus, on the other hand, whose name means *Forthinker*, wanted human beings to become seers, conscious beings aware of our circumstances, awakened to our existence. But the result of his gift is being bound to a rock, to have his innards picked at by vultures, just as we all must feel the pain that's part of being bound to our earthly existence. As punishment to humankind, Zeus sent Pandora to open a box, releasing all the horrors we suffer in life. Only one thing remains inside Pandora's box, which should more accurately be called a vase, and that thing is *hope*. You see, Pandora is not the innocent and ignorant villainess of the story, but the heroine. She has to release the evils into the world lest hope remain hidden and crushed beneath their unbearable weight. In the same way, I suggest the possibility these bits of stars we call human beings have chosen to enter this partial and often painful existence in the hope of achieving something greater, enlightenment, the ability to see ourselves and, and in so doing see the entire Universe inside ourselves.

Let us also look to Odin, the Alfater of the Nordic pantheon, who often wandered about in human form in search of wisdom. He allowed himself to be blinded and crucified in the hope of learning the wisdom of mortality. And what is this wisdom we mortals alone can know? I suggest it is consciousness, self-reflection, the ability to look into ourselves. To me consciousness is best described as the experience of separateness. An infant, for example, is not conscious of its surroundings because it is unable to distinguish itself from those surroundings. But as the baby grows it learns to distinguish the unified canvas of meaningless colors, shadows, sounds and other sensations as objects and experiences separate from each other—Mom and Dad, brother and sister, bottle, food, toy, cold, hot. Very soon it becomes aware of itself and is able to consciously experience its interactive world. If, however, the infant never learned to break its experience apart it would, at best, act on instinct alone, moving about, eating and drinking like some mindless brute, perhaps at one with the Universe yes, but completely unaware of its own existence. But in learning to separate itself from otherness, the child becomes conscious.

Now let's suppose that infant is no infant at all but a god, like Odin, Prometheus and

Jesus, who has come into this world in the hope of discovering itself, or a little baby star wishing to look into the heavens. Our mythology points to our psychology, and our psychology tells us that we are all in the process of self discovery and self understanding. We are stars trying to look into the heavens, gods trying to discover ourselves. It's quite a phenomenon when you stop to think about—the *whole* breaking itself into *parts* so each part can learn to see the whole! As Jung says; The boldest speculations of the human mind concerning the nature of the phenomenal world, namely that the wheeling stars and the whole course of human history are but the phantasmagoria of a divine dream, become, when applied to the inner dream, a scientific probability. [CW5,p.430]

## **The Game of Life**

Let's look briefly at two areas of scientific study for further evidence of my hypotheses, *physics* and *psychology*. Most of us consider the phenomenal world, that is, our physical world, to be the apex of reality, and our sensory perception the ultimate test of reality. If there is another kind of reality that can't be physically sensed then it is somehow less real than the material world. In this line of thought emotions, ideas, dreams, even ghosts or other intangible apparitions may have some sort of half life, but they are not nearly as real as the ground we place our feet on, or the things we touch with our hands and see with our eyes. But what would you say if I told you just this past week I was transported away from this world and found myself in another world altogether.

The world, in fact is called Thyrion. It's a world whose populace has lived in fear and dread ever since the violent arrival of the villain Eidolon and his vile army of Golems. I was brought to Thyrion to become a warrior to help free it from Eidolon's reign of terror. With a sword in one hand, and what magic skills I could quickly develop, I roamed through the mystic castles and meadows of Thyrion doing battle with giant venomous spiders and armor plated soldiers overly fond of shooting fireballs at me. After slaying one soldier in a particularly fierce battle I found myself trapped behind a locked door. In a combined stroke of genius and idiocy I jumped onto the arm of a nearby catapult, cut the rope with my sword, and was instantly lunged over the wall onto the soft grassy hill awaiting me on the other side.

Don't worry, I haven't fallen under the spell of some sort of dementia. I've been playing a new virtual reality computer game. Some may consider it an incredible waste of time, but I do enjoy playing these kind of games. I particularly like the first person games because they give me the feeling that I'm actually walking around and interacting in another world. My favorite thing to do, is play the game in the evening, when I can turn the lights off so the only stimuli I see are the images on the computer screen.

Now, some of you are thinking it's only a game. It isn't real. At best it's a collection of electronic images, bits of information moving about on a screen that can be terminated by simply flipping a switch. The creatures I'm doing battle with aren't real, nor can their weapons really harm me. What I'm seeing on the computer is merely energy. It has no real substance.

But can't we also make this same argument about the phenomenal world? In truth the material world we perceive is an illusion which is at best the dim image of some other intangible reality. Quantum physics tells us the Universe is really made up of fields of energy. Our senses can only perceive matter, however, so we don't usually perceive the Universe as it really is, as energy. I've said before, if we could see the world on a molecular level it would appear as void as galactic space. It would be impossible to travel the vast distance between the points of matter that sparsely populate the great field of energy. Furthermore, what prevents me from passing through walls is not the matter of my body bumping against the matter of the wall. If that were all there were to it I would pass through the wall with ease, for the chances of our matter ever meeting is astronomical. It is actually the my field of energy meeting the field of energy in the wall that prevents me from passing through. Again, we are energy beings, not material beings.

In a way, then, we can say that we are living in a virtual world! The material world around us is virtual reality, but not reality. It is merely a collection of sensory images placed on the screen of sensual perception, indicative of a greater force that cannot be sensed.

Now, I mentioned when I play my virtual reality games, I like to play them in the dark so I can forget about the world around me, the world I "really" come from. Perhaps this is how it is for we gods who have traveled to this world for the purpose of self exploration. We forget where we really come from. By separating ourselves from the whole of existence, by becoming only part of it, we forget that we are from the whole. The Kabbalah has the tradition that the indentation we all have under our noses is the imprint of the angels placing their fingers over our mouths just before we're born into this world, reminding us to shush, not to tell the secret of our true origins. Still, our entire lives, consciously or unconsciously, seem to be about the business of remembering the secret, remembering where we come from. As physicist Gary Zukav writes in his book, *The Seat of the Soul*, "*The illusion holds power over you when you are not able to remember that you are a powerful spirit that has taken on the physical experience for the purpose of learning.*" [208]

In turning to the field of psychology, let's not suppose that full consciousness comes easy. Although most of us can distinguish ourselves from our environment and the objects in our environment from each other, this is only a superficial sort of awareness. In reality, most of us also feel mixed up most of the time! Feeling mixed up means part of us is truly mixed with parts that aren't our own. We haven't quite separated from the whole of existence and, therefore, are unable to truly comprehend ourselves. In the realm of emotion we call this co-dependence—the experience of confusing our feelings with the feelings of others. We all exhibit this sort of behavior on some level from time to time when we do something we don't really want to do, or forsake our own feelings just to keep the peace, make someone else happy, keep from making another angry or from hurting someone else's feelings. The beginning of psychotherapy, remembering that the word *therapy* means *assisting the gods*, is learning to distinguish our own feelings, in other words, to achieve a higher level of consciousness about ourselves.

In other words, we haven't arrived just because we've arrived in this world. We must be about the task of understanding ourselves. In doing this we enable the Universe to understand itself. For each one of us is, in our own unique way, a little version of the entire Universe. That's the great paradox of my theory, that the Universe breaks itself into parts so each part can learn to see itself as part of the whole.

A good example might be the way holograms work. In my limited understanding, the word itself is a combination of the words *wholeness* and *part*, a gram the contains the whole. Holographic images are created when focused beams of light are bounced off an object. The holographic plate that is created from the light will then reproduce a whole image of the object. The interesting thing is, if you break the plate into parts each part will also reproduce the whole image. I think this is how it is for us too. Each one of us is part of the whole and contains the whole Universe inside us.