

Thinkpiece

IS THERE MORE? A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SIGHT AND INSIGHT

by Alan Nordstrom

PREFACE

The verse dialogue that follows presents two sides of myself: the skeptical secular humanist and the mystical transcendentalist. These two personas have been duking it out in me since before college, when I found myself drawn equally to Bertrand Russell and to Ralph Waldo Emerson. Their respective prevalence in my mind seems to alternate like the seasons or the tides. Last summer when I was moved to write this dialogue, Emerson was in the ascendant and took the lead part in the debate I present you on the topic of “Is There More?”—meaning, “Is there more to the universe in the way of intention, purpose, and meaning than the secular scientific cosmology (or scientism) acknowledges?”

Now, in the winter, my mental season has altered, and I feel more dubious about my sunny transcendental insights, less open to the whispers of such inspiration. But so it goes with me, and maybe with you when you don your philosophical cap and ponder the Great Mystery of Things. Robert Frost in a witty couplet (1995, 329) once summed up our perplexity in the face of this Mystery:

We dance around in a ring and suppose,
But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.

And so it is that I offer you two suppositions, yet I do so not to persuade you necessarily of one view or the other but rather to entice you to exercise what the poet John Keats called “negative capability” (1959, 261), by which

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he meant “being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” Perhaps his notion is akin to Coleridge’s famous “willing suspension of disbelief” (1952, 376). In other words, I appeal to you as you listen to my dialogue to suspend your predilections toward either scientism or transcendentalism and let each supposition play itself out in the debate. Might it be that somehow, paradoxically, both views are true, not black and white, but yin and yang?

In my text I have labeled my two speakers “Y” and “N” for their respective Yes and No positions on the topic question of “Is There More?” As we come upon them, they appear to have already begun their dialogue, for Yes says:

∞ 1 ∞

Y: You’d have me prove to you there’s something more?

N: That’s right. There’s something more than what we see
Right here, right now, and in our memories.

Y: Some plan, you mean, some hidden purpose or
Design, some point to why we’re here at all?

N: That’s if you can, which I entirely doubt.

Y: Why’s that?

N: Because it’s plain to me that we
Have randomly evolved like everything
In nature, in the universe, and though
It’s wonderful to contemplate the scope
Of it, the time it took, how intricate
Complexity’s become—the cosmic course
Is not intentional and doesn’t point
Inevitably to us. That’s merely ego
Speaking, misguided pride because
We think ourselves the be-all, end-all of
The universe—what cosmocentric guff!

Remember how, not long ago, we thought
This Earth stood at the mid-point of nine spheres,
A nest of crystal shells encompassing
God’s masterpiece, descending from a chain
Of gold beneath the pearly gates of heaven?
Some charming fantasy that was. But then
We learned to look more closely at the stars.

Copernicus and Galileo showed
 Our ego's flaw and put us in our place,
 Disgraced from primacy, peripheral;
 And when biology advanced enough,
 Darwin made clear that accident alone
 Brought us about—no special providence,
 No heavenly intent, but simply chance
 And something in the course of things that tends
 Toward complexity, though randomly,
 With nothing in its mind implying us.

Y: Yet here we are, and marvelous indeed,
 Don't you agree? I cannot help but think
 That something more than simple chance provides
 The reason of our being in this world.
 Aren't you amazed, confounded, stupefied
 That out of hydrogen, then up the scale
 Of elements should come this universe
 Of stars and galaxies and then this one,
 Perhaps but one of countless other planets
 Still unknown to us, that brings forth life,
 Then consciousness seeking to know itself,
 Its origin, and yes, its purpose, too?

N: Amazing, sure, and wonderful, I've said,
 But that we feel, and *can* feel, such delight
 Does not enlighten us as to its cause.

Y: I think we do not know its cause, nor will
 We ever know in years to come, by just
 The power of science. Or if we do we'll prove
 What we have learned through intuition long
 Ago, by what diviners, sages, seers
 In rapturous ecstasy have seen and sung
 In poetry and myth, those languages
 Attuned to deepest mysteries such as these.
 Now I'll make bold and I'll predict a time
 Not far ahead when science will expand
 To recognize a cognizance forgotten
 Four centuries ago, when minds began
 To narrow for the sake of making headway
 In the world of matter, measurable and hard.
 Somehow we'll recognize that consciousness
 Includes a mystical-empirical

Connection—a paradox just now, but soon
 Self-evident, an obvious paradigm.
 And in that coming paradigm we'll see,
 I do believe, that what ordained this world
 And us—its arch inhabitants—is more
 Than accident and less than fixed design:
 A scheme that leaves us free to make our way.

N: And that you would call purpose?

Y: Yes, I do.
 Our purpose is to learn why we are here,
 To fathom how this wondrous universe
 Came into being, how it works, and where
 It tends, not just toward us but far beyond,
 For we are instruments it surely made
 To realize its aim and comprehend
 Itself. Our task, implicit in the itch
 Of curiosity we feel, is to delve out
 By every way of knowing we command
 The marvel of the mystery that made us.
 Your science is a part of how we see,
 But merely part; the rest is wisdom
 That only mystic insight might divine.

N: Those are fine words, but meaningless to me,
 The hokum of a superstitious age
 We've left behind, an age of magic and
 Quaint fantasies that crooks, who would beguile
 The credulous and captivate weak minds
 They would control, bend to their sinister ends.

Y: I quite agree fake mystagogues abuse
 The foolish minds of those prone to believe
 Preposterous delusions clearer thought
 Could cure, yet the mystery I mean to probe
 Is not the stuff of cunning cozenage
 But what lies hidden in the warp and woof
 Of truth, reality so subtle that
 We must become as subtle as it is
 To apprehend its essence in ourselves.
 Now, more than this I cannot plainly say,
 For I have not attained such subtlety,
 But only dimly glimpsed the truth of it,

Enough, however, to assure myself
That wiser ones than I exist who know
Much more of mystery and will some day
Reveal the wealth of wisdom they behold.
Indeed they have begun. What was occult
And covetously concealed from common view
Has broken loose, and books abound with lore
Men died to hide but we now live to read,
And live more truly as we understand
These hidden insights into what is real.

N: So you assert; assertion's, though, no proof.
Yet as a scientist, whose method is
To be proved wrong, I'll grant you time and space
To make your case, to show me what you can
That demonstrates the limits of my knowing
And opens me to keener ways to see.

Y: I thank you for your open-mindedness
And in due course I will present my case
And hope, if not to prove, at least to make
More credible the proposition that
The universe is more than accident,
And shows instead intelligent intent,
Which our capacity to apprehend,
Once learned and used, will prove our purposed end.

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N: Some several weeks have passed since we last talked,
My friend. How goes your study? Are you ready
Now to tell me more about that something
You declare exists beyond the scope
Of physics and the stuff of science's theories?

Y: I am, indeed, my old antagonist
(My brother and myself, I must confess,
The darker side of me, of little faith).
I'll tell you that I've come at last, if not
To see, at least to say on credible
Authority: there's more in heaven and earth
Than you, in your confined philosophy,
Can apprehend or comprehend as true.

N: I am all ears. I'm only here to keep
 You straight, you know. I'd be quite glad to have
 You demonstrate or otherwise convince me
 That *you* know something more and something truer
 Than science, as I know it, will allow.

Y: Then let me tell you stories and reports
 You'll think absurd, and I have too, though now
 I am inclined to open wide my mind,
 Suspend my disbelief and live with doubt,
 Uncertainty, and mystery in peace—
 To see what deeper wisdom may reveal.

N: Say on, my credulous friend. I only hope
 Your open mind won't let your brains drop out.

Y: I'll let you tell me if they do. That's why
 You're here.

N: Say on. What stories? What reports?

Y: The story of the universe as Love,
 So different than you think since you suppose
 Nothing but energy and light and gas
 Expanding, cooling into particles
 Of matter that coagulate as dust,
 Then earth, then us—a happenstance.
 But I say Love, the Living Logos, first
 Brought all this forth, the birth of mystery's mind
 That we, or some of us, may read and more
 Will come to read once they have learned to clear
 The fog of ego and refine their minds,
 As myths can do, to tune in this divine
 Intelligence—though that ability
 Is everyone's potentiality.
 Being creatures of the one creating Mind,
 We're made to know ourselves, our origin,
 And find our way back home in our due time.
 We're formed to realize our deepest being,
 Our essential and authentic self,
 And know it perfect, pure, divine: all Love.

N: I wonder if you might be more precise?
 Say more about the nature of this world.
 If there is "more," what's *more* than we can see?

- Y: I'm ready to believe a spirit world
 Exists, the realm of angels, muses, elves,
 Of spirit guides and ancestors who care
 For us, all unawares, and speak to us
 In dreams and in our hearts, and jest with us
 Through telling signs and synchronicities.
- N: Oh, now you're overboard, you're loony tunes.
 It's time to see a shrink.
- Y: So *you* would think.
 I knew you would, for so did I until
 I wondered where my words came from when I
 Would write a poem, and how my thoughts
 Emerged mysteriously as if foreknown
 To round a sonnet off and make it whole.
 My sense of being guided (whispered to)
 As ancient muses were alleged to do,
 Was too uncanny, too dependable
 To be denied as something from outside
 My ordinary mind and mode of knowing.
 I learned how to relax and trust that words
 Would come and thoughts would flow in cadences
 As I co-labored with a source that *you*
 Might label my unconscious mind, but *that*
 Just makes my point: there's only mind, and all
 Is mind, the Universal Sacred Mind,
 The Nous, the Logos, the eternal Tao,
 And we are It, a bit of It—the way
 A wave plays on the ocean yet is ocean.
 So likewise now I see my soul as part
 Of Oversoul, as one with it throughout
 Eternity, beyond all space and time.
 This Universal Sacred Mind is God,
 And we, being part of It ourselves, are God,
 Since all is God, could we remember that—
 Though we, here, now, in this material form,
 For reasons that eventually we'll learn,
 Have fallen asleep and let ourselves forget
 The truth of who we are and why we're here.
 The gist of this I'll give you in one sentence:
 The aim of life is to attune and then
 Atone ourselves with God and be at one.

- N: Well, that at least is pithy and well put,
 But is it more than wishful rhetoric
 And fantasy, the stuff of fairy tales?
 “Angels,” you say! And muses. Even elves?
 I think your Inner Child needs to grow up.
- Y: My Inner Child’s my Higher Self and knows
 The clouds of glory it descended from,
 Its provenance from Providence Divine.
 It knows the role of mind in all that is,
 Or seems to be, and therefore knows that elves,
 Imagined well, come into earthly ken
 At the command of mind. Blind are the ones
 Who cannot see thus, metaphysically.
- N: Then I am blind. But you, you say, can see,
 Or at least hear, occult realities
 Still hidden from my duller eyes and ears?
 You’d have me play dim Peter Quince while you
 Cavort in fairyland enrapt in bliss
 That seems to me mere asininity,
 For you, my bully Bottom, are a dolt.
- Y: Had you but eyes to see and ears to hear,
 You wouldn’t scorn me so, though I won’t hold
 A grudge at that, my friend. Your time will come
 And so will everyone’s to waken from
 This dream we think is life, yet is a sleep
 And a forgetting of reality.
 This story’s old and Plato told it long
 Ago, his “Allegory of the Cave”:
 That cave’s this world you see and you believe
 Is real but is a fiction of your mind
 Projected on a screen, a figured veil
 Of figments apprehended as the truth.
 But some know better and have seen the sun
 Outside the cave, and come to know that shadows
 Masquerade as things substantial there,
 Within the cavern of unconsciousness—
 False idols in uncomprehending minds.
- N: I still am blind to that, or still asleep,
 As you would say, but I’d be glad to waken,
 If I knew how, or even be enchanted

For a spell, if it takes that, to make
 Me see or realize what you delight
 In knowing—if knowing's what it truly is.

- Y: A *kind* of knowing, yes, noetic knowing,
 The gnosis intuition gives a mind
 That's learned to listen to its heart and hear
 Impulses from dimensions subtler than
 The atoms of this world.
- N: Well, that's beyond
 What I can know, if not beyond belief.
- Y: Neither, I'd say. You *can* know this and can
 Believe. In fact, belief comes first. Believe
 Then see: that's how it works. But first relax
 Your apprehensions. Let possibility
 Occur to you, not probability,
 Not something measurable, but just the thought
 Of *might*: it might be so. I wish it so.
 I'd like to see it so. Let it be so.
 Thus you allow your mind to open to
 The inspiration of ethereal thought,
 Which only intuition can perceive,
 Not rationality. Your reason that
 Discerns, distinguishes, and separates
 Cannot relate to wholes intuited,
 To oneness and integrity, to love,
 The Love that makes the universe one web,
 Or some would say a hologram; though we
 Have only feeble imagery to show,
 Suggest but dimly, what cannot be said
 In language of the senses and the head.
 The mindfulness we need is heartfulness,
 For only intuition apprehends,
 By feeling and emotion's images
 Imagined in a way that shows them so.
- N: Ah, yes, I know—the stuff of poetry:
 “The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
 And as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.”

- Y: Well, if you'll quote the Bard to make your case,
 Don't stop with what your thick Duke Theseus says;
 Hippolyta, his more perceptive queen,
 Sees something of "great constancy" beyond
 Mere "fancy's images" in what their night
 Of dreaming has mysteriously revealed.
 Somehow the wayward course of human error,
 Benighted and befuddled and dismayed,
 Is straightened and illumined once the moon
 Of lunacy gives way to brighter rays
 Of transcendental, providential light.
 Whoever said that tragedy is how
 The world appears to those who only feel
 And comedy the mode of those who think
 Has got it backward, but I'll put you right,
 Or Shakespeare will, for tragedy, he knew,
 Depicts the dark, the doltish, the deceived
 Who never learn, or learn too late, how they
 Have strayed erroneously into the fates
 Their heady willfulness has made, for so
 It is with Hamlet and King Lear and dull
 Othello and self-blinded, foul Macbeth.
 But comedy has got it right, as Dante
 Earlier showed, since comedy's divine.
 In comedy we understand the world's
 A stage, the characters but players in
 A drama that's a dream. Beyond that dream:
 Reality, the realm of the awakened.
 While in Will's comedies few truly wake
 To apprehend the realm embracing them,
 We see how their good fortune in the end
 Proceeds from forces unbeknownst but real,
 Portrayed as fairies, gods, or human beings
 Of angelic disposition who
 Dispose affairs to yield a denouement.
 All this we feel is true, though know it not
 And cannot know by ways that heads conceive
 But only hearts. Heartsight alone can see
 The sacred truth revealed by comedy.
- N: Amen. You've had your say. Now rest until
 We meet again. Meanwhile I'll ponder all
 You've said. There's more that I would ask of you
 And more, I'm very sure, that you'll proclaim.
 I certainly won't concede you've won this game.

∞ 3 ∞

- N: Well, brother mine, how goes your wondering?
Too many months have passed since last we chatted.
- Y: I've been too much distracted, I must say,
My friend, my mind in thrall to lesser things,
Necessities, however, for my living.
I teach, you know, and though that's worthy work
It's too confining often to give rein
To ranging thought and scope to pondering.
- N: Then let me see if I can focus your
Distracted mind and bring you back to task.
I have a question that I've longed to ask.
- Y: What's that?
- N: You've claimed, before, *incredible* things,
I think. Give me some reason to believe them.
- Y: Give you a reason to believe? Why that's
Impossible. That's contradictory.
What I believe, by definition, goes
Beyond what reason can confirm is so.
What I believe I choose to take as true
Beyond the bounds of proof and certainty
By leaping in a void where no one *knows*,
Yet where I may imaginatively *suppose*.
If thinking in this way can make it so,
So be it then, and *then* let reason in
To deal with what I've come to know by virtue
Of *as if*: some thing of constancy conceived
From my belief, then nourished in the womb
Of time and born beyond the edge of doom.
- N: Gracious! I think you've said a sonnet there.
Though rather scant in rhymes, it's eloquent.
- Y: Then let that serve you as some evidence
For what I'm saying: that something grander than
My little mind may lift me higher than
What feeble intellect can by itself
Conceive, and carry me to realms of light
And insight shut to rationality.

N: And you *believe* that's so?

Y: Believing makes
 It so, as I have said. Don't ask me how.
 I only know what my experience
 Has proved in practice, proved pragmythically.

N: "Pragmatic," *that's* a word I recognize.
 "Pragmythic," what is that?

Y: A term I've made
 To label what I've told you: how I put
 Belief ahead of knowing, then I wait
 To watch what I believe come into being,
 Made manifest apparently by faith.
 I've learned at last the universe is giving.
 It waits until it's asked and then responds
 In kind to your request, your true request,
 According to your deepest, fondest wish.
 What you believe is what you get, for what
 You see you have believed and made it so.

N: *That* I'll believe when I first see it so.
 One thing I see's how contradictory
 We are, as opposite as black and white.

Y: Or could it be, you think, as yin and yang?

N: As yin and yang? *That's* somehow more complex,
 I know, but *how*, you'll have to clue me in.

Y: Well, think of them as poles, magnetic poles—
 The kind of opposites *you* mean—one at
 Each end; but when you bend your bar into
 A circle and fuse both ends together, what
 Would happen then? I think you'd see (if you
Could see) a swirl of energy like yin
 And yang each swallowing the other's tail,
 Becoming its own opposite, black hole
 Becoming white, the night producing light
 And, *Fiat Lux*, from nothing something comes—
 Returning then to nothing, round and round.
 And that is how *we* are, we two, like wave
 And particle, matter and energy,
 The same but for perspective, only seeming

Opposite or contradictory,
One coin, two sides; two poles, one globe, a world
Unto ourselves.

N: You may be right—my head
Is spinning so. Or else your reasoning
Is circular and I'm too dizzy now
To figure out what fallacies you've made.

Y: Sit down, my friend. Let your brain settle, for
It's only in deep stillness that you'll know
The truth I've told you to be true indeed:
That *you* are right, and *I* am right as well,
Though seeming opposite. A paradox
This is that cannot be resolved by thought
But only understood another way,
The way of silence and no thought, a way
Beyond the mind of rationality
Into the seat of universal sight,
Of seeing without eyes, illumined by
A light invisible to mortal sense, and
Senseless to all but wisdom—soul divined.
Let's call it "Soulsight."

N: Oh? "Heartsight" before,
And "Soulsight" now. Are they the same?

Y: The same
But in degree. Soulsight sees deeper and
Sees more, sees ultimate reality
Beneath all shows of things, illusions that
Confound most human minds most of the time.
Soulsight sees Reason beyond reasoning
Sees Purpose and the methodology
Of Destiny, how fate and freedom blend
To bring about predestined willingness—
A mystery, I know, another source
Of paradox, but let that rest. I speak
Mere words, and words will never tell the truth
I mean, which lies beyond all saying, though
Is found in the profundity of silence.
So I'll end now as Hamlet did: "The rest,"
My friend, "is silence." My muses so attest.

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