

The End Of Philosophy

– Tales Of Reality –

by

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Foreword

This foreword details a seven-year challenge to complete this project.

Several complete rewrites later, I finally realized the work I originally sought to compose could never be written using words – if indeed it could be created in any medium at all. So, to whatever extent this work might interest the reader, it is unlikely to do so via any set ideas, but perhaps via what it indirectly demonstrates the human mind can never achieve.

The subtitle *Tales Of Reality* is more descriptive than the title declaring *The End Of Philosophy*. The idea of philosophy having an *end* is of course just a play on words, suggesting that human ideas have inherent limits, but that philosophy is nonetheless far from the pointless navel-gazing exercise often imagined.

At one point, the subtitle nearly became *Rambling Tales Of Reality*; the motivation being an awareness – confirmed by others – that the text rarely sticks closely to any particular subject. But this is a somewhat incorrect perception since one main theme is that seemingly different subjects are never wholly disconnected. The word *rambling* was in any case ditched once I realized its role would be apologetic. In truth, the work sets out to join as many dots as possible, and its sometimes-rambling feel results only from immersion in that task.

In describing the *connectedness* of reality, I have flirted with *holism*, but the holism concept is already marred by misleading cultural associations in relation to what might be considered *pure holism*. A philosophical impossibility of discussing such *wholly indivisible* holism lies in it logically having no parts or features to form the substance of any would-be discussion. *Pure Holism* is in effect the book that neither I nor anyone else could ever write, given the divisive nature of language. However, the inherently elusive aspect of such holism is perhaps hinted at in the long-standing but notably short saying that *He who knows does not say*. And of course, that idea could jokingly or otherwise be expanded to infer that the more one says, the less one knows – an idea reflected in another saying: *Empty vessels make the most noise*.

Here we are thrust upon questions regarding what truly constitutes *knowledge*. In a world where our burgeoning masses of *objective facts* are given supreme importance, and new information assaults us daily, we subliminally accept all such *cultural noise* – arguably the opposite of *spiritual silence* – as a feature of knowledge. But to what extent has that noise deafened us to forms of knowledge not tied to facts, data, and abstract thought processes? And can such a question be properly answered amidst the modern cognitive din that inhibits even asking it?

Our model of informational and factual knowledge is rarely examined to see if it genuinely merits its cultural pride of place; its supposed benefits are generally just seen as a given. It can nonetheless be checked for philosophical weaknesses, paradoxes, and omissions – whilst its comprehensive failure to resolve age-old philosophical conundrums strongly suggests its scope is at best limited. This forms one theme of this work, together with a general contention that matters in these areas are not at all as typically imagined.

Tales Of Reality reflects the idea that we can never have more than imperfect, albeit often useful beliefs regarding our condition, whilst all our related conceptualizations must remain mere models of an ultimately unfathomable reality. If any such thing as absolute or incontrovertible knowledge is possible, it is not considered amenable to the abstraction within human thought and cognition. At least, such is one key *tale of reality* amongst

countless others.

From this perspective, no ideas are presented as wholly *correct* or *false*. Nothing in human ideas is seen as being of unquestionable value or as wholly meaningless. Moreover, everything experienced, however seemingly crazy, is seen as essentially *real* by simply being experienced. And such experience is also considered real in manners mere *facts* never could be – experience, unlike facts, being of a primary nature that requires no abstract interpretation.

Meanwhile, *objective* thinking is presented as an essentially utilitarian mental strategy – devoid of intrinsic value, albeit central to the dubious planetary explosion of homo sapiens. Even the apparently exact certitude of mathematics is revealed as circular thinking of no inherent worth.

The backdrop to all this is that the human mind's framing of its experience and intentions within abstract thoughts and ideas is regarded as an embryonic evolutionary development in rather urgent need of maturation. Framing absolutely all the mind's *tales of reality* as truly nothing more than *mere tales* is seen as integral to such maturation. So, while I wish the reader an interesting read, he is warned against taking any such tales too seriously – whether they be mine, the conventional ones challenged herein, or any others.

Regardless of their source, the *tales of reality* that ring most true to each one of us are those upon which our most enduring delusions rest.

Narrative strategy

Contrary to any suggestion of the book-cover image, no individuals or their works are directly referenced. Instead, the narrative is deliberately generic; it aims to transcend the endless cultural colorations associated with not only specific people, but also with recognized nations, religions and ideologies of all kinds.

For whoever might argue the dangers of all the generalizing that results, a counter argument is made that language actually *depends* on generalizations; to specify anything at all is in fact to use a term for something that upon closer examination is invariably far more complex and varied than any term could ever capture. The underlying inability to resolve anything at all to would-be indivisible component phenomena reveals generalizing to be an intrinsic linguistic attribute. This can be demonstrated on the physical dimension by simply considering that the documented identities of each one of us – however detailed they may be – are monstrous generalizations for the collection of atoms and whatever else we imagine compose us as flesh and blood. Meanwhile in the world of physics, even *the atom* itself – so easily referenced by its short word – increasingly looks like a complex and somewhat mysterious entity.

Examining this whole issue in more depth throughout the text substantiates the notion that we in fact have little more than mere *tales of reality* about anything.

Punctuation notes

Breaking with convention, italics are used in all instances where words or phrases warrant any form of stress or special attention. Often the idea is simply to highlight the conventional but suspect use of terminology, or to reflect some irony or dubiety regarding a concept and its naming.

The idea of *rhetorical questions* requiring no interrogation marks is not acknowledged; the reader's response to some questions may be anticipated but is never assumed.

No punctuation rules are considered sacrosanct; clarity rather than consistency is the goal.

Trigger warning

The three INTERLUDES use expletives and other forms of supposedly *bad* language. These three sections can be ignored in terms of following the main narrative.

1 – Language, Lies, And Illusions

Of all the things distinguishing humans from other species, language and symbolic forms of communication play a central role. From religion to physics, and from art to industry, linguistic and graphic communications are key.

Speech is reflexively used in so many social situations that without it our cultures could not be as we know them. Those cultures are also awash with text, audio and video covering everything from technical manuals to the most bizarre fiction and fantasy. Organized entertainment, legislation, administration, education, scientific theory and more, all rely so heavily on human forms of encoding reality that it is easy to see why all such pursuits appear wholly absent in other species.

So central has language and related activities been to the development of human cultures that any self-examination of our species should surely place them center stage. Perhaps for the same reason, philosophy seems magnetically drawn to this whole issue. But despite millennia of debate and linguistic expression – endless *words about words* – no clear understanding of language has emerged that might match, for example, the human understanding of our solar system. In terms of such an analogy, theories and ideas about language have not even agreed on the trajectories of the planets, what orbits what, or what holds the apparent order in place. However, any philosophical inquiry that fails to acknowledge and interrogate language's pre-eminent role in human affairs would be rather like daylight astronomy concluding there can only be two or three celestial bodies. Without questioning our mode of investigation, we effectively assume it to be sound and unwittingly allow its flaws to skew our thinking.

Notably, it can be asked if astronomers would ever have bothered working in the dark were it not that conditions impact perceptions. But obvious as this issue might be in certain disciplines, the matter has little recognition when examining the ubiquitous role of language in relation to human ideas. Far from peering out into the darkness to see what new entities and phenomena might be found, linguistically-couched human ideas are handed from one generation to the next in rather routine manners that escape question. This represents an almost mythological blind faith in our core ideas and their linguistic formulations. And although such cultural inertia is heavily masked by the industrious thrust of making various forms of *progress*, the underlying paradigm of abstract thought only remains even more beyond question as a result.

Regardless of its huge role in human development, language remains a profound mystery – even if linguists, philosophers, psychologists and others choose to debate it in disarmingly erudite-sounding manners. It is almost as if our model of knowledge is circular in a manner prohibiting any proper interrogation or understanding of the very language that frames it. But if language and related forms of conceptualization are the bedrock underlying human abstract knowledge and inquiry, our understanding of everything thereby accessed remains dependent on the true nature of these things – regardless of how obscure that nature may be.

The inability to get at the real nitty-gritty of language arguably extends right back to its very emergence. Theories of how and why language and graphic representations first emerged must remain speculative given there obviously were no prior-existing means of recording such matters. As the evolution of language was presumably not instantaneous and initially limited to its verbalized form, it could only emerge devoid of any record of its true origins. Hence no one knows how we came to speak, or what the subjective human experience felt like before language appeared. And yet we are now so habituated to it that we struggle to

turn off our conscious stream of linguistic thoughts long enough to get a feel for the wordless consciousness our distant ancestors must have known as their daily reality.

It is not only within the external world of human societies, cultures and industries that language has had a monstrous impact: it has presumably also reworked subjective human consciousness. And we may well be laboring under a very imbalanced view of this, given that the very conspicuous physical effects of human development contrast sharply with the invisibility of our consciousness. Archaeologists have seemingly reliable accounts of how evolving civilizations transformed their physical environments, but there are no equivalent accounts detailing how those civilizations transformed human consciousness. There is however, significant evidence that our brains have physiologically evolved to better manage all the linguistic and related cognitive processes that, despite all our shared DNA, leave us appearing quite distinct from other species.

The foundation of technology

From a certain perspective, it is arguable that language, symbolism, abstraction and the related brain functions should be seen as a fundamental *technology* underlying all other human technologies. Much as we might typically think of *technology* as a modern phenomenon, the etymology of the word simply concerns skills and *know-how* and does not therefore exclude our ancestors inventing how to *grunt intelligently* at one another: a technology now highly developed and called *language*. Given all our modern technologies could surely only emerge after language's initial emergence, this slightly unusual step of seeing language as a root technology appears sound.

Notably, the emergence of new fields of technology has always been paralleled by new jargon and language use – something that underscores the crucial role language and related forms of encoding ideas continue to play today. In a complementary manner, great strides in human knowledge and its sharing are associated with various technologies and inventions that helped *spread the word*, such as writing and paper, the printing press, sound recording, the telephone, the radio, the television, satellite communication and the internet.

A significant benefit of language is that it can record, store and exchange information such that whatever any individual happens to know or discover remains available in their absence – including long after their death. This simple fact that abstract knowledge can be encoded linguistically has moved knowledge and learning from the live-and-learn paradigm of other species to one in which language alone allows humans to, for example, become familiar with the speculations of each other's minds regarding events at the furthestmost extremities of the universe.

Crucially, this linguistic encoding of knowledge and ideas in manners that allow their exchange, storing, and reuse constitutes a cumulative model of amassing knowledge, such that whatever was known by our forebears can be handed over to us without the need to repeat the acts and experiences that initially derived such knowledge. Thanks to language, *knowledge* – at least a certain form of knowledge – no longer necessitates direct experience of that which is known. Hence, instead of learning through direct interaction with the physical world, we increasingly learn via abstracted processes; by referencing existing texts, concepts, ideas, theories and historical records: the *learning materials* that form the substance of formalized education and knowledge acquisition in general.

The ever-growing wealth of factual knowledge facilitated by this process down through the ages is well beyond estimation. Combined with the many technologies spawned along the way, the individual can now acquire all sorts of information that until recently would not even have appeared knowable, regardless of any effort. There is now so much knowledge to

potentially learn, that in terms of the overall body of human knowledge, even the most scholarly mind knows relatively little.

Managing this explosive mass of knowledge requires continual categorization and subdivision into more and more *fields of knowledge*, such that the growing totality is spread across a large and still-expanding universe of specialisms.

This huge exercise of examining and encoding our world and its phenomena in ever-greater detail is evidenced in etymology where concepts once closely related are now considered quite distant. For example, *art*, *craft* and *science* are words with roots closely related in a manner that seems odd to modern minds. Similarly, *physics* was once seen as a branch of *philosophy*, as were various other disciplines now considered fields in their own right. Consequently, an argument can be made that *specialists* and *experts* who focus extensively on specific areas do not have well-rounded and balanced views – their attention having been mostly spent examining details within some narrow band of human activity, rather than looking at matters in more general manners.

Via science in particular, knowledge acquisition has to date promoted such specialization and the examination of relatively discrete microcosms in ever-finer detail – as opposed to considering that individuals should maybe develop more rounded views by looking at multiple areas on a broader basis. Simultaneously, new words and concepts have been birthed at an accelerating rate, as language and its abstract modeling of our world have moved relentlessly to deeper levels of sophistication and *granularity* – a word that not by coincidence enjoys popularity within *information technology*.

Comparing recent and ancient history illustrates that not only has language enabled a cumulative learning paradigm, but also that this paradigm exhibits a chain reaction effect in which the more we learn the faster we learn, and the greater is the ongoing explosion of new linguistic terms. It is even debatable if language, together with other symbolic forms of encoding reality, can be properly separated from the learning and knowledge it seeks to frame. What could it mean to know anything without at least some internal verbal description of whatever is known? Modern *fact-ridden* minds typically struggle with such questions, whereas certain individuals from more primitive civilizations can for example, navigate long distances at sea without even being able to describe the nature of the knowledge or techniques they use.

The accelerated development of more and more technologies has rendered the outward appearance of our environment increasingly alien when compared to that of our primal origins or the natural habitats of other species. It therefore seems misleading to directly attribute our considerable technological prowess to the minor differences in DNA between ourselves and related species. Instead, perhaps homo sapiens long ago reached some critical tipping point – primarily related to the birth of language and abstract thought – from which our unique means of encoding, recording and reusing knowledge progressively took hold as a self-propelling process otherwise unseen in nature. This idea is reflected in the popular idea that today's scientists are merely standing on the shoulders of their predecessors – and also in the observation that formal education is such a major part of the modern world, whereas it believably had no counterpart in the caveman era.

From this same perspective, it is quite arguable that language enabled a form of learning that is actually out-of-control – at the same time as it becomes questionable if the result is as beneficial as commonly thought. That we humans are somehow driven to pursue more and more factual knowledge only appears unequivocally advantageous from within a belief that our knowledge has no downsides and serves exclusively for our communal benefit. But

these are both questionable ideas. As regards downsides, we need only glance at the unintended damage done to the planet's biosphere to realize our knowledge and its use appear defective in terms of delivering exclusively desirable results. And as for knowledge being used entirely for communal benefit, our very long history of developing increasingly sophisticated weaponry to annihilate one another silences that particular argument.

Nonetheless, the modest admission that human knowledge remains somewhat limited and that such limitations leave it occasionally prone to producing imperfect results appears culturally preferred to any idea that knowledge itself might actually provoke problems. Hence, problems tend to be framed in terms of whatever was not previously known or understood about specific situations, rather than as direct results of for example, excessive confidence in what little actually was known. Similarly, any idea that mere language might actually play an important role in man's inhumanity to man will sound bizarre to most minds but proves not so ridiculous on examination. Can the fact that much blood has been spilled over so-called *holy texts* never teach us a lesson?

In general, whilst dominant cultural ideas tend to see *knowledge* as inherently *good*, *language* is at least presumed to be wholly disconnected from the worst excesses of human conduct. Hence, whenever knowledge is used to perfect any means of persecuting or killing our own kind, the apparent evil is generally regarded as ultimately rooted in something vague such as *human nature*, rather than as related to abstract knowledge itself. Similarly, language of itself tends to be seen as a simple medium of communication unrelated to any specific motivations. But do these everyday ideas really stack up?

All such questions inevitably turn on the difficult issue of what language itself is – not only because such questions are by necessity linguistically framed, but also because, poorly understood as language is, it remains anchored at the very heart of our uniquely-human form of knowledge. This relationship between *language itself* and linguistically-framed knowledge is obviously tight – if indeed any real distinction between the two can be reliably discerned. The whole matter is ironically too central to human thought and communication to escape serious philosophical circumspection and doubt. Can abstract knowledge properly comprehend itself, its origins, and its own machinations, given that a *true* mirror reflects anything other than itself?

For better or worse, modern culture has generally promoted a state of consciousness in which minds struggle to understand how any form of knowledge could possibly elude linguistic framing. That anything could possibly be known but nonetheless defy verbal expression is an uncomfortable notion to the mind that has been schooled in *objectivity* and factual knowledge. And yet the position that anything known must be amenable to linguistic expression comes close to a silly inference that every species lacking our form of language knows nothing

By further logical inference of that same idea, it seems things can indeed be known outside of language – no matter how odd this strikes the more fact-based orientations of conventional human ideas. Do we not have numerous traditions in which concepts of *enlightenment* and *spiritual transcendence* present themselves as forms of knowledge that are purposefully devoid of abstract thoughts, ideas, linguistic descriptors, and related cognitive processing?

The obvious step from here is to reason that not all *knowledge* – at least within a broad understanding of the concept *knowledge* – is of the same order. More worryingly, if we humans tend to think that all knowledge must be capable of verbal expression, how and why have we come to adopt such a monolithic language-only view of knowledge that on examination actually looks misguided?

If asking what we might be missing or forgetting within such a perspective, it is curiously pointless to expect any direct answer, given that such a question asks for linguistic descriptions of some *unknowns* that by their very definition defy such descriptions.

So not only is language poorly understood, but common conceptions of *knowledge* appear constrained by misguided presumptions that whatever is known must be capable of verbalization. And if there appears to be more to the concept of knowledge than we typically imagine, the word *knowledge* itself becomes suspect as something properly understood.

Is the *knowledge* that one is tired and ready for sleep really of the same order as the knowledge that Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system? One seems personal, subjective, temporary, and known through physical sensation, whereas the other is considered impersonal, objective, enduring and learned through intellectual exchange. Like the concept or idea of *knowledge* itself, it seems the real flexibility of language and words is too often ignored. Perhaps there is no knowable entity that is *pure* knowledge, and the word *knowledge* is simply used in various contexts to fulfill somewhat different linguistic functions that we do not bother distinguishing from one another.

This flexibility of language can also be seen by considering a word such as *religion* and what it might signify. Does the word refer to religious doctrine, religious belief, the religious lifestyle, religious ceremonies, organized churches, religious cults, a generally religious outlook, some combination of these things, or any one of them in isolation? Such open-ended questions readily arise whenever we mistakenly assume a noun such as *religion* must stand in a one-to-one relationship with some absolute *thing*, *phenomenon* or *essence* of the known world.

But as soon as we abandon the strict idea that *words mean things*, and think instead of language as serving hard-to-define goals within different social contexts, the problem of defining *exactly* what any word supposedly *means* is replaced by the idea that *word meaning* is merely a convenient idea itself, and that any supposed meaning of a word is in fact somewhat variable from mind to mind and from context to context. In fact, it may be more accurate to state that the very idea *words mean things* is just an internalized idea rooted in rather unthinking social convention.

The common idea regarding the meaning of words as being within the words themselves is in fact easy to debunk in various ways. Firstly, it is noticeable how even those who argue words to have set meanings inadvertently ridicule their own argument by their interminable disagreements over what those supposedly set meanings really are. Secondly, if words have meanings within them, why do we need dictionaries? Similarly, if the meaning of a word is in the word itself, why do we need to learn languages? Would the supposed meaning *within* any word not reveal itself? Thirdly, the idea that dictionaries detail word meanings by using other words does not establish that any words at all have inherent meanings, as a dictionary is still useless to someone who is not familiar with the language in the first place. What dictionaries actually reveal is that a mind seeking to understand socially-adopted uses of an unfamiliar word can reference other linguistically structured words to hazard a rough understanding. Fourthly, we never think of text itself as knowing what its author meant. Is it not obvious that what we call *the meaning* supposedly *within* any text only occurs once a mind accesses that text?

But if it feels odd to suggest that *words have no meaning*, this is because words nonetheless have very definite effects – as demonstrated by everything from our holy books to urban graffiti. Such a position is not necessary in any case if words are seen as dynamic elements within wider contexts. Rather than looking for *meaning within language*, the *value* of

language is perhaps a more realistic concept that accommodates the real-world impact of specific instances of language use. Conventional ideas of linguistic meaning focus too rigidly on the actual words, at the expense of considering other contextual elements and the social function of language in general. For example, whereas the statement *I hate you* might generally be seen as having just one *meaning*, it can have very different *values* depending on whether it is uttered in anger or in playfulness. So, whether words are considered to have internal meanings or not is actually pretty irrelevant once language is understood as a social activity in which the actual words are often somewhat incidental.

Being essentially a form of *intercourse* that can communicate anything from technical information to a declaration of war or a desire for sexual intercourse, language's true social role is surely more significant than anything understandable via the conventional idea of *word meanings*. Given actual words can appear somewhat incidental to language's social role, surely a better understanding of the whole subject should focus on underlying human motivations, intended results, and actual psychological outcomes, rather than on narrow linguistic analyses of actual words.

With this in mind, should someone automatically be taken to task simply on the basis that two things they have said are logically contradictory? Viewing the relevant individual narrowly as someone to be attacked as soon as their statements are linguistically inconsistent is a typical stratagem seen within the squabbling of political theater, but in the wider world this surely represents a failure to understand that, because people pursue different goals in different situations, stating one thing today but something contradictory tomorrow is not necessarily hypocritical or foolish.

The social aspect of the spoken word is that we use it to convene with the minds of others, and therefore we no doubt prioritize the effects of the language we choose over any strict factual accuracy. Even the politician – quick to attack his opponent's apparent factual error or lack of consistency – easily fits the idea of someone who is nonetheless targeting a certain impact on his audience.

More generally, given the effective use of language is tailored to specific circumstances, is it not more appropriate to view language-use as endlessly *creative*, rather than as utterances of would-be *eternal truths* unrelated to the context in which language is used? Even the recounting of supposed *hard facts* is typically tailored to the goals of given situations.

Why did we embrace language?

All purposeful language use, from habitual politeness to grand oratory, appears formulated, agenda-driven, and deployed for social goals. Even impersonal technical manuals and scientific textbooks are the works of minds seeking social rewards for their efforts. Casual chat helps us bond socially, whilst even the most famous works of *literary geniuses* can be seen as merely the means by which their authors pursued artistic expression – possibly alongside their desires for fame, fortune and social status. Amidst gazillions of words poured out in countless formats for all sorts of overt reasons, the idea that any of this happened without inner motivations seems positively idiotic. In terms of our consciously planned actions, do we do anything at all without goals in mind? The very idea is at odds with both basic psychology and common sense – even if it is hard to get a fix on exactly what motivations are at play in any given situation.

Understanding that obscure motivations underlie language use and the pursuit of knowledge shifts thinking away from popular ideas; it debunks purely semantic views of language and purely factual views of knowledge. Such conventional perspectives may be common, but they do little in terms of understanding the bigger picture in which linguistically-framed

knowledge spearheaded a new evolutionary direction that has increasingly set humans apart from other lifeforms.

But our history should not just be retold in terms of language, knowledge and our motivations for using these things; it also ought to accommodate everything else we are. Much as we might see ourselves as *the animal that talks and knows*, we are by that very definition still an animal, including all that is thereby implied.

Rather than analyzing the human condition via all our culturally familiar concepts and the language that frames them, it can prove useful to view things from a more primitive and animal-like understanding of what we are. Can we suspend our learned ideas in key fields such as anthropology, sociology and psychology, and rediscover ourselves as something different from the *civilized beings* we habitually believe ourselves to be? Civilization, as often remarked, is only skin-deep in any case.

Is it not logical that, language having proven such a powerful force in human development, the animal within us would have used it for purposes other than simply categorizing and describing the world in sterile encyclopedic terms? When we all know at some level that people can say things just to produce particular results, shouldn't we ask to what extent language is used to manipulate others, as opposed to being a mere tool of communication?

Instead of passively observing for example, how political messages are dressed up in drama, why not ask what really motivates the political mind to deploy such drama, as well as why such obviously contrived theatrics can sway the masses? Inasmuch as such issues are uniquely human and superficially manifest themselves through the medium of human language, they surely offer a deeper insight into the wellsprings of language's wider use. Political drama is notably also a key means by which social power is somehow *agreed* – or at least established. The underlying suggestion is that language use is in fact not so disconnected from our more primal herd instincts – including the search for domination and the desire for protection.

For all our technological developments, we remain social beings, and just like any other species, we seek to breed and secure our existence within an uncertain world where biological needs are never fully assured. So just as other species exhibit various behaviors designed to achieve such essential ends, the appearance of language in humans would presumably be harnessed to meet those same ends – if in fact it did not evolve primarily to further them.

From such a perspective, language should not be considered the sort of intellectual or academic tool it is often thought to be; it appears more as an evolutionary development that marks us off dramatically from other species, and something that significantly impacts how we address this world's challenges. It can easily be hypothesized that, deprived of our linguistic skills, we would be pretty much like any other *uncivilized* mammal trying to eke out its living within Earth's threatening environment. And if we now struggle to envisage how our ancestors coped prior to the development of all our modern technologies, it is surely because the development of sophisticated technologies would have been impossible without language and related forms of abstraction as their foundation.

Viewing language as a technology on which all other human technologies are built calls into question the idea that other technologies are as innocent as we typically think, and this idea can be somewhat substantiated by today's *murderous addiction* to technology in general. Like it or not, the reality is that *mere language* is in fact the main means by which minds deceive, cheat, trick, dupe, swindle, contrive, lie and otherwise act in manners insincere, dishonest, and designed to exploit others to their disadvantage. And given our ongoing

processes of cultural and linguistic sophistication, the resulting lack of integrity within human communication is arguably growing by the day. Consequently, this phenomenon, which could be viewed as a form of unchecked deceit, has now gained widespread recognition and acceptance, and renders much human communication highly disingenuous: deliberate trickery hidden behind a thin veneer of social respectability.

More generally, an awkward reality of human development and its countless technologies is our plethora of ways to manipulate, injure and destroy life – a *talent* possessed by no other species. In truth, we frequently use nefarious tricks and stratagems for our supposed benefit – all the way from the occasional *white lie* of casual conversation to various technological means of inflicting genocide on those of different opinions and ideas. The ugly fact that many *civilized* endeavors are actually to the detriment of our fellow humans is not something easily isolated from the use of language and other technologies to bring such things about. Without those technologies, history's worst intentional atrocities – which are of course all of human origin – would simply not have been possible.

However, given mere words and purely *academic* knowledge appear harmless in themselves, it might be reasoned that other factors must be at play within our ruthless and often uncaring exploitation of others and the environment. Realizing we remain *animal-like* in many respects can somewhat explain such exploitative conduct, as well as why our supposedly wonderful forms of knowledge and technology are not always deployed for such wonderful motives and do not always produce such wonderful results. Given our knowledge and technology so clearly represent stunning powers somehow conferred on a species within a dangerous and threatening environment, it would actually seem bizarre if the powers thereby unleashed were not utilized to improve the security and dominance of that species.

From what is understood of human history, there is little to argue about in such an analysis. Technology in various forms has long been deployed to suppress perceived threats and enable dominion. Today's popular view of knowledge as an at-worst-harmless pursuit can therefore only be sustained by some other idea that man's inhumanity to man is rooted elsewhere. But where is this *elsewhere*? The *evil soul*, the *devil*, the *dark side of human nature*, or some other bogeyman corrupting the psyche? It seems we like to point to such things to escape the otherwise obvious evidence that we are in fact just behaving like the animals we are – other than that we are in fact animals drunk on technological power.

Is it really to be imagined that the progressive development of all our knowledge and technology somehow tamed our animal instincts that are otherwise inclined to dominate and seek security by whatever means available? If anything, historical evidence suggests the very reason we pursue knowledge is precisely to increase controlling power over both the human and non-human world.

Technical knowledge is and always has been a very tangible means of dominating others – especially those of lesser knowledge. Any idea that such knowledge is harmless *in itself* therefore relies on the goodwill of the holders of that knowledge. However, human history records that such goodwill was frequently in short supply, and knowledge was often sought precisely for the exploitative advantages it conferred – whether seen within the primitive tools and weapons of cave-dwellers or within today's mass surveillance of entire populations.

Similarly, as regards attempts to manipulate the environment, human knowledge focused on agriculture and industry for obvious motives, rather than on some pursuit of *knowledge for knowledge's sake*. And given that abstract knowledge is an exchangeable commodity, it has empowering social value, even when not directly concerned with human domination. Minds naturally want to learn how to do useful things that others already know, if only because that

in turn increases their own social standing. But of course, knowledge can also be acquired by forcible extraction, and so even apparently *harmless* knowledge can be coveted and foster aggression. Knowledge should therefore only be considered truly harmless in the sense that a gun is considered *harmless* for not being able to pull its own trigger. And while such an idea is logically valid, only in foolishness do we ignore the many motives behind the manufacture, distribution and procurement of guns.

The cost of abstraction

The social value of language-based abstract knowledge conspicuously permeates every area of our complex societies. Every form of employment centers on knowing how to produce certain results and, in rough terms, the more complex and obscure the necessary knowledge, the more one is paid. Not so dissimilarly, manners, politeness and dress codes codify behaviors that must be learned to avoid social exclusion. Buying and selling within consumer societies require internalizing various conventions, plus heavily-formalized protocols governing ownership and exchange. Civil laws are a collection of written obligations that one must know and observe to avoid social sanctions. Urban environments are blanketed in all sorts of technological gadgetry that the mind must master to simply exist without raising eyebrows. Meanwhile, various forms of officialdom bear down on us to ensure compliance with these and other linguistically-framed demands that do not even remain static.

So convoluted is the modern world that its education systems are still cramming knowledge and complexity into the young well beyond the age of puberty – an age in years by which many other mammalian species have lived and died natural deaths. And far from such extensive programming completing the learning process, today's world sees new technologies quickly replaced by even newer ones, such that continual adaptation is required in the face of ever-changing societal realities.

What are the real drivers of such growing convolution in the modern world? When today's affluent lifestyles are increasingly associated with forms of malaise, discontent and behavioral ill-health, can we be confident our collective development is headed in a generally beneficial direction? Is the overall human trajectory one that we consciously choose in any case, or are hidden evolutionary forces steering human development in manners unseen by our everyday consciousness? Given there never has been any universally agreed developmental direction for humankind's overall benefit, are we simply driven by a fearful awareness that those with the most developed technologies have always had the upper hand?

The extent to which our development follows planned and reasoned steps towards a predictable and preferable future, as opposed to a more or less *accidental* process beyond our control, is a huge unknown. It could appear that our poorly understood animal instincts combine with cognitive evolutionary advances to empower us technologically – but only in a rather reckless manner with unforeseeable outcomes. Are we really shaping the world to our benefit, or are we basically spectators amidst some greater evolutionary drama beyond our understanding? While the former is flattering and offers more intellectual comfort, the latter, by its very definition, can never be disproved.

Culturally, both positions coalesce, albeit in many different versions. We are not short of grand plans for some better tomorrow within a general idea that something called *progress* is meaningful and advantageous – but our predominantly materialistic views of reality are based on cause-and-effect deterministic thinking and a world where forces beyond our control are at work.

The result is a sort of mishmash state of mind in which we believe that what actually happens

results partly from our choices and actions, and partly from incontrovertible *laws of nature*. Closely examining this issue forces us towards the fundamental and supposedly unresolved philosophical issue of whether we have free will or whether we exist within a wholly deterministic reality: a universe in which everything is *caused* by some prior state or event, such that apparent free will is a mere illusion.

Whatever the reality, if proof was ever required that homo sapiens are an intellectually confused species, one need only reflect on how utterly endemic the lack of resolution over these two paradoxical stances is throughout many areas of human culture. As just one simple example, how do we decide if someone who attended a publicized event chose to go of their own free will, or if their apparent decision was in fact an *effect* of the publicity? Both ideas seem neither entirely false nor entirely correct.

Whoever might dismiss such philosophical matters as so much pointless navel-gazing could reflect that only through the insistent probing of philosophy is it realized how fundamentally confused our *normal* state of mind really is. The reality is that we operate daily with many beliefs that are fundamentally incompatible with one another. Given for example that the idea of free will is so obviously at odds with causal determinism, it is arguable that only by ignoring such dilemmas do we manage to function at all. It seems everyday life requires a mix of both perspectives, whereas agonizing the one side versus the other only leaves us with no clear model of anything.

Critics of philosophy can appear justified inasmuch as the history of this question is one of interminable debate plus all sorts of highly intellectualized *solutions* that somehow situate determinism and free will simultaneously within the same universe – all as if the fundamental contradiction these two views represent could be reconciled by clever semantic acrobatics or the intellectual airbrushing of the problem into invisibility.

Of course, like everything else humans do, the philosopher's thinking activities are surely motivated by certain goals. Although he may think of himself as some sort of *purist* whose mind is uncompromisingly open, underlying desires to present himself as a *serious philosopher* might be at work beneath the surface. Is it really in his interests to make an admission of failure as regards resolving conundrums such as this contradiction between free will and determinism? His thinking might understandably be skewed towards whatever serves his personal goals, and endlessly debating such intractable dilemmas in highbrow manners is certainly the expected behavior of *doing philosophy*. So however pointless or even conducive to confusion such supposed *philosophy* might appear, it can nonetheless have its uses – if only on a personal level. More generally, in a world where knowledge carries social value, the temptation to intellectually feign knowledge exists in every domain, with an obviously distorting influence whenever the mind succumbs.

It is notable on another front that, to date, no cultural ideas have evolved valuing any awareness of what is *not known*, or what may in fact be wholly unknowable. This is revealing. Why is culture exclusively interested in knowledge and not in ignorance? The question only sounds silly because we so habitually concern ourselves with possibilities enabled by knowledge, whilst generally disregarding any consequences of acting from positions of ignorance.

Independent of any unresolved philosophical puzzles, a balanced approach to acting within a world only partially comprehended by human knowledge should surely involve proceeding with caution, given that unexpected results are logically inevitable and likely beyond proper comprehension. Although we obviously do not know whatever we do not know, responsible behavior should surely acknowledge the implications of us not even knowing how much we

do not know. More generally, it could simply be said that we often do not really – or *fully* – know what we are doing.

Uncertainty and ignorance are the canvas on which human knowledge is painted. Hence, although our ideas and forms of knowledge may obscure or distract us from this state of ignorance, they can never remove it. No amount of knowledge – certainly in the everyday *factual* sense of the concept – can ever vanquish the fundamental mystery of our existence. Our fate is to be small and fleeting entities in relation to the apparently infinite expanses of space and time. What item of knowledge could ever remove all doubt in terms of us possibly being the victims of some grand metaphysical deception or illusion? What ideas – whether couched in religion, cosmogony or anything else – could ever properly answer why there is existence at all instead of absolutely nothing?

Hence, perhaps a useful goal of philosophy is to intelligently but humbly delimit how much is knowable to the human mind – or perhaps to work in a converse manner to identify where stretching human ideas only results in wild speculation, as opposed to beneficial understanding. Perhaps another goal is to assess the true nature and value of human knowledge as best as possible within an existence that nonetheless appears ultimately beyond comprehension. And perhaps a third is to realize that no matter how well these first two goals may be met, conventional philosophy itself is locked into the process of abstract thought and cognition, and therefore restricted in relation to other possible ways of *knowing*.

The common view that pursuing such philosophical ends is just pretentious esoteric intellectualism of no real import is understandable considering philosophy's impotent history. But that view should be enthusiastically cast aside if any opportunity is envisaged to meaningfully transcend the many otherwise endemic problems that afflict human development. And those problems are very believably rooted at the very heart of philosophy's subject matter: the world of abstract thought.

Our cultures seem stalled at a point where preoccupation with an increasing glut of ideas and facts obstructs any questions regarding the *quality, nature* and *origins* of ideas in general, or of our accepted model of knowledge. Quite ironically, the notion of some true breakthrough coming from merely thinking or talking about matters appears ludicrous to most, even though just about everything that sets humans apart from other species has in fact been derived exactly by thinking and talking about matters.

It is in any case notable that uniquely human problems coexist alongside philosophy's hitherto-failed attempts to resolve key dilemmas such as free will-versus-determinism and mind-versus-body. Could a connection exist between these unresolved matters? As regards why such questions might appear so intractable, the human mind's fixation on abstract thought – complete with any limitations thereby embraced – is the obvious jumping-off point. What exactly is abstract thought, and what limitations or flaws might it impose on our development – whether these be manifest within the philosopher's mind, or within our exploitation of the surrounding world?

Unfortunately, any idea of answering such questions using abstract thought itself appear logically shaky from the start. We do not escape a jail cell by remaining within it. At best, we can only glean some understanding of how the walls are constructed and why we are being held.

What is suggested here is the existence of an arguably misplaced blanket faith in abstract thought. Confronted with a philosophical challenge, the mind reflexively turns to abstract thought for the answer, just as it does with so many other conceptual challenges in daily life. Hence, any argument suggesting abstract thought plays a role in certain human problems is

well-grounded – at least inasmuch as our cognitive relationship with everything is so thoroughly and *unthinkingly* based on framing matters within such abstract thought.

In examining whatever flaws or limitations may be intrinsic to our way of thinking about the world, one significant observation of conventional philosophy is that the thinking mind operates with conceptualizations of the surrounding world which obviously differ from the supposed *real world* these conceptualizations attempt to model. Hence, the mind might expect sunny weather only to realize it is in fact raining. This ability to *get it wrong* is of course utterly mundane, but nonetheless highlights a break between *reality* and *ideas-about-reality*. Significantly, without such *ideas-about-reality* there would be no fiction, speculation, conjecture, hypothesizing, theorizing, extrapolation, interpolation or other such creative and imaginative mental activities.

However, ideas-about-reality are nothing more than mere ideas, and they invariably appear somewhat disconnected from the reality with which they are otherwise concerned.

As regards some *real reality* separate from the mind's *ideas-about-reality*, this turns out to be a bizarre idea on close examination. How can the mind know of any supposed *real reality* if not that it has an *idea* of it? Is the duality that we think separates *ideas-about-reality* from *reality itself* not just the means by which we recognize that ideas about reality can be more or less ill-conceived? When our idea of a sunny day is replaced by an idea that it is in fact raining, neither idea is any more or less an idea than the other – both being equally *real ideas*. The difference is simply that additional ideas of being *correct* or *incorrect* are attached to the original ideas – at which point we accept one and dismiss the other. Notably, would-be direct access to what we consider *real reality* is actually impossible via any and all ideas of the abstract mind.

Consequently, the decisive factor for what passes as accepted knowledge appears to be how concisely a candidate idea can model *perceived reality*. Without actually checking the weather, the idea that it is sunny is obviously no more or less valid than the idea it is raining. Pragmatic resolution of all such uncertainty is invariably achieved by moving beyond mere ideas to access direct sensory perception – observing the actual weather in this example. From this angle, ideas are naturally subordinated to whatever is perceived by the senses – peer group pressure notwithstanding. Only in humor or madness would anyone insist amidst pouring rain that it was in fact sunny – which is not to deny that situations of excessive social coercion can force people to say virtually anything.

In general, tangible evidence matters. Car drivers may all tell different stories about a road accident whilst protesting their innocence for obvious reasons, but none of them will go as far as alleging they were not involved if it is obvious their car is smashed-up as a result. Whatever is observed naturally takes priority over all ideas, claims and allegations.

Hence a possible classification of human knowledge in terms of demonstrable reliability extends from what can be seen with our own eyes or otherwise directly perceived, to what is pure conjecture lacking any evidence, such as the idea that the entire universe and everything that happens within it is orchestrated by *something* utterly beyond all perception, or that it all began with a *big bang*.

Within such a classification, a *false* idea, such as that boiling water is solid, is notably placed alongside *true* ideas such as that grass is green, since both can be verified or falsified by direct perception – albeit both also require abstract thought for verbalization. In general, the immediately obvious is not something we argue about.

By the same thinking, uncertainty and argumentation can be reasoned to be conditional upon some inability to directly check whatever is under debate. Hence, *God* is controversial –

being an entity lacking identifiable or verifiable evidence for some, but nonetheless underpinning absolutely everything for others. Conversely, once things are seen for what they really are – for example when a playing card is turned face-up – argumentation becomes pointless.

Standing all this on its head, the implication is that, provided there is no misunderstanding about which subject is under debate or the nature of different parties' arguments, the very existence of argumentation requires that at least one party has not properly verified whatever they are talking about.

Taking this thinking to a far more general level, it can be reasoned that the evidently interminable arguments within politics can only rage ad infinitum precisely because many of those arguments are not at all verifiable. Such debates typically wallow in a sort of unstructured woolliness that seems notably inherent to most discussions about *society*. The fact is that within the complex world of human affairs where countless identifiable events and changing social currents are in constant action, the idea that any single thing within the past, present or future results as a consequence of any other thing, is as shaky as the idea that someone bathing in an ocean is ultimately *the cause* of subsequent waves on the opposite side of that ocean. Albeit in principle such an idea is logically sound, to develop it in detailed terms of what-caused-what is patently ludicrous.

Of course, political debates are further complicated by contentious assertions that certain things are to be judged *good* or *bad* – at the same time as most viewpoints are rather bizarrely reduced to being either *left* or *right*. So even if some political policies and their results appear not quite so woolly in terms of cause-and-effect, there is nonetheless no agreed standard as regards what constitutes *good* or *bad*. Similarly, the left-versus-right political confrontation is one that by its unthinkingly banal nature is inherently incapable of resolution. The framing of human affairs within such crude binary terms could surely never result from any genuine concern to understand the complex realities in question. Instead, such simplistic ideas seem almost purposefully designed to fuel interminable political arguments in which minds latch on to whatever propaganda might convince others as regards who are the supposed *goodies* and *baddies* of human affairs.

The world of politics, as anyone can spot, is not particularly strong on calm, lucid and balanced consideration of other people's viewpoints – never mind how to comprehend the human condition in general. Hence, much of what is spouted in that arena in terms of supposedly understanding the world, ought to be viewed as little more than fabled *tales of reality*. How can any such ideas be taken seriously when virtually all of them exist in stark contradiction to many others: all fueling a mad shouting match that would logically deny credibility to any of them? Of course, some of them do have a ring of truth about them and are well crafted to win minds. But a mere *ring of truth* can be as deceptive as it is informative.

For example, the idea that *money is really good* can have a ring of truth to many minds that would also recognize a ring of truth in the idea that *money is really evil*. Taken together, such ideas obviously detail nothing conclusive about money, other than that dramatically inconsistent thoughts about it can be simultaneously entertained within the same mind. And it is notable that this is merely one example of how the human mind can hold logically contradictory positions in a manner that sees those different positions voiced in different contexts.

This observation obviously has serious ramifications for our everyday ideas that reality has certain fixed and definable qualities; apparently, we do not even know our own minds in any

consistent or reliable manners. The truth is that our viewpoints, perspectives, opinions and even fleeting moods seem to very easily overrule whatever faith we might otherwise place in the supposed reliability of facts and objectivity. So just how much faith should we place in the idea of a knowable objective world that can be detected beyond the interference of cognitive distortion, changing emotions and other forms of coloration?

In terms of establishing consensus-based knowledge, the importance of checking things directly is jargonized within traditional philosophy as a need for *empirical proof*. This was well illustrated by the infamous battle between the traditional idea that the Sun orbited the Earth, and the contending idea that it was actually the Earth that orbited the Sun. Short of an ever-increasing weight of observational evidence and related analyses, the stubborn supporters of the original idea would probably never have conceded their position to be flawed. But, just as it is hard to convince anyone of dry weather when they are actually being rained on, or that you were not in a car accident when your car is a mangled mess, the relative motions of the planets were eventually seen as incompatible with accepted claims of an Earth-centric universe – thereby condemning those claims to the cultural dustbin.

However, things are perhaps never as simple as the mind likes to see them, or as history recounts them. The idea that it is *wrong* to imagine the Sun orbits the Earth ignores the solid evidence behind that idea. Anyone who cares to sit put on our planet for 24 hours and observe the movement of the Sun relative to himself cannot miss that it very definitely appears to be orbiting his position. As regards conventional ideas of geometry, it in fact does orbit any fixed spot on Earth. So, given most people spend most days in relatively fixed positions on the planet's surface, the Sun effectively does orbit the Earth for most purposes. And it's no surprise that we still talk about the Sun moving across the sky, rather than the sky *turning across the Earth*.

The modern idea that the Earth orbits the Sun only has relevance when the Sun is taken as a central reference point. But should anything else be expected once the Sun becomes the reference point of two bodies locked in such motion? How could the Sun be imagined to orbit the Earth when taking the Sun as the center point of a model? Hence, the supposed justification for the Earth orbiting the Sun relies on the idea that we somehow *should* consider the Sun as the point of reference.

It is true that the Sun is by far the largest body in our spatial locality and thereby is of huge importance. In simple terms, it not only holds the solar system in place, but life on Earth appears utterly inconceivable in its absence. However, life on Earth appears at least equally as inconceivable in the absence of planet Earth itself. And as most people can be observed to be living here, as opposed to on our totally inhospitable Sun, why has it been decided that the Sun should be the relevant reference point? This line of questioning is of course not primarily about the solar system, but about the workings of the human mind and the influence exerted by culturally accepted ideas.

In any case, any crude idea that either the Sun or the Earth simply orbits the other is misguided in terms of properly describing the more complex situation as currently understood. Nonetheless, both these ideas have been popularly accepted – initially as the Sun orbiting the Earth and subsequently as the Earth orbiting the Sun. Notably, in terms of being crass simplifications to the point of being misleading, the latter and currently accepted position is actually the more inexcusable one in terms of ignoring the available knowledge of its era. Consequently, it is possible to come across people of little interest in astronomy who are not clear that the apparent orbit of the Sun results from the Earth's rotation on its own axis. Some even reflexively guess the Sun appears to orbit Earth because the Earth orbits the Sun – clearly illustrating the common idea that *a little knowledge is a dangerous thing*.

Having established that both these simple versions of what-orbits-what are at least somewhat relevant under different perspectives, it cannot really be stated unequivocally that either is *right* or *wrong*, or *true* or *false* – not unless one is adopting some sort of authoritarian approach to the matter. One version may be popular, widely accepted, recognized as more useful in certain fields, or otherwise preferred over the other, but both have strengths and weaknesses, whilst neither tells the full story as currently understood.

To counter this idea of there being no absolute truth in either version, and to insist instead that one version be somehow *correct*, is indeed to adopt an authoritarian but flawed approach to knowledge – whether done consciously or otherwise. Cultural observation reveals such authoritarian approaches to knowledge to be nonetheless very real societal phenomena. This is evidenced by a history in which many cultures demonstrated an official preference for one or other of the two versions in manners that somewhat ostracized if not demonized the other. The battle was fought out when the long-established and ecclesiastically-endorsed idea of an Earth-centric universe was recognized as inconsistent with astronomical observations – the church's initial responses demonstrating an eagerness to retain power and authority rather than to consider hard evidence. But when religious authorities finally conceded their position and the degree of authority that went with it, the *scientific* view immediately stepped up to grab some of that authority for itself. Hence today, when science tries to grapple with the intellectually-humbling concept of *relativity*, the should-be-obvious fact that what-orbits-what is *relative to the reference one chooses* remains largely overlooked within a dominant *scientific* view that the Earth simply orbits the Sun.

But given both versions have some relevance, this whole battle was silly from the outset – as is any idea that such a battle could ever be either won or lost. However, almost as if cultures enjoy mocking supposed *losers* rather than learning the true nature of what human abstract knowledge really is and how it evolves, we now seem generally tied to *science-preferred* versions of reality – and certainly not only regarding the movements of celestial bodies. Another lesson otherwise overlooked within all this is the manner in which authoritarian goals can corrupt knowledge and impede a general awareness of matters that would ideally become widely known.

Inasmuch as this example concerns two overly-simplistic, incomplete, somewhat-contradictory, and not entirely right or wrong versions of reality, knowledge as expressed by either of the two versions can be seen as a mere *tale of reality* – to some extent describing reality, but also distorting it inasmuch as matters are presented in manners too-stark to even acknowledge the wealth of complexity that both positions ignore.

Tales mundane and tales fantastic

Such *tales of reality* are of course distinct from *pure fiction*, which can be seen as *stories of invention* – tales that take complete liberty in simply *making things up*. However, even with this distinction in place, the two are not so different, given that *pure fiction* is only understandable to the extent it references familiar concepts and ideas learned from readers' previous experiences. In this sense, even *fiction* is reinforcing of culturally popular perspectives and illustrates how conscious thought can reflexively access its many existing *tales of reality* in the absence of direct experience.

Furthermore, given that abstract thought and language always involve words or other symbolic references modeling the world at one remove, there is good reason to class everything normally considered as *knowledge* within this *tales of reality* idea.

However thoroughly we might study or think through anything, human knowledge remains universally recognized as incomplete. No matter how clever our words, known reality

exhibits levels of complexity beyond our grasp. So, to insist from some imagined position of legitimate authority that anything at all is wholly understood or *correct* is to delude oneself regarding the need for circumspection within a somewhat mysterious universe. It is also to misunderstand or overlook that *correctness* actually appears a relative concept itself – something that depends on whatever presumptions one starts with and the manner in which different concepts are understood.

Such thinking is of course wildly at odds with mainstream cultural ideas, and education in particular. In general, culture teaches the mind to search out *correct* accounts of things with an enthusiasm that could almost be seen as a frightened denial of the intractable uncertainty in which we actually exist. Students are never commended for philosophically challenging the conventional outlooks by which their answers are crudely judged as *right* or *wrong*.

But what else is to be expected when the entire foundation of education, religion, law, finance, employment, and social conduct in general is based on ideas of *correct* as opposed to *false* – or *right* as opposed to *wrong*?

Regardless of any conservative justifications or philosophical criticisms of this situation, is it not abundantly clear that our cultures are utterly awash with all sorts of authoritarian ideas that not only marshal how we live, but also – should we allow them – how we think? Given the nature of modern education, it is in fact hard to see how more could possibly be done to drum into us from infancy the basic idea that reality is something to be understood via the human mountain of factual knowledge and abstract ideas generally considered as either *right* or *wrong*. Consequently, it is no surprise that many minds struggle to see any weaknesses at all within such an *authoritatively correct* approach.

Any competing idea that our cultures have somehow *got it all wrong* asks for an explanation in terms of how such a situation could come about. But the very idea anything at all is *wrong* is only more of the same black-and-white thinking already under criticism. Similarly, all attempts to *explain* matters almost inevitably draw on the very same conventional perspectives already under question. If education and contemporary culture have in some way twisted, narrowed or otherwise compromised our thinking, examining all this from within that same compromised thinking can only block any possibility of seeing where illusions or shortsightedness might lie. No amount of what we have learned can ever inform us of issues remaining as yet unlearned.

Speculative philosophy aside, our culturally popular perspectives remain extensively reinforced via endless and largely unquestioned *tales of reality*. These are the mountains of individual facts and accounts that each mirror some small facet of reality – albeit somewhat imperfectly, or even as complete nonsense. When taken as a whole, these constitute a sort of well-ordered *intellectual mud* in which nothing is completely clear, and the more we think we know, the more we are weighed down by competing ideas that only frustrate making sense of the whole. Amidst countless sciences and new avenues of learning, modern culture has effectively silenced the big metaphysical questions by the sheer noise of endless facts comprising our supposedly wonderful but increasingly abstracted form of knowledge.

We resemble a species in need of some sort of cognitive reboot, given that more knowledge of the same format – but lacking any critical review of that format's true value – is actually somewhat akin to stagnation. More can even appear as less, given the many man-made problems that threaten our very survival, but are nonetheless marginalized amidst other supposedly more important priorities. At least, that appears to be our dilemma absent some new cultural paradigm that radically reappraises existing forms of knowledge with a view to transcending the philosophical inertia endemic to this precarious state of human affairs.

As regards addressing the idea that human development on this planet is maybe not quite as ideal as the mind imagines it could be, and as regards how to examine such an idea without just regurgitating learned ideas that inhibit innovative thinking, the role of technology within human development remains an obvious focal point. Viewing language and abstract thinking as foundational elements of human technology distinguishes us appropriately from other species, whilst it is notable that no other species is enthusiastically reworking their environment or knowingly inviting destruction to both themselves and the planet. The combined presence of human cognitive skills and technology within the same species is in any case surely not a coincidence.

In terms of *thinking differently*, the increasingly ambivalent attitudes of some towards deployed technology and its industrial fallout represent a marked departure from the traditional but still-dominant unthinking assumption that *technology is always good*. Are we finally being forced as a species to question the value of something that has historically appeared just too good to doubt?

If all such matters have common roots, should notions of modern technology as occasionally problematic not include a consideration that the abstraction within language is a possible source of problems? What if language and abstract thought, despite being incredibly useful, are nonetheless tools by which we to some extent *misunderstand* reality? So influential have these things been within human development that even a minor imperfection in the way we use them could have colored all human ideas in a significantly detrimental manner. In addition to recognizing that the mind can and does use language as a means of tricking and exploiting others, why not go further and consider that language might in fact have tricked us all into a false sense of understanding reality better than any of us actually do – that is, better than language and abstraction ever could?

One blunt and obvious answer as regards why this question is effectively never asked is that most would reflexively ostracize anyone *foolish enough* to merely voice it. When linguistically framed knowledge has recognized social value and serves to gain authority – both on a personal and on an institutional level – why would anyone enjoying the social status and authority thereby conferred choose to examine this matter? As long as conventional ideas about knowledge are officially endorsed and dominate our cultures, who within those cultures would want to undermine them? Not only would such a person be widely ridiculed for the content of whatever they said, they would also be criticized for questioning ideas that help sustain those of power and influence.

Notably, this line of thinking tacitly suggests the accepted view of knowledge and its conventional model are defensively protected for motives not dissimilar to the motives by which the Earth-centric universe was once defended: too many people see themselves as having too much to lose if their ideas are undermined. But although the principle in these two matters appears basically the same, the scale is global when it comes to human knowledge in general – with the psychological mechanism operating at a deeply subliminal level. The historic reluctance to dismiss the Earth-centric view of the universe is just one example of a more generalized reluctance to concede any ground on whatever is culturally accepted as *knowledge* – a reluctance perhaps felt at the level of the individual as a defense of his position within the power structures such knowledge sustains.

Just as with knowledge itself, adherence to any accepted model of knowledge is arguably not based primarily on either rational assessment or metaphysical faith regarding that which is thereby embraced, but on a conservative desire to retain social standing. Hence, viewing abstract thought as the base technology framing all conventional knowledge, a question arises: have we evolved into an empowered species that both individually and collectively is

too preoccupied with technology and its form of knowledge to properly contemplate the possible shortcomings of these things?

For the time being there are no effective challenges to the dominant model of knowledge – albeit perhaps because would-be challenges are being successfully suppressed for reasons explained. Challenging the near-global conviction in the intellectual sanctity of key abstract concepts such as *facts*, *objectivity*, *scientific truth* and abstract thought itself, is certainly a more heretical position than merely arguing the movements of bodies within our solar system. But amidst mankind's peculiar development the potential rewards of transcending possible problems associated with such concepts can be reasoned to be correspondingly greater.

Consequently, any unwillingness to at least probe this area should be viewed with suspicion. If *mere language* and abstract ideas really are harmless in themselves, there is nothing to be lost, and so any such unwillingness is perhaps only another manifestation of our irrational reluctance to critically examine existing ideas. Alternatively, if language and abstract thought are not such innocent endeavors, this is something effectively unrecognized within popular culture, and therefore even more worthy of investigation.

Problems with modeling

Basic logic dictates that language and abstraction as means of modeling reality must in some way be inadequate.

When modeling of physical objects invariably introduces various discrepancies, an *abstract* model that has no enforced limits on how much or little of reality it addresses is an extremely ambitious project that will inevitably fail in certain respects. But that is exactly what language and abstract thought are: fallible models that we use to address absolutely anything we care to discuss. Whereas we would never see any validity in for example, using the technology of sound recording for agricultural purposes, the technology of language and thought is inherently considered to have absolutely no no-go zones. Our faith in it appears scarily absolute – to the point that we almost never bother to even acknowledge or discuss it. And yet that faith is arguably born of nothing more than the apparent absence of alternative approaches. Meanwhile, the mere fact that we have no recognized means of *thinking outside thought* presents a serious verification problem regarding the value of thought itself.

We know only too well that thoughts can appear *wrong*, but such condemnation of specific thoughts is never extrapolated to thought itself as the vehicle of countless mistakes. However, if the technology of thought can produce recognizably wrong results, to what extent does it produce other results that appear more or less correct, but nonetheless somewhat flawed upon closer examination? Surely our everyday binary outlook that sees thoughts as basically *right* or *wrong* fails to address this.

A common approach simply asserts that as more information becomes known, an initial idea might be revealed as ill-informed, based on false premises or assumptions, derived through a wrongful analysis, or otherwise founded on some *wrong thinking*. But what then constitutes *right thinking*, other than whatever is generally accepted and has avoided debunking? If the magic ingredient is thought to be *logic*, that is something notably absent within most thinking.

In any case, logic of itself does not define any relevant elements of reality that merit thinking about; it is only concerned with methodical thinking based on whatever elements the mind has embraced outside logic. $1 + 3 = 4$ might logically seem beyond all doubt, but if for example, we are counting houses, pure logic cannot decide if a dog kennel counts as a house.

Generally speaking, there is in fact very little within our cultures directly and seriously addressing this question of *correct* thinking – other than endless vapid texts understandably damned to obscurity as *works of philosophy*. Hence, all sorts of ideas are accepted to greater or lesser degrees within different areas of culture and by different minds that operate in numerous manners to derive their own ultimately-unique cocktails of seemingly valid ideas and opinions – all mixed from myriad *tales of reality* invariably regarded as *true* by some, but *false* by others.

Political and religious divisions are the obvious tangible manifestations of this *collective scatter-brain* phenomenon. Scientific thinking, often seen as somehow above ideological infighting, is nonetheless another victim in its own peculiar way. The microbiologist, the sociologist and the cosmologist can actually appear more intellectually remote from one another than three randomly chosen members of three different religions – most religions at least having the supreme deity aspect in common. And the fact that scientists are not known for slitting each other's throats over whose beliefs are *right*, or for generally commenting on areas of science in which they are not involved, only reflects just how well-orchestrated the huge disconnections within modern science now are. But although this simultaneous development of science in a plethora of different directions is generally regarded as a positive and progressive movement, an interesting scientific measure of such progress would be to assemble just a dozen experts from a broad spectrum of different fields, then identify as best as scientifically possible the position and behavior of just one single atom, and then see how well the experts could agree in terms of cause-and-effect the reasons the atom was positioned and behaving as it supposedly was. Or to make this point more prosaically, how can a microbiologist explain *cognitive dissonance* in terms of spacetime? In effect, we have different scientific disciplines probing different intellectual universes.

The social reality of human thought is that the mass of ideas generally accepted as *knowledge* is a huge, growing and shapeless ocean in which each idea can at best enjoy circumstantial credibility as *correct*. And although mainstream scientific knowledge may appear too widely accepted to be thus criticized, it is nonetheless just so many *tales of reality*. Moreover, those *tales* arguably include some of mankind's most dangerous ideas, framed as they are within the weaknesses of abstract thought at a time when those weaknesses are so studiously ignored as to escape any meaningful inquiry. It is noticeable in this respect how *philosophy* – etymologically a *love of knowledge* – is now a laughing stock for most, whereas countless obscure specialisms thrive on the unquestionable justification of simply *being science*. What we see with the modern cultural rise of science is a massive increase in the volume of a particular type of knowledge, alongside a widespread belittlement of anything now pejoratively seen as *not science* – including any critiques regarding the value of science itself.

Meanwhile, it could be argued that the grander culture-wide refusal to put thought in general under the microscope persists through fears of what might be thus discovered. Perhaps the implications of doing so are too threatening to those who promote set ideological positions as a means of securing power. As has likely been known by most leaders down the centuries, mere ideas are actually quite easy to change, but emotional attachments to ideas run deep and have the potential to culturally anchor entire populations. Hence, moving the goalposts becomes a risky business.

Even if there may be no such demonstrable entity as *absolute knowledge*, and we therefore ought to keep our minds open, it is nonetheless the norm that authority seeks to suppress unfettered critical thinking for what some might understandably judge the *wrong* reasons. The common adage *power corrupts* is neither short of supporting evidence, nor is it an idea

that excludes the corruption of ideas themselves.

Language and abstract thought have catapulted mankind into a wholly new paradigm – a situation to be understood as a first-run and currently unfolding evolutionary experiment. These new tools and everything that flows from them are features that in evolutionary terms are only at a trial stage – at least as regards the lifeforms on planet Earth. Therefore, looking to the future, they have unknown eventual results by anyone's standards. How such an evolutionary novelty will pan out must remain well-reasoned conjecture at best. Given this bigger picture, anyone who claims to *really know* what will prove generally beneficial is someone effectively laying claim to a form of knowledge more akin to some omniscient god than to a mere mortal; their position is not to be trusted. In reality, their motive must surely be to win others over to their ideas, rather than to reflect with due humility on the developmental precariousness and uncertainty of the current human situation. Even more than is commonly acknowledged, dogmatically foretelling the future or unequivocally proclaiming *what is best*, is feigning knowledge that simple reason dictates no one can have.

There are, nonetheless, plenty stepping up to the mark. There always have been. From monarchs to religious figureheads, from political theorists to dictators, from media pundits to the anonymous voices relentlessly bellowing publicity banalities, and from scientists of all sorts to esoteric sages – not forgetting bar-room gurus, armchair philosophers, bloggers, or momentarily-angry minds reflexively screaming at a world-gone-mad – human ideas amount to a junk-filled quagmire of endless notions regarding what is supposedly *good, right* and necessary, as opposed to whatever is supposedly *bad, wrong* and a waste of time. We like our tales.

Such a volume of ideas could of course be seen as some form of wealth were it not for the fact that, as a whole, it amounts to a species-wide state of confusion and confrontation – periodically manifesting itself within various forms of destructive ugliness. It would seem that everyone just *knows* stuff, even if the fact that we cannot agree much at all among ourselves raises doubts that anyone anywhere knows anything at all for sure. Such is the true state of our *knowledge* and supposed *intelligence* for anyone who dares to reflect honestly on these matters.

All these voices trying to drown out one another are obviously not motivated by any lofty search for *true* or *pure* understanding but are only using language and linguistically-framed ideas to promote their competing worldly agendas – often furtherance of their own careers and social positions. To understand this idea, it is only necessary to realize that language and ideas are of themselves pretty useless and are in fact deployed primarily as the means of achieving ends. Even *pure wisdom*, if such a thing exists, must surely be something with a tangible impact on how we live: something that reaches beyond mere ideas and abstract thoughts. If not, what could possibly be wise about it?

This perspective puts an unusual coloration on human ideas of reality, whilst challenging conventional ideas regarding how those ideas were derived. Within modern thinking, the predominant view is that we inhabit an *objective* world in which ideas should be vetted for *correctness* and then, depending on how such vetting fairs, accepted as proven, or rejected as false. But the fact that this seems perfectly reasonable to most minds can be seen as a sign of how thoroughly indoctrinated our cultures have become to this approach – an approach that is only one among others the human mind can and does entertain. It can immediately be reasoned that if expressed thoughts and ideas are motivated primarily by personal goals rather than an impartial search for truth, this *objective* approach is inherently open to corruption in terms of what it pretends to be.

Or are we really to believe that the propensity towards corruption of thought and ideas that was once so clearly demonstrated within a refusal to accept evidence about the real mechanics of our solar system was somehow eradicated from humankind by the rise of science and ideas of *being objective*? It will not do to highlight the scientific community's rituals of *the scientific method* or peer-reviews of findings as if these were things conducted by authorities beyond reproach. It is in fact exactly *because* these are carried out by recognized authorities considered beyond reproach that questions ought to be asked. In general, *recognized authorities considered beyond reproach* actually have an established record of suppressing and twisting the truth, precisely because their position is invariably based on doctrines they too-reflexively seek to defend. More viscerally, *the flesh is weak*.

The generalized failure to acknowledge the relevance of such potential corruption within all human ideas is endemic for obvious reasons. What social value could anyone gain from highlighting their own self-interest within whatever ideas they express? The same desire to avoid undermining social standing is perhaps even more evident within institutions and formal power structures – members often being instructed both formally and casually as regards which narratives are deemed acceptable and which ideas must remain unvoiced.

In many situations the resulting distortion operates all the more effectively for being highly subliminal in nature. Workers for businesses understand intuitively that openly bad-mouthing the business, however factual their comments may be, is likely to land them in trouble. In other areas we see that courts and law enforcement agencies generally become more inclined to bend or ignore laws the closer any law-breakers are to top business and government positions. Similar biases within the mainstream media arguably make it the main vehicle by which culture promotes all this – the fundamental ideas of formalized power and the legitimacy of authoritarian social orders usually remaining beyond serious questioning.

If power corrupts, perhaps we are all somewhat corrupted, or at least living amidst the corruption of others – although a mix of both is perhaps the most appropriate notion for social beings that exhibit copycat behavior within hierarchically structured cultures. Such corruption may appear negligible or be well hidden within many social interactions, but its scale is arguably universal – albeit often too thoroughly internalized and subliminal for any conscious recognition.

However, once understood for what it really is, mass denial of such clandestine influence operating within human affairs is in fact only to be expected given the social mileage available to all by appearing genuine and honest. Hence, we can all tend towards being somewhat disingenuous social actors – unknowing masters of the art of deception, if nonetheless forgivably unaware of how our minds really work.

But those of more ruthless dispositions who also possess a meaningful idea of how all this operates are well placed to deploy their knowledge in the exploitation of others. Unfortunately, the resulting imbalance represents a highly instrumental mechanism at work throughout all societies: the result of a generic stratagem deployed wherever opportunities exist for skilled players to take advantage of gullible others.

Although it is arguable that many asymmetrical human relationships such as the master-servant, manager-worker, teacher-disciple, or governor-citizen rely on a common idea that inequality of status is legitimate and acceptable, that very idea can arguably result more from indoctrination and mental trickery, than from any impartial reasoning. And notably, this potentially unwelcome perspective is not as incongruous as it might first appear, given that in reality such relationships can even be sustained through overt coercion, plus recriminations

for any non-compliance. In truth, the gaining of the upper hand in many such relationships reflects the authoritarian flavor endemic to society in general – albeit heavily obfuscated and widely *normalized* through cultural *values* and traditions.

Failing to factor in the hierarchical character of human societies within ideas of how knowledge comes to be created, accepted, suppressed, popularized or distorted, is as silly as studying birds' feeding habits but refusing to entertain the idea of a *pecking order*. And failure to consider that one's own ideas may therefore also be subject to bias is as silly as imagining that one does not exist within a world of hierarchically structured societies seeking to control one's thoughts and actions.

The fact that this line of thinking is hardly flattering on a personal level constitutes a potential impediment to meaningfully discovering who one really is and how one relates to the wider world. But should any ideas be discredited for merely having an initially low appeal? Fear of seeing through whatever cherished ideas sustain one's self-esteem can be the very reason those ideas remain too cherished to question. Our many *tales of reality* that make each of us unique individuals form a sophisticated structure of interdependent and mutually reinforcing ideas, opinions, beliefs and well-rehearsed justifications that we quite naturally seek to defend. Perhaps some form of restless discontent, intellectual adventurism or mad curiosity is a prerequisite for us to even dare ourselves to look outside the bubble thus created.

2 – Our Troubled Evolution

Although significant evidence highlights our close genetic ties with various other species, the outward manifestations of human civilizations make us look incredibly different. And arguable as it may be that caveman with his early technologies was already quite different from other species in terms of his daily life, even he would have seen our modern world as frighteningly alien.

With the appearance of language, abstract thought, and technology in general, human development underwent a quantum leap outside normal ideas of *evolution*. From a process operating rather sluggishly and somewhat independently of the mind, evolutionary change *caught fire* by assigning the mind – abstract thought in particular – a new developmental role. The resultant transition leading up to today's world is unparalleled in any other species. As a result, changes to human society and civilization are now dramatic and swift within a situation where the related reworking of the external world appears in constant acceleration. In terms of both cultures and environments, many people now finish life in worlds significantly different from those into which they were born.

As regards exactly what might have triggered this dramatic change, perhaps such questions are best left unanswered; it is too easy to throw the word *evolution* at such questions without properly acknowledging that many intellectual battles rage over the nature of evolution itself. For example, are we to be understood as just the end-product of some long organic process, or did some alien intelligence intervene at some point? And within attempts to comprehend *evolutionary change*, should we simply consider our biological and genetic development, or is some greater *life force*, god, or other metaphysical reality at work behind the scenes? It is far easier to simply contrast our modern lifestyles with how we lived many thousands of years ago than it is to explain why such significant change came about. We can at best hazard some guesses.

The cumulative process of developing new knowledge based on existing knowledge and new technologies on top of existing technologies is in any case foreign to traditional ideas of entirely *organic* evolution. At least as regards other species on our planet, these processes appear uniquely human developments in which abstract thought and its planned activities empower us in ever-greater ways. And notably, given there is no need to be genetically evolved from previous generations to understand and deploy new technologies, there is effectively no organically based braking mechanism on the acceleration of this process.

Consequently, and unlike other species, we have ongoing and often dramatic forms of essentially *societal evolution* – as evidenced by information technology's massive cultural impact over just a few decades. More generally, through our extensive power and control over the environment, we have multiplied across the planet in a manner well beyond anything that would have been possible had abstract thinking and the recording of information not been a key part of our development.

But there are few signs any of this was ever planned – other than perhaps as a multitude of very immediate, circumstantial and highly disconnected steps. There never was any initial consideration of where our development was headed, or if the whole exercise was really beneficial in the round. It would appear evolution does not work with such long-term plans. That which prevails need only be immediately expedient, and such expediency is not diminished at all by being wholly accidental. In this sense, we have arrived at today's situation by chance, and any idea of some grand design behind our development would therefore be misconceived.

As part of evolution in general, the human trajectory on this planet ought to be regarded through a dispassionate lens in which competition appears ruthless, no species has any *right to survive*, and whatever conditions favor one lifeform at any given point can dramatically change in unforeseeable manners. In short, evolution does not appear to favor any particular species – even if homo sapiens look like the current favorite.

Hence, whatever strengths we humans might think we possess, our survival is in no way guaranteed. Not only is there nothing to prevent our demise through some failure to control the whole *dramatic accident* that is our peculiar evolution, but our planetary dominance includes various new threats outside mainstream evolutionary theory. Like it or not, there are no historical examples to illustrate what happens when all this development hands so much power to just one species.

It is not only our propensity to massacre our own kind by the millions that looks like a new evolutionary phenomenon; the massive destruction of the biosphere by our industrial activities is another evolutionary *first* of increasingly disastrous and unintended consequences. Most notably, it stands as clear evidence that our actions often produce results that we neither foresee nor fully understand. By any logic, this failure to correctly predict the results of human actions proves that whatever kind of *knowledge* underpins our intentions, it must be at best incomplete – if not actually misguided or illusory.

Whatever the exact mechanisms behind such troubling developments might be, much scientific thinking now warns of potentially catastrophic consequences within just a few generations – not to mention believed *tipping points* beyond which any remedial attempts to protect the environment might simply be too little too late, amidst a sort of chain-reaction ecological collapse. Such matters may be extremely difficult to nail with any certainty, but that same lack of certainty further illustrates just how unsure we are regarding our current direction, or how we might act to correct it.

It becomes very arguable that despite being supposedly the smartest species on the planet, our very survival rests on us quickly becoming a whole lot smarter – or perhaps humbly accepting that we are simply not as smart as we like to imagine. Either way, do we have the responsibility to accept that we simply cannot carry on throwing our formidable technological weight around with the sort of reckless abandon demonstrated to date?

The gusto with which we continue technological development whilst largely ignoring the resulting problems is partly explicable in terms of the larger social structures that have replaced those associated with more primitive hominids. We are no longer confined to communities primarily based on local survivability, but see ourselves as members of nations, religions and other mass groups – sometimes numbering billions of members spread across the globe. However, depending on personal disposition, we may not feel any real connection with even our next-door-neighbors. Today's world is increasingly one that mixes *immediate anonymity* with *abstract sociability*. In many situations we are largely indifferent to those in close proximity, whilst our *friends* can be physically remote people encountered by purely electronic means. We crush shoulder-to-shoulder into public transport in a state of learned non-recognition of our fellow beings, and yet we go out of our way to establish contact with others we may never meet face to face – often on the basis of some ideological affinity that is invariably learned, as opposed to a naturally occurring common interest.

The idea that all these peculiarities of our sociability produce a generally dehumanized and mechanized outlook is not hard to fathom. Formally, we are divided into nations of no meaningful configuration beyond historical happenstance. These nations are mostly just a hodgepodge of people sharing nothing in particular other than a general tendency to have the

same mother tongue, limited degrees of racial commonality, some common religious orientations, and the occupation of more or less contiguous patches of land. But of course, alongside such seemingly shared orientations, many nations also embody factions that openly express bitter and murderous enmity towards one another. Therefore, it is no surprise that sustaining the overall situation requires some unifying idealization of *nationhood*, and this of course is the core doctrine championed by those in formal positions of power. Power has always attempted to cobble together whatever cultural elements could be dug up here and there to fabricate a notion of common identity and lend an air of legitimacy to the governing of more or less divided populations.

But in truth, the apparently shared attributes of any varied population are just more historical accidents – as opposed to anything that truly binds people within one nation separate from another. Nationalism easily reduces to nothing more than a belief-plus-propaganda tool by which populations are persuaded into unthinking subservience to those thereby presenting themselves as legitimate rulers. The overarching success of the propaganda is reflected in it being believed by many to be something far less sinister and often as a force of *good*. Meanwhile, any meaningful idea of a common global humanity is ironically obscured by the man-made divisions of nations.

A similar irony lies in national leaders preaching the importance of *inclusivity*, *multiculturalism* and global outlooks, at the same time as they preach the divisive notion of *national greatness*. If such characters really want to foster such broad-minded and global outlooks – and there are good reasons to believe that their words are but rhetoric in any case – how can any nation be considered any *greater* than any other? And if all nations are to be considered equally great, why have national divisions so often been vectors of man's inhumanity to man? *National greatness* may help those in power appear legitimate, but only to the extent that the concept inhibits the realization that a world thus divided is also a world in which many unthinkingly seek out masters to lead them like sheep.

Quite logically, a world divided into nations can only promote and perpetuate global schisms by imposing differing fates on the world's divided population, and by sustaining the many tensions that result. For example, the unequal distribution among nations of the world's resources is blindingly obvious but is mostly met with indifference in high places, or mere words at most. Other major inconsistencies include the different constitutions and formalized structures of nation-states, plus the roles different state institutions play, with the levers of power being held in different configurations from nation to nation.

As regards civil laws, these obviously have no universality and what is obligatory in one nation can be outlawed in another. Belief systems form another area of significant differences, as well as metaphysical ideas – extending to the very understanding of what constitutes life, and the significance of birth and death. Even the news events that supposedly inform people of key events on our planet are in effect different for different nations, thanks to different media machines filtering and recoloring what is supposedly relevant and to be regarded as *knowledge*.

Who would choose any of this if planning a world where people might happily cohabit in peace? The fact that the real world is riddled with human conflict and grief amidst a gloomy outlook only serves to remind us none of this was ever planned. Who could ever have been so foolish as to choose any of it?

Our rudderless journey

As a species, we are evolutionarily adrift amidst tortuous seas. We plan immediate things and produce certain intended results on a very limited scale, but the bigger picture of human

development to date remains very visibly beyond both our choosing and mastery. We may have the knowledge and technology to probe the seemingly inanimate depths of outer space, but we apparently lack any parallel knowledge and technology to make proper sense of our own conduct here on Earth.

In addition to national divides, other ideological divisions only cripple our natural ability to find common ground with our fellow humans. People starve in large numbers whilst their near-neighbors consume voraciously – extensively polluting the planet via wealthy lifestyles and narcissistic indulgence. Key natural resources are plundered by profit-driven multinational corporations – indifferent to the poisons and devastation left in their wake. In a world controlled in many ways through money and related forces, the poor are so often ignored or kept in desperate subservience by the rich-and-powerful who generally seem coldly indifferent and somehow convinced that this is all how it should be.

Supposed justifications and excuses for such a state of affairs are found within various contrived forms of ideological thinking that seek to shape *cultural values* and popular narratives. For example, the powers-that-be promote the supposed importance of *creating wealth* – usually through economic ploys that only reward the already-rich even more, and thereby further deepen wealth inequalities. But the obvious fact from a more honest perspective is that money of itself is utterly useless. As organic beings, the real wealth on which we depend is the living biosphere. The matter could not be simpler; without other lifeforms, we all die. However, this simple truth has somehow been obscured – so much so that many do not recognize it even when stated so bluntly. As a result of the deception sustaining all this, today’s supposed providers of what is at best a surrogate form of wealth – money – are nebulous entities such as *a healthy economy* and *business performance*: conceptual masks that seek to disguise centralized and authoritarian control of both natural and artificial resources.

When even the basic ability to simply work for the direct benefit of those in one’s local community has long been privatized within the legal constraints of *employment*, those of controlling power in today’s business world cunningly paint themselves as *job creators* – even as they unhesitatingly close non-profitable factories and actively create *unemployment* under the euphemism of *rationalization*. And perhaps it is only through a learned fear of questioning the prevailing order that people generally remain submissive in the face of such external control over their fates. The result in any case is a form of global indoctrination reducing both labor and its fruits to monetary values, with financial gain and *products* – as opposed to the natural world – being the supposed provider of human welfare.

However, to reflexively label as *hypocritical* any such attempted justifications for the massive wealth inequalities haunting this planet is arguably to misunderstand how thoroughly and easily any of us can acquiesce to socially accepted ideas – especially when mainstream culture presents such ideas as respectable. Flattering images of the self, together with positions that defend against potential criticisms, are things that sustain self-esteem for all of us, and are no doubt subliminally internalized at deep emotional levels. So, is for example the national leader who preaches peace but dispatches young soldiers to unthinkingly kill complete strangers who happen to wear different uniforms really to be understood by simply hurling the word *hypocrite* at him?

Popular narratives challenging the economic control of the world – typically bundled together as *left-wing* ideas in opposition to *capitalism* – generally fail to look beyond the conventional boundaries within which this whole debate is framed. The proposed *redistribution of wealth* or suggested *state control* of certain resources rarely asks what properly constitutes *wealth*, or what might constitute truly meaningful values for humans to share. Even within seemingly

radical doctrines, core notions of property ownership, monetary exchange, and systems of law and order are generally seen as givens that merit no direct questioning. Similarly, the basic idea of *formalized power* rarely comes under the spotlight as an inherent source of problems – even when historically it is a well-established vector of corruption that has afflicted all sorts of regimes.

Left-wing challenges have tended to simply advocate alternative structures of power and wealth within approaches now shown to have potentially disastrous results. Consequently, based on extensive human suffering and oppression now associated with certain historical implementations of these ideas – notably totalitarian incarnations of *communism* – they have been somewhat marginalized by the very voices of power and wealth they once sought to unseat. In its various flavors, left-wing ideology is obviously still widely expressed, but it is often rendered impotent or politically hijacked as mere window-dressing amidst what many see as a general slide towards *global capitalism*. At least, such is the situation at the time of writing. But the history of political ideologies has often reflected a pendulum action between unsatisfactory extremes and the indecisive confusion that constitutes the middle ground.

No matter how horrific the excesses of right-wing regimes may have been from time to time, it seems the left has never formulated a sound counter-narrative that goes much beyond merely spotlighting those excesses – the pointing of fingers at undesirable social outcomes being far easier than explaining their true background. And whenever leftist ideas have managed to dominate, it has too often resulted in nothing more than alternative excesses and different horrors. So, given both sides of the conventional political spectrum effectively see formalized power, private property, and monetary exchange as givens, they can in fact be seen as forming a rather one-dimensional argument that does little other than periodically rebalance itself. Neither end of the spectrum offers a true alternative to the troublesome confrontation that results from the unhappy coexistence of both. Hence, when no meaningful cultural debates embody more encompassing perspectives, it is no wonder the arguments simply rage on with no end in sight – not least of all because a squabbling citizenry is politically disempowered.

Formalized power as a problem

The bigger problem in all this can be conceived as *formalized power* itself – if not something deep in human psychology that currently manifests itself as a conviction formalized power is an essential ingredient of any *successful* human cohabitation. Due to the difficulty minds have if they try to conceive of a significantly different world – for example, one devoid of the sort of power bases we currently have – almost all debates unwittingly presume formalized power simply must be included within whatever world they contemplate.

Given such a presumption, even the most apparently revolutionary proposals are invariably flavored with some form of power-favoring conservatism – usually in the interests of pandering to popular opinion and gaining traction. Virtually all political thinking engenders this philosophical inertia behind some façade that pretends to offer change – thereby suppressing truly critical thinking and real imagination as regards how humans might transcend their self-imposed form of autocracy.

The underlying psychological mechanics are easily comprehended. In proportion to whatever political power anyone wields, that person is naturally inclined to oppose anything that jeopardizes their power – quite regardless of any particular idea's nature, or whatever support it might enjoy. Similarly, to the degree that power is likely to be increased by certain other ideas, those in power are inclined to support those ideas – again, regardless of whatever popularity or opposition exists. In short, those of political power are heavily

inclined to *vote for themselves* above any principles or soundness of ideas.

These self-serving attitudes of individuals readily scale up to groups of all sorts and to entire nations, global corporations, and all other human power structures – political parties being just one vehicle by which those in formal power work to consolidate their position. And regardless of ongoing superficial societal modifications, this will all remain fundamentally unchanged if cultural awareness fails to acknowledge and address the use of formality and social institutions for the achievement of individualistic goals that are potentially to the general detriment. Whoever holds an institutional position of power knows that power awarded to that institutional position is in part power awarded to themselves. Why would they rock such a boat?

Long-term, the resultant process is inherently unstable: effectively a one-way ratchet in which, other things being equal, power structures expand in carcinogenic manners that eventually attack their own healthy tissue. By such a process, even the most powerful empires to date have tended to eventually eat themselves from the inside out – rampant societal exploitation eventually creating problems within increasingly dysfunctional, duplicitous and hypocritical social orders.

Even putting aside the occasional media exposure of scandals in high places, real-life examples of corrupting incentives are easy to spot. For example, within a marginal political party trying to gain power, it is typical that members struggle to agree whether to stick rigidly to whatever principles their party espouses, or whether to compromise towards mainstream ideas in the interests of gaining political traction and popularity. Effectively, this is a choice between being honest with the world whilst accepting whatever loss of popularity that entails, or being somewhat dishonest in the hope that the skilled manipulation of other minds plus limited subservience to existing power will win some share of that power. Such reworking of original party goals to bring them more in line with the ideas of existing power bases is a recognized way to increase popularity, if nonetheless a pact with the devil inasmuch as the party only achieves its ends through deception and a loss of integrity.

Hence, many in politics who begin with principles only achieve power by more or less abandoning those principles. In contrast, any radical factions staying truer to their ideals likely have to struggle in the political wilderness or, should they manage to attract serious public support in manners likely to shake things up, expect smear campaigns or even nasty *accidents*.

Meanwhile, frank examination suggests modern governments have largely conceded their traditional political power to the shadowy world of *economic interests*. When even the most powerful governments of the largest and most militarized nations still face some token level of public scrutiny that in minimal manners curtails their worst excesses, the apparent legitimacy thus created proves the ideal guise behind which other entities can flex their muscles. In truth, whilst many minds still believe their governments generally act on their behalf and that elections allow citizens' voices to be heard in some small way, such perceptions have largely been hijacked as part of a grand subterfuge in which many governments do little other than rubber-stamp the wishes of big business interests. The truth of many nations is that corporate lobby groups shower politicians with campaign funds and other perks in return for legislative favors and influence, with the politicians themselves often having similar business interests – a situation in which the overall nepotism is too opaque and extensive to ever be properly disentangled. And matters might be considered even worse given the addition of certain highly secretive and autonomous *government bodies* that are in fact barely answerable to governments at all, but nonetheless ruthlessly engaged in various power-plays that keep themselves well-funded as they go about who-knows-what behind

their cloak of *state secrets*.

To better understand how so much deception operates on such a grand scale and yet remains only marginally visible, there is no need to enter the inventive world of so-called conspiracy theories. Basically, the situation is simply about formalized and hierarchically structured power operating within a trickle-down model of authority that inhibits each level from revealing what would otherwise be seen as the wrongdoings of those higher up. In practice, matters are somewhat complicated by hierarchical structures intersecting with each other, as well as structures that openly oppose others, but the basic principle remains sound and effective given that almost all people are consciously committed to one or more powerful structures – typically their nation, religion or the business that employs them.

As an example of how this plays out, mainstream commercial media can be observed to generally avoid head-on criticisms of the prevailing social order lest they offend their paymasters and owners – usually agenda-driven businesses. Consequently, as otherwise self-serving entities, media outlets protect themselves and thrive by perfecting various means of holding the public's attention for advertising revenues whilst not actually being honest to the point that audiences realize their minds are being exploited. And as regards the psychological mechanics of this particular example, it is notable that commercially successful publicity usually involves some deliberate softening, dimming or narrowing of consciousness, given that an alert, open and critical mind can more easily see through the ruses involved in promoting consumer services and products.

No sooner did modern culture realize just how comprehensively people's viewpoints and behavior can be influenced by subverting their more rational thought processes than this truth was seized upon by businesses and politicians alike to mold the public's conduct in manners designed to sugar-coat what is in truth *brainwashing*. The fact that whole populations can be manipulated through their emotions has no doubt been understood by a few since antiquity, but the rise of modern psychology allowed this to become an industry in its own right, with the mass manipulation of minds having since spawned various lucrative and superficially respectable business fields.

As regards avoiding accusations of conspiracy theories over just how extensive this phenomenon really is, one only needs to consider the sheer scale of modern publicity, or the hysteria and propaganda of the modern political campaign. In both cases, ruthless appeals to rather animal instincts are at best covered by the thinnest veneers of rationality. The truth is effectively hidden in full view for anyone who cares to take a stark look at just how unthinkingly others around them are drawn into such mind-colonizing ploys. Social media's deliberately addictive aspects perhaps represent the most effective form to date.

The necessary distortion and suppression of truth within hierarchical power structures can operate with little awareness at any level of what is actually afoot in terms of psychological trickery. Hence, any conspiracy theories suggesting everything is planned and orchestrated from *on-high* only throw minds off the scent by detracting from the nebulous complexity with which these things operate. Perhaps that is in part why conspiracy theories prove so popular; if somewhat misguided, they are nonetheless understandable attempts to figure out how such comprehensive top-down demands for compliance function on such a grand scale. Such theories even possess a certain beauty for those of power who they typically target: because they can readily sound quite ridiculous, they help convince the gullible that only cranks make sweeping criticisms of the world as it is. And even if all theoretical explanations appear too crude to grasp the complexity of real-world human phenomena, that in no way negates the realities such theories seek to explain. For example, the fact that socially corrosive excesses generally attributed to *capitalism* may not be properly explained by any existing conspiracy

theories changes nothing in terms of those excesses being real and manifest.

Additionally, the considerable difficulty minds can have in simply seeing these things – never mind correctly explaining them – results in part from the fact that all members of any hierarchy have a certain interest in denying that hierarchy's unscrupulous activities. Entire societies can thus be seen as more or less duplicitous – all hierarchies being naturally hostile to perceived *enemies within* – including conscientious whistle-blowers or truth-tellers. Whenever someone in-the-know is interrogated by, for example the media, they feel inclined to deny or omit anything that might reveal what by association would be their own complicity in any incriminating matters of whatever hierarchies they belong to. More bluntly, all formalized power structures generally expect their members to lie – if only by omission – in support of their power. Such obviously compromised behavior is tacitly demanded by such structures in the interests of their cohesion and retention of power: a sort of structure-wide bias operating clandestinely behind goals such as *furthering our objectives*.

The reflexive hypocrisy involved nonetheless becomes noticeable wherever any seriously credible criticisms of the social order manage to slip through the conservative filter of mainstream media. In the interests of appearing impartial and welcoming debate, such criticisms are rarely attacked directly for what they say but will more likely be attacked on the irrational basis of simply *appearing too wacky*, or for being at odds with *what most people think*. Alternatively, they may just be flatly ignored, given today's limited attention spans and insatiable demands for immediate entertainment.

In any case, it proves easy to frighten minds off radical ideas by simply inferring that any implied social changes would involve undermining cherished institutions in exchange for unproven benefits. But what does criticizing an idea's novelty really amount to if not an argument that people should unthinkingly just go with the crowd? Whoever seeks to shut down particular debates can use the reflexive appeal of populism as their ploy – but not because it represents any solid argument; only because it appeals to primitive instincts in a manner that allows hierarchical structures and their leaders to avoid potentially embarrassing scrutiny.

This is how the window-dressing of social formality operates. Players are driven primarily by their own interests including meeting their *superior's* interests, and they naturally act to achieve these ends within any social setting. Even going against group peers can be sensed at a deep level as potentially dangerous – however foolish the group's conduct or position might be. Only rare heroes and fools risk breaking rank. Anything resembling true individualistic self-determination is highly unusual for all but those in positions of power – if indeed those in power are not to be understood as mere puppets of their own egos. For the most part, people simply accept what others around them accept, and mimic what others do. And even if some personal power lies in noticing all this despite it actually remaining largely obfuscated within popular culture, that is no doubt one reason it has to be obfuscated in the first place.

Basic psychological experiments demonstrate extensive copycat tendencies within human behavior. Even a casual study of everyday life reveals sheepish imitation – everywhere from the seemingly voluntary choices of fashion to the intimidated obedience of a military parade. Hence, however social reality be culturally presented, it is largely the complex interplay and manipulation of all *group-influenced self-interest*, in manners ultimately beyond anyone's full comprehension – albeit nonetheless somewhat engineered by whoever exercises a suitable level of controlling awareness.

As a consequence, culture and its formal presentation of *knowledge* can be seen as fluid

entities that are continually refashioned in line with the changing agendas of power bases and the preferred rhetoric of those who run them. It is therefore no surprise that society is rife with attempts to control our thoughts – even if these are sometimes dressed up as helpful and useful advice.

All such ploys can nonetheless only thrive to the extent people unwittingly allow them to succeed. Although never admitted, those in power generally know this and sense in their own stupid way that the game is up if their ruses become common knowledge and are openly exposed. Hence, formalized power naturally seeks to conceal such matters and to suppress full awareness of how its power truly operates. However, to the extent that it succeeds in its many acts of deception, there are consequences for the entire human race regarding how reality is understood – or *misunderstood*, as is arguably the case.

Particularly in so-called *developed* nations, popular culture is increasingly polluted by the agendas of the powerful – with new cultural narratives and forms of mind manipulation being established regularly. For example, police forces – once seen as protecting the citizen – are increasingly militarized for supposedly good reasons, but in manners that appear more and more designed to protect power elites from possible citizen revolt. And such a would-be revolt can in fact be seen as a response to the general disenfranchisement of the citizen through multiple forms of exploitation – even if this be poorly framed by any culturally popular narratives. Meanwhile, visible corruption and duplicity within the political process, alongside growing social injustice only helps fuel dissatisfaction – all as an ongoing explosion of mass entertainment and social media seeks to further divert people’s attention. It is no wonder that more and more people now question the cultural mantra that claims all this to be some sort of *progress*.

But how to move forward presents another cultural dilemma. Growing divides appear between those who feel the situation should be addressed through *the system*, those who think the system itself ought to be attacked, and those so apathetic, disillusioned or distracted as to feel there is simply no constructive avenue ahead. Consequently, populations rip themselves apart amidst what little faith they have that anything might genuinely promote better social cohesion.

Even for some of the most radical and critical voices, *might is right* is no longer just an approach by which certain parties throw their weight around, but a supposedly reasoned view of how society inevitably works. Hence, many *rebels* who are painted as seeking to *destroy society* can in fact be found trying to win the social, political and media popularity games they otherwise decry. The idea that formally recognized power is essential and that therefore the only meaningful goal is gaining such power is far more widespread than the competing idea that all the ultimately divisive means of gaining such power are themselves means of perpetuating problems.

Even less optimistically, there is now a supposed *wisdom* effectively dictating we can ultimately be nothing other than spectators of our own power-crazed and troublesome behavior. Social institutions supposedly created for our benefit are somewhat understandably seen as inherently riddled with human evils in manners that can never be rectified. *The system* can too easily appear as a controlling monster with which anyone can strike a deal but never meaningfully alter.

As a result, the *freedom* to spend one’s entire life in a distracted servile adoration of material and consumerist so-called *values* is asserted endlessly in a million ways, but the idea that we might simply choose to say *no* to the associated mental and financial enslavement is culturally ridiculed. Everything from a preoccupation with prettifying one’s immediate

circumstances and superficial presentation, to squabbling with others or embracing feelings of resignation and powerlessness prevents individuals from actualizing the personal agency essential to meaningful change. And given all such stances emphasizing personal impotence prove more than convenient to powerful elites, they meet no high-level opposition, if indeed they are not positively encouraged by the *expedient idiocy* of most politics.

Meanwhile, no amount of pollution of land, sea and atmosphere, no amount of ecological disruption and collapse, no amount of warfare and bloodshed, and no amount of injustice or avoidable death and misery seem to provoke serious thinking about if and how our generally troubled direction might be altered. Such questions are effectively off-limits in a world where healthy cynicism too easily morphs into banal attacks on anything not framed as a fatalistic assertion that efforts at social change are ultimately pointless. And none of this ingrained indifference should be a surprise within today's large and heavily structured societies, given that institutional power thrives by neutering individual creativity – both physically and mentally.

All formalized power structures claim an inherent legitimacy that reflexively seeks to nullify any thorough and impartial critique of their actions. This exploits the primitive fears and self-defensive instincts of all individuals concerned – creating a subtle sort of *protection racket* behind the institution's veneer of formal respectability. Failure to protect and defend key players can be costly. Hence, criticisms of any social institution are readily detected as potential threats by that institution's members, and to the extent such criticisms are successfully rebuffed, the structure is only reinforced in its apparent legitimacy.

The politicization of fear

Fear of course plays a major role in human affairs and life in general. Sometimes debilitating, it is nonetheless useful in every species for alerting the organism to dangers and initiating the well-known *fight-or-flight* survival response. Moreover, although we generally choose not to discuss fear on a daily basis, this does not negate its permanent background presence. How do the hierarchies of both animal herds and human institutions function, if not by playing on our subliminal fears that not complying with their expectations may invoke detrimental consequences?

But given the unique challenges our species currently faces, and that our destructive capabilities exceed any meaningful limit, an inability to understand and grasp the true nature of fear might prove our collective undoing. Could fear constitute a challenge to be finally mastered in a manner that moves us into a truly new evolutionary era? It is certainly easy to see how extensively fear is deployed to control minds, and the costs in terms of human suffering can be seen everywhere from war zones to domestic relationships.

The highly exaggerated and generally phony *war on terror* is an obvious example by which those in power cunningly manipulate people's fears to award themselves increased legal powers. Meanwhile, the simultaneous and already-advanced damage to the planet's biosphere provides real cause for concern – a problem that some scientists predict will culminate in nothing less than a mass extinction event. Hence, the spontaneous fears cultivated by the latest terror attack are well complemented by longer-term fears that our entire habitat may be collapsing.

However, in terms of real-world dangers facing the average citizen, the difference between these two concerns could hardly be greater. And yet many media outlets obsessively prioritize sporadic terrorist attacks that typically kill only a dozen or so people over the ecological problems threatening every last one of the several billion on the planet – not to mention myriad other lifeforms at similar risk. If we cannot on the one hand understand

where the real threats lie, and on the other hand address them in a cool and pragmatic manner, those who use fear to exploit minds and manipulate others will only lead us all astray in terms of finding answers to truly relevant questions.

Holding minds within generalized states of fear and panic that only inhibit their abilities to think calmly and lucidly is not responsible behavior. It may be a stratagem that renders people subservient, but it also stops the mind from doing what it does best: efficiently and intelligently digesting new information within a dynamic process that protects and aids survival.

The wild exaggeration of low-level terrorist threats with the goal of frightening a population and thereby gaining its subjugation should be seen as just another demonstration of the inherently self-interested nature of formalized power. The simultaneous downplaying of the much graver ecological threat – very arguably the greatest threat by far humankind has ever encountered – effectively amounts to an entire species being engineered towards its own suicide. When all the indications are that, in the simplest of terms, *large-scale industrial technology is the core cause of the ecological problem*, the duplicitous conservatism pervading politics, business and other seats of power constitutes an irresponsible denial of even the problem's basics.

Admitting the environmental challenge to be of an obviously global scale and therefore well beyond any simple correction, is something formalized power has neither motive nor the intelligence to do. Hence, the supposedly global responses in this area mostly reduce to just more window-dressing aimed at placating the concerned, whilst siphoning off more taxes into new ventures wholly unrelated to the underlying imbalances that created the problems in the first place – pollution in the environment being arguably only symptomatic of pollution in the mind.

Recognizing the disproportionately large environmental damage resulting from the lifestyles of the most affluent populations is most definitely not welcome in the world's major power centers – including within their people's consciences. And the fact that significantly scaling-back on consumption seems like a logical requirement of any realistic solution helps explain why public attention is deliberately diverted from such issues towards matters of great drama but relatively minor consequence. Reductions in consumption spell reductions in economic activity, and these in turn spell reductions in the exercising of power through economic means. However mighty those in power might appear, they are hardly immune to the power of fear in relation to losing that which they cherish.

Hence, there is a real danger within all the related dishonesty that an entire species will be reduced to obedient idiots plus idiots-in-charge – all simply because controlling minds pursue their own preferences within such idiocy. Indefinite failure to transcend this situation can only spell our end as a species – or at the very least, serious grief for many. There is simply no point in deluding oneself over any of this unless one seeks to ignore the manifest downsides of a species skilled in fooling its own kind.

When problems facing the planet's biosphere are now common knowledge, all the evidence suggests the limited measures so far taken are doing close-to-nothing – or are even worse for instilling a false sense of security. For example, as regards the apparently urgent need to transition from fossil fuels to renewable clean energy, many findings indicate that much of what has been done in this area amounts to simply adding the new sources of energy *on top of existing dirty sources* – the net result being of no ecological benefit at all. But unsurprisingly, it appears this is not common knowledge – media propaganda being designed to placate audiences and keep them consuming their way to increased advertisers' profits.

More fundamentally, it can be asked if modern human culture and debate has yet got to the heart of our troubled evolution – evolution in which planetary problems can be seen as mere symptoms of something more profound. Surely the current destruction of the biosphere, albeit a very serious problem in its own right, only results from the general thrust of technology within human development. What use will it be to somehow arrest environmental problems if we are still a species that exploits and murders one another through everything from consciousness-twisting propaganda to hi-tech warfare?

Do the problems we watch ourselves creating within the physical world not have their roots in some deeper failure to properly grasp the evolutionary changes that made all such things possible? If such deeper questions remain unaddressed and we only deal superficially with external results, it may be that a nuclear holocaust will one day finish us off – as surely as our strongest and highest buildings have been destroyed by our own hand, and all whilst our *unsinkable* ships laugh at us from the seabed. It is a sobering thought in any case that almost all weapons ever invented have eventually been used without restraint – especially when in effect, we seem to have declared war on both our supposed enemies and the natural world that otherwise sustains us.

3 – Who And What Are We?

Does whatever might save humans from themselves lie within some corrective engineering of the external world, or may the answers actually lie in a better understanding of our evolutionary development? If certain problems are unique to our species, can we expect significant beneficial changes if we remain disinterested in who and what we really are?

An easy mistake is to assume the numerous problems of the human race are basically unrelated and have no common origin. For example, when we look at ongoing bloodshed in its peculiarly human form – which is most definitely not just an expression of the natural competition seen in other species – this looks quite unrelated to acidification of the oceans, malnutrition, or a host of other issues the mind would normally identify as problems in their own right.

Silly though it is to imagine that all such problems are somehow the *same* problem, it is not ridiculous to consider that, given these all ultimately result from human conduct, they may share a common origin. This is in fact hard to argue against in that such problems could logically not exist in a world devoid of humans. But, for better or worse, such a world is by definition not one we can inhabit, and so we are forced to address such issues with ourselves in the picture – all of which makes us appear very much our own enemy.

But any cultural incarnations of such obvious thinking are unsurprisingly buried amidst endless obfuscation and convolution. Who wants to consider themselves a problem to the world and their fellow humans? Moreover, who wants to present themselves to others as such? Who even wants to think about any of this? The implication here is of course that we tend to think whatever pleases us, rather than whatever concurs with the realities before our eyes.

Hence, regardless of any beneficial value there may be in contemplating such an awkward perspective, and however stultified our cultural evolution may remain through failure to look frankly at ourselves, we largely remain unwilling to push our minds into what they subliminally understand as the dangerous no-go zone of unfettered self-criticism. Even the very concept of *self-criticism* has a ring of negativity that tends to block any idea of simple and impartial appraisal – thereby suggesting we actually know somewhere within ourselves that something potentially untoward remains unexposed.

Our basic desire to present ourselves as useful and legitimate members of whatever communities we populate is probably one of the most basic *hard-wired* traits we possess. Furthermore, all our modern sophistication and highbrow sociological explanations of how this operates may only obscure how visceral this desire to feel secure and socially accepted really is. In almost all nature it appears that being outside of the flock, herd, or pack is inherently dangerous, whereas integration offers safety. Whatever battles may rage within such groupings, mere membership offers basic security inasmuch as we are at least members of a group that pursues its overall survival. Exclusion, in stark contrast, entails utter self-reliance in the face of a hostile world – not to mention the end of our particular bloodline.

Any passing glance at human cohabitation suggests that, for all our technological development, there is neither good reason nor evidence to imagine we are much different from other species in these respects. The rare individuals who display little or no allegiance to family, would-be friends, communities, and other social groups, are generally associated with precariousness and compromised survival chances.

These ideas reaffirm our status as basically *animals-with-technology*, and they suggest that

understanding our conduct should be approached more from a zoological perspective than from the typically *rational* approaches that flatteringly assume we are motivated by logic and reason. The cultural resistance to roughly equating our behavior with that of other species stems from a long-standing pretentiousness that seeks to paint ourselves as somehow *above mere beasts*. But that is only a legitimate position inasmuch as we *differ* – having transformed almost the entire surface of this planet through our unique technological development. Social group behavior suggests we remain very animal-like in many respects – specifically in terms of our deepest drives and motivations. As organic beings with the same basic needs as many other beings, this is surely no surprise; the modern cultural emphasis on rationality appears misleading.

The tearful and distraught mother whose children have just been murdered in a war zone is not being rational or logical about the obvious fact that her children's death is utterly final – she is instead undergoing some profound emotional pain that no amount of rationality can touch. She exhibits some opaque but deeply-felt need to undergo and express intense grief as some sort of internal rebalancing process, or even as a display of social revolt against an act that so obviously weakens her social group. Whatever the explanation of her behavior, she is not driven by the logical and calm decision-making processes that modern culture typically uses to explain behavior.

Similarly, but in a superficially very different manner, the athlete who pushes his body to the absolute limit in an attempt to excel at his sport is not entirely rational in terms of his own welfare. Whatever wealth, adulation, or official recognition are his goals, these are pursued at the expense of later-life health. Regularly extending the organism's abilities far beyond nature's demands is obviously not necessary in a world where, arguably due to technology, others actually face health problems through lack of exercise and overly-lazy lifestyles. Both excessive and inadequate exercise are similar in being injurious to health. But both are nonetheless peculiarly common to the supposedly rational human race.

Could it be that technological development and civilization have corrupted the various means by which we would otherwise manifest a more animal-like pursuit of social success? Is, for example, the quest for wealth something that would have any meaning without years of schooling in monetarist values? To what extent is acquiescence to such modern *social expectancies* in our best interests as either individuals or group members? And is any group really strengthened by cultures that make such unnatural demands on individuals?

An abusive indifference to personal well-being can be seen in many social situations where actions appear based on somewhat irrationally doing what others seemingly expect – apparent *obligations* becoming internalized as demands people subsequently put on themselves. The standard model of paid employment is the obvious example where the pursuit of social integration drives people into a plethora of activities that offer no direct benefit and often provoke ill health – all the way from the well-recognized *repetitive strain injury*, to various hazardous-environment issues, or even to a general loss of motivation resulting from the sheer tedium of the office or factory floor. And while the social role money plays leaves many seeing little choice but to submit to soul-destroying work conditions, others demonstrate a positive eagerness to embrace such employment-related suffering in the interests of pursuing the materialist lifestyle.

Within some enthusiastic workplace mindsets, simply leaving the office at the end of the nominal working day is deemed bad form – even if exhausted to the point of not being able to function properly. More generally, and well beyond simply funding the mere survival requirements of the organism, many are driven by various expectations of *achieving* – apparently devoid of any direct knowledge or understanding of their deepest motivations for

doing so. Again, the simple but powerful need to belong to a given social group seems to dominate any rationality about the basic matter of how one ideally spends one's time.

Although modern man certainly does display a lot of rationality in the general structuring of his conscious ideas, his instinctive desire to successfully play a social role seems to motivate him more profoundly. This is no surprise, given the abstract thought and planning associated with modern technology appears to be just an evolutionary add-on to essential physical and biological needs. Hence, the dramatic changes of the last few thousand years in the external world – albeit wrought by the hand of man – are not matched by any dramatic biological evolution of the species. Our natural interest in security, survival and procreation may have to wrestle with the many newfangled complexities of today's world, but such interest otherwise appears little altered since ancestral times.

Curiously, this line of thinking suggests we really do not know who we are – at least, not on the level of conscious thought. Much as we may be aware of our social identity in terms of name, address, age, employment and so forth, such details hardly provide a deep insight into either our drives, or even what it is to be the unique person each one of us is. And though we might all have fuller ideas concerning our own *personalities*, most of us seem more or less at the mercy of various reflexive drives, as well as the occasional emotional explosion or breakdown – forms of conduct that again suggest deeper motivations operating below the radar of consciousness. The full implication is that, whatever we superficially think of ourselves and others, we actually have no solid or reliable knowledge of *the totality* of ourselves. It may even be that our conscious thoughts are actually a distraction in terms of letting the overall organism's non-conscious processes self-regulate in our best interests.

The individual who resolves to alter their eating habits, or to kick gambling, smoking or drinking, frequently provides an unintended illustration of a certain disconnect between conscious thoughts and deeper drives. Plans made at one point can come unstuck only hours later when some impulse overrides them and once again initiates the behavior the plans sought to avoid. Huge sums of money are exchanged ineffectually addressing this matter via *miracle diets*, rehab centers, *wonder* therapies, drugs, self-help books and other generally unsuccessful strategies. All promise in vain to deliver some means of joining behavior more closely to conscious intentions such that those conscious intentions will successfully control behavior. But if all the money spent on such dubious ventures serves any useful purpose at all, it is perhaps only as testimony to the fact we are actually somewhat *out-of-control* in relation to any notion that conscious thoughts control our behavior.

When we consciously decide to, for example, take more exercise, it seems we delude ourselves with an idea of some identifiable *self* under the control of conscious thought. Consciousness may obviously involve itself in some reasoning that more exercise will somehow benefit what it sees as this *self*, but the fact that the decisions then taken are subsequently overridden by *something else* suggests at the very least that whatever this *self* might be, it is certainly not the controlling master of behavior it so habitually considers itself to be. And it is noticeable within many such situations how any determination garnered amidst efforts to better discipline behavior, is easily overcome by impulsive drives – often leading to a generalized state of frustration and inner tension.

The difficulty of consciously and deliberately altering habitual behavior can be seen as just one obvious example of a more general situation in which behavior is driven by poorly-understood mechanisms of the organism within its environment – a view that of course contrasts sharply with the popular idea that *we are consciously in control of ourselves*. But exactly what it might be for any entity to control itself is not only a philosophical conundrum; it is also a delusion in terms of explaining real-world human behavior. Hence, it is arguable

that the self-image of the modern individual as someone who consciously understands himself and his actions is simply a psychological convenience for managing the complexities of modern life. Analogous to the way warm clothes maintain body temperature in the colder climates to which humans have migrated, presenting oneself as an integrated self-knowing person helps us exist within today's complex civilizations. All such outward protections meet basic needs and exist for all to see, but they do not constitute much more than that. Behind our outward appearances, the bulk of who we really are remains concealed, and is too easily overlooked by the conscious thoughts we mistakenly interpret to be *me* or *the self*.

The ramifications of this idea are immense. Topping the list is the closely-related idea that conscious thought is a cognitive phenomenon somewhat driven by mechanisms not properly amenable to abstract analyses – not least of all because the organism is not directly conscious of such mechanisms. Far from conscious ideas being the primary motivational drives we habitually consider them to be, they can be seen as simply manifestations within a greater whole, and subject to largely mysterious influences that defy any amount of thought or analyses. Furthermore, the situation is not so much that we *know the world* through conscious thoughts, but more that we somehow adopt a preferred set of thoughts and ideas as survival strategies for negotiating our path through immediate circumstances.

Conventional ideas of evolution we might remind ourselves, place no particular value on intellectual abstraction as a pursuit *in itself* – even if any means whatsoever of pragmatically negotiating life's challenges obviously prove advantageous in terms of survival. Once evolutionary theory is embraced, whatever survival benefits might be conferred by abstract conscious thought surely ought to be regarded as evolutionary enhancements. Hence, the basic notion that abstract thought assists human survival should surely not be in question – the products of the human mind being arguably the very means by which our species has dramatically fanned out across the planet. However, the exact nature of our increasingly curious societal and cultural evolution is not something to be reflexively assumed as that which human ideas to date have imagined it to be.

The popular perspective simply paints the situation as one in which rational and logical thoughts have been deployed to comprehend and manipulate the world in predictable ways that achieve desired results. This can appear fine as a simplistic microcosmic view. For example, planning to run water into a glass and then drinking it is a strategy that will obviously quench thirst. But the problem in even this simple example is that it in no way accounts for the initial thirst that instigated the overall process. We can of course address that issue in terms of physiological knowledge of the body's hydration requirements and its overall nervous system – but note that in doing so we explicitly remove conscious thought as the primary motive. By such reasoning, thought is relegated to nothing more than a link within a chain of events initiated by non-conscious bodily activities.

The same thinking can obviously be applied to all thoughts associated with satisfying key biological needs and desires; the body seems to somehow tell consciousness that something needs attending to, and then conscious thoughts merely help achieve the end.

Many of our more basic activities obviously operate in similar animal-like manners, such as breathing: an activity we are occasionally conscious of and might deliberately alter, but not one actually requiring conscious thought. And of course, the organism has endless internal activities that we neither know of nor identify outside of dedicated medical research, but that appear utterly essential to our survival.

None of this is surprising once the peculiarly human activity of complex abstract thought is viewed as a recent evolutionary add-on – as opposed to something more central to life.

When every other species gets by without it, just how important can it be? Arguably, what is in fact surprising here is the great importance human culture accords to its unique way of thinking. But this is nonetheless understandable given that what we value highly as *human culture* arguably amounts to little more than just a collection of thoughts, ideas, and the results of deploying them. *Culture* itself is notably another idea for which other species have no requirement.

Humans can therefore be seen as *subliminally obsessed* with the technology of abstract thought – perhaps to the point that this obsession distracts them from otherwise obvious problematic results in terms of both the planet and their general sociability. Far from being some *explanation of reality*, abstract thought appears to be an evolutionary development of an as-yet unclear if not dubious long-term value. If it really merited a more positive consideration it would surely have allowed us to better tackle the many challenges it has thus far created.

Trapped by thought

At a time when our cultural obsession with physical technology is one in which questioning its merits effectively amounts to a modern form of blasphemy, our passion for such technology actively inhibits any proper examination of abstract thought as its foundation. This is another situation in which a generalized but deeply subliminal fear of what might be uncovered can be postulated as the backdrop. When abstract thought has expanded in so many different directions and is arguably the main characteristic marking humans off from other species, it is remarkable that we deploy such thought so extensively whilst giving so little consideration to the simple question of how and why we think, and what abstract thinking might actually represent in the bigger picture.

The position that thought is primarily a tool of survival and dominance makes absolute sense inasmuch as evolution is not just some theoretical framework in which species evolve faculties that serve no end. Nature is ruthless. Short of metaphysical speculation, there is no explanation as to why any species would develop a faculty in a manner that only allowed it to pointlessly know things for *academic* purposes alone. Our form of knowledge, given the general understanding of evolution, will have developed by enabling advantages that most definitely are not *knowledge for the sake of knowledge*. And of course, this is evident in the huge expansion of our species across the globe – knowledge having empowered us tremendously through its practical deployment.

However, the implication of this idea is that the real value of thought and the form of knowledge it produces has nothing to do with our conventional and somewhat idealistic ideas of being *right* or *wrong*, or of some *veracity* within academic and scientific disciplines; it is instead about exploiting our world to immediate benefit. Notably from this perspective, knowing how to benefit from blatant lies and deception is no less useful than knowing how to benefit from being honest and truthful – in much the same way as other technologies are used to gain advantage through both destructive and constructive goals. Within a competitive world of evolve-or-die, evolutionary theory dictates that every opportunity to gain an advantage will be dispassionately exploited by sheer force of circumstance if nothing else. Any supposed *authenticity* within whatever is called *knowledge* becomes incidental to knowledge's evolutionary usefulness. Supposed *falsehoods* that somehow protect lives prove more expedient than truths that imperil them – another observation with sobering ramifications for the supposedly great enterprise that is human knowledge.

Positioning these ideas within today's world creates a version of human cultures that differs greatly from most popularly accepted notions. Instead of knowledge being primarily a process by which we continually add to the sum of what is known, its prime goal is indeed as

a *technology* – that is, as a means to an end. Regardless of how we might view even the most academic or esoteric *knowledge* – for example, theories claiming *gravitational waves* have been discovered and are somehow proof of colliding black holes buried in the depths of space – such supposed knowledge must logically serve some real end here on Earth.

But of course, this is exactly what we find. Science in its many forms is a very well-funded activity, and few scientists are motivated by pure desires for knowledge devoid of financial rewards. Even robotic scientific work typically guarantees salary as a minimum, whereas apparent breakthroughs boost academic prestige, elevate careers, sell books and maintain funding. The practical activities of scientific research, learning, teaching and education in general, can therefore be lumped together as a *knowledge industry*: a business first and foremost within a commercial world order in which knowledge authentication and verification are no more than business processes, and not even essential elements for the *selling* of knowledge.

As regards what conventional knowledge *really is*, it reduces to nothing more than approved ideas and beliefs, given there are no independent guidelines for what constitutes objective *knowledge*, beyond whatever blessings specific ideas and beliefs might receive within academia – often substantially augmented and filtered by mass media.

Whatever the exact mechanics, the result is that much of what is believed beyond question in one mind can be considered utter bunkum in another – especially as regards anything claiming to be *knowledge* within the worlds of politics and religion. Curiously enough, those two major areas of contention just happen to be concerned with two of the biggest questions: how is a human society best structured, and what is the metaphysical truth of the human condition? So, although there might be no shortage of ideas and beliefs floating around within these areas, they are hardly founded on any agreed means of validation or any broad consensus of anything at all. The mere existence of such widespread contention is the effective proof.

Other content culturally passed off as *knowledge* is in effect of entertainment value only: celebrity gossip, personal opinion and comment, overly-dramatized or phony scandals, journalistic space-fillers, and various other forms of trivia. Such so-called *knowledge* haunts culture as just so many more *tales of reality* – ideas that are loosely framed, vague by definition, just plausible, but easily ridiculed, and arguably of no real consequence in any case.

The overall mass of current cultural ideas called *knowledge* can thus be seen very roughly as serving one of two goals – either they allow something useful to be achieved, or they entertain. These two goals can even coalesce where for example, entertainment achieves the politically useful goal of keeping minds preoccupied and distracted. Hence, just as science and academia can be seen as business-like *knowledge industries*, the various activities that amuse people can be recognized as a business-like *entertainment industry*. In summary, our dominant cultural activities are destined towards one end or another and compete for attention within mostly commercial parameters.

In this sense, both cultural expressions and technical ideas can be considered *commodities* – products and services within cultures which assign a monetary value to everything. The internet illustrates this particularly well via its heaving glut of trivial information electronically tailored to commodify attention; its traditional pay-for-access model of selling specialist knowledge and privatized *intellectual property* actually looks quite old-fashioned in comparison. And as with everything bought and sold, sales and profit margins are ultimately prioritized over quality.

More generally, the explosion of the internet itself can be seen as just the latest stage in a long history of progressive technological developments that expand the ease of exchanging and disseminating ideas – not because we are particularly concerned with keeping each other informed, but more because ideas and thoughts can influence how people behave and thereby constitute powerful tools of social manipulation.

Meanwhile, the view of money as a valuable social asset has just about every mind in some way pursuing what are in truth the worthless tokens of a formalized system of exchange. Of course, considerable social power can in fact be harnessed via money – such power being indirectly derived from a mass delusion that money in fact does have some inherent value. But this constitutes massive cultural indoctrination as regards apparently legitimizing the huge levels of social inequality monetary structures actively perpetuate – all in all, an unsurprising situation given monetary wealth invariably coincides with social power and prestige.

Who can *afford* to view money as worthless when no one else does? But the near-global conviction that money does have value only shows the colossal power of a universally believed false idea. It would seem a suitably convincing lie can be more powerful than the truth; so much so that many people will reflexively defend the role of money with great vigor.

From such a perspective it is easy to understand the continual cultural and media emphasis given to economics in general – the inclusion of economic reports within newscasts now being as regular as weather forecasts. Without the fabricated and arguably illegitimate social role of money, many wielding power might suddenly be disempowered. Consequently, we see discussion of most political issues reduced to economic concerns. As long as public debate centers on ideas of money and its effective importance, any political affair at all can be framed in terms of the apparent necessity of complying with faceless *market forces*, dehumanized *financial requirements*, troublesome *costs*, anonymous *business interests* – or other assumed economic parameters that construct whatever narratives suit those of power and financial wealth. Of course, to the extent that all these ideas thoroughly saturate the public's consciousness, money does in effect equate to power, and power will therefore seek to further emphasize these perspectives to its own benefit. The almost universally accepted value of money and the continuous cultural emphasis of such a supposed value is anything but coincidence.

Nonetheless, modern monetary systems – taken together with the legal systems required to enforce them – remain elaborate scams that cultivate delusions of their legitimacy. A tell-tale sign of the vast reach of the related cultural indoctrination can be seen in the manner by which even many of *capitalism's* strongest opponents will nonetheless frame their arguments in terms of monetary analyses and financial parameters. While many supposedly radical minds cannot imagine that formalized social power may be an inherent problem, they also cannot get beyond the idea of money as a legitimate way to control human society.

But this perspective is not a naïve critique of a perceived divide between the *evil rich* and the *victimized poor*; it is about how unwittingly and thoroughly the mind can imbue money and other social norms with legitimacy. Every time money is used as a means of exchange there is a further endorsement of that legitimacy in manners that ultimately help it remain instrumental in some of the most dehumanizing practices. History illustrates that some people at least will do almost anything once financial rewards become their goal. And that we may not like such an idea does not change the fact that money's only worth is rooted utterly in the social conventions and beliefs that allow it to control us – whether that involves the purchase of our weekly groceries, the purchase of a jet fighter, or the actions people

undertake to enable such transactions. Perpetuating all the related conventions perpetuates all that goes with them, at the same time as none of the excesses with which money is associated would be possible in the absence of those conventions. Without mass belief in this grand lie, money is revealed as utterly devoid of any intrinsic worth whatsoever.

Such may be the power of a mere idea, but the principle illustrated is a critique primarily aimed at ideas, as opposed to money itself. It might be popular to frame money as *the root of all evil*, but how can something so otherwise innocuous as a worthless token be held accountable for the many excesses often attributed to it? One common explanation is of course that it is not money itself, but the so-called *love of money* that lies at the heart of the matter. This again emphasizes the power of mere ideas – the idea now being that money somehow equates to more than just an exchange system within modern life. If the supposed *love of money* is the real issue, then that is where any inquiry should now move. But once again we are brought back to human thoughts and their genesis.

From this perspective it can be argued that a world free of money would not necessarily be a better one, even in terms of the problems commonly associated with money. On close examination, money itself does not in fact appear the direct source of any problems. Just as resolving our growing ecological challenges might not be a long-term panacea if we remain fundamentally stuck within the thinking that caused them, eradicating money – or otherwise addressing it as if it was somehow *to blame* – is pointless if we do not address the core reasons humans use it to exploit one another. Any idea of simply *getting rid of money* is every bit as unrealistic as the silly idea that huge amounts of money can properly solve problems that are in fact rooted in humanity's evolution.

The silliness of ideas

As regards the power of ideas in general, it is well recognized that a lie told often enough can become perceived as the truth – an observation that explains the great interest power structures show in controlling what the public does and does not get to hear. In general, whatever might keep the public acquiescent is made believable through cultural repetition and forms the basis of subtle but mass indoctrination – all whilst any conflicting truths are silenced for potentially undermining the current order.

This goes some way to explaining why so much illogical thinking lurks within popular culture and political ideas; it can suit powerful and authoritarian interests that certain forms of nonsense remain unquestioned – the mere acceptance of any silly ideas helping to keep a population confused and divided against itself.

For example, the commonly expressed idea of *fighting for peace* is obviously paradoxical for suggesting peace is somehow produced by fighting. Nonetheless, a generic argument for such illogicality runs along the lines that something is somehow preventing peace, and that by fighting and destroying that something, peace will result. But true and lasting peace is not the defeat of one party by another within an overall situation of war. As history has repeatedly demonstrated, any such supposed *changes* only realign the power dynamics such that further conflict and conflagrations remain latent within whatever new configuration results.

Another illogical gem is summed up in the phrase *laws protect our freedoms*. What are civil laws but a mix of constraints and obligations, and what are constraints and obligations but restrictions on freedoms? In any case, is *freedom* as a global concept something that can be broken down into discrete component *freedoms* without being diminished or compromised? True freedom is surely not just the freedom to act in a set number of ways.

As with *fighting for peace*, the popular argument for laws protecting freedoms relies on

something conveniently obscure. In this case, the particular *something* must be controlled by laws lest we are overwhelmed by whatever that *something* is. But perhaps this should be seen less as an *argument* and more as a *psychological ploy* by which the elusive *something* is posited to instill fear and compromise critical thinking. Coherent arguments certainly can be made that something undesirable in human society needs to be overcome and that laws might help that happen. However, these are basically arguments that surrendering freedom through laws is the lesser of two evils; they in no way support the illogical notion that *laws protect freedoms*. And of course, on closer inspection, the mysterious *something* to be controlled is simply human behavior. Hence the full illogicality can more or less be reduced to a statement that *being controlled keeps people free*.

Of course, civil laws obviously can be broken; they clearly would not be introduced if this were not the case. Therefore, from an alternative perspective, laws could in fact be argued to ultimately have no impact at all on freedom. This is an argument that intimidation against law-breaking is not in itself a loss of freedom, but simply a prescribed set of recriminations against anyone caught doing whatever is deemed *illegal*. And as those with the least respect for laws are logically those most likely to demonstrate this truth through their actions, a sound argument exists that laws only intimidate law-abiding individuals more than those inclined to ignore the law. Therefore, alongside the first argument that laws inhibit freedom, a complementary and more philosophical one can be made that laws ultimately have zero effect on freedom – but do intimidate different people to different degrees, and in manners counterproductive to achieving lawmakers' intended results.

Note in the passing how easily different meaningful statements can all seem more or less relevant to a discussion, simply by making subtle alterations to the perspectives from which matters are examined – the result being logically contradictory positions that nonetheless all have relevance. Hence, any idea that logic alone constitutes well-grounded thinking does not itself appear a well-grounded idea.

The popularity of obviously illogical ideas such as *laws protect freedoms* results in part from such ideas being cunningly propagated alongside unthinking assumptions – one example in this instance being the assumption that *lawlessness* is undesirable. Notably, *lawlessness* is culturally linked to notions of troublesome *civil chaos and ideas that* the mere absence of laws makes *bad things* inevitable. There are nonetheless umpteen examples where it is the very *presence* of laws that has promoted *bad things*. From the murderous *war on drugs* to the many ugly effects of the legal obligation of corporations to ruthlessly maximize profit *at all costs*, it is obvious that people actually suffer and die as direct results of *law enforcement*.

The politically crafted view of *lawlessness* is a false depiction of the concept; true *lawlessness* would logically designate a mere absence of laws. But through the cultivation of public fears over some horrific state of social mayhem, the concept of *lawlessness* has been crafted as something inherently undesirable. The term has been twisted to justify and promote formal power bases and all their strong-armed judicial machinery in many situations where the relevant legal impositions are in fact failing to produce the results their advocates once promised. Very arguably, all the *lawless* ugliness of, for example the illegal drug trade, results from the very imposition of laws – just as it did with the prohibition of alcohol. Such is the willful perversion of language for political ends.

Perhaps it is through the same political exploitation of human fears that nonsense ideas are pushed into the *beyond-question department* of the mind, where they are then reflexively defended – never to be identified as the dogma of a frightened but respectable social conservatism they really are. Within a mix of self-flattery and the primitive fear of being socially ostracized, one's resultant acquiescence to the control of law can be hidden behind a

self-image of the *good law-abiding citizen*. Nonsense ideas such as *laws protecting freedom* can thus appeal to minds that fail to spot – or choose to ignore – the psychological ploy by which culturally-endemic doctrines both pamper their conceit and exploit their fears – an age-old stratagem that stymies the mind’s ability to notice its resultant lack of critical and independent thinking.

Illusions of the self

The fact that dominant cultural ideas influence individual thinking and behavior whilst the poorly-understood non-conscious workings of the organism are also at play, rather kills off any ideas of the self as an independent rational entity. It would instead seem that abstract thought – and maybe consciousness in general – is actually sandwiched somewhere between the external world as perceived by the senses, and the far more mysterious organic life of the individual, with both sides exercising significant influence. And this is neither to endorse nor refute the possible presence of yet other entities or forces such as whatever might be the *spirit* or *soul*, or anything else that might elude normal sensory detection. Much as all these ideas remain speculative by necessity, the available evidence certainly ridicules everyday ideas of the self as a definable and known entity in its own right.

The common belief in the self is nonetheless perfectly understandable – not because any such entity can be proven to exist, but because *self* has possibly been the most socially important idea since abstract thought first evolved. If modern minds have difficulty entertaining any idea that the independent self might ultimately be an illusion, this may only demonstrate just how fundamental the idea of self really is. Being effectively essential to playing our part on the world’s stage, the concept of *who we are* is something we both project and internalize to the point that we easily forget it is but a concept – if indeed we ever recognized it as such at all. But in noting how our cultures emphasize the self and thereby downplay the reality of our connectedness to a constantly evolving world, we might also want to note that such *constant change* – paradoxical as the concept may be – is another idea defying any simple understanding of our situation. No wonder it is so hard to properly grasp these matters; it may in fact be impossible without some level of intellectual *self-deception*.

Considering our changing attitudes, ideas, opinions, moods, and desires alongside the fact that the occasional politically-threatened individual can be given an entirely *new identity*, what exists in any enduring or tangible manner that might constitute the supposed self? Even the physiological body is in a state of continual change and biological renewal – having at best a very temporal appearance on this Earth.

The issue is of course not that *the self* has no form of existence at all in terms of everyday thinking: it is that whatever does exist is not something we understand remotely as well as we typically imagine. Moreover, given abstract thoughts and ideas are effectively static within their symbolic formulation, they seem inherently handicapped in terms of truly understanding the dynamic nature of everything surrounding the idea of *self*.

The mind, even when it follows this logic, can nonetheless be reluctant to *self-criticize* and investigate further. In terms of getting on with life, such questioning can seem like a pointless foray into highly abstract philosophy. Doesn’t the value of thought lie in getting things done, rather than simply thinking to no particular end? And yet, given abstract thought is the core technology that has led mankind into a somewhat problematic state, the general cultural disinterest in thought itself and how it operates is like driving a car with persistent engine trouble, but stubbornly refusing to investigate its mechanics. When it is so evident that abstract thought is instrumental in constructing everything distinctly human – as opposed to more visceral attributes shared with other species – any answers to distinctly human problems likely have their roots and possible resolutions centered on the distinct

nature of abstract thought.

We are in an odd situation. On the one hand, we remain very much animal-like organisms with biological needs and instincts serving to protect us in the wild, but on the other, we increasingly inhabit civilizations quite alien to anything seen even by our own ancestors. Hence, in evolutionary terms, we are arguably ripping ourselves away from our own natural habitat. But far from being concerned about whatever tensions and disconnects such alienation would logically produce, the main cultural thrust remains the promotion of so-called *progress* – all as if the cleavage between the world we evolved in and today's increasingly artificial one is somehow beneficial.

For better or worse, as a species we seem to be pushing our adaptability to the limit – altering both our environment and our culture, with little concern for the consequences. In survival terms, this has not yet proven a problem inasmuch as, despite all the dramatic changes and our ongoing butchering of one another, we continue to thrive and dominate the planet. However, the future of that domination now looks much less certain for numerous reasons of our own making: from the scale of damage inflicted on the biosphere, to our ever-ready ability to annihilate ourselves many times over. Sheer human numbers alone are a noted *risk multiplier* for many problems: from geopolitical tensions and resource depletion to the likelihood of global viruses, pestilence and disease. Our domination could ironically be our very undoing, given that the *natural* world is changing faster and more profoundly than any human organic evolution is likely to handle on the long-term – if indeed some specific man-made problem does not see us off more immediately.

On the face of it, these are problems that are slowly being addressed – at least to the extent that they are discussed in the media, and statesmen occasionally make declarations or sign bits of paper. But in reality, stripped of such window dressing and lip service, there seems to be little if anything in terms of an effective strategy in place. The truth is that no amount of political posturing, international agreements, spirited movements or other cultural *noise* over these matters will bring about meaningful change without everyday human attitudes and behaviors altering on a significant scale. The true roots of our problems lie in our failure to understand and master our evolution; certainly not in politically posturing over their troublesome symptoms.

The signs suggest we remain too divided and too self-interested to take any steps for the welfare of the species in general – a visible truth at every level from the individual up to the multinational corporation and the most powerful nations. As a specific and highly relevant example of this problem, a rift exists over environmental concerns between those nations that once spearheaded industrialized production, and those that now effectively act as subcontractors for that same production and have thereby become big new polluters. In terms of halting the damage inflicted on the biosphere, the dominant nations can be quick to criticize the record of such so-called *developing* nations, whilst their corporations nonetheless farm out production to those same nations and demand the lowest possible prices. Hence, given the overall process prioritizes profit above all else, any stated commitments to addressing environmental matters are quickly subordinated to commercial interests, rather than being prioritized as essentials of species survival. Such national and corporate self-interest might act to increase profits but is literally costing the Earth.

Is it really a surprise to find such self-centered human behavior alive and kicking at both the individual and group level? Has any other species ever had to consider its behavior in relation to several billion others of its kind – not to mention planetary life in general? Is it not unrealistic to imagine we would concern ourselves with the fate of so many beings and lifeforms with which we have no contact whatsoever? From an evolutionary perspective, we

seem confronted with a unique problem that logically requires a unique solution – certainly not the usual political mutterings and duplicitous agendas lacking frank and honest acknowledgment of the awkward truth that, in effect, *we are the problem*.

There are some who are so convinced of our intractable role in our own downfall that they consider it merely a matter of time until global catastrophe visits us in one form or another – regardless of any efforts to avert it. Some even take the attitude that the sooner this happens the better for the rest of life on the planet. And then there are those who despair at ideas that the planet should be kept healthy for the continuation of the destructive and too-stupid-to-learn species we appear to be. But perhaps most ominous are the huge numbers who seem thoroughly disinterested in just about everything other than pursuing their own short-sighted goals amidst a complete disregard for any bigger picture at all. However natural such self-interest may be in evolutionary terms, it renders the individual as all-problem-and-no-solution in terms of the real challenges facing our species.

If self-interest truly is an intractable natural state, then it logically underlies all human activity – irrespective of how magnanimously anyone dresses their intentions. We may convince even ourselves of some altruism within the acts modern society more or less demands of us, but such conviction runs contrary to much within evolutionary theory. It is not necessary for example, to theorize about some subjugation of our better side at the hands of *evil capitalist forces* in order to bluntly admit that we habitually pursue our own ends; is it not more honest to accept that nature just made us this way and that would-be excuses are neither necessary nor helpful for a proper understanding of where we currently stand?

Perhaps it is more revealing to look at the social veneers that seek to hide natural self-interest. From everyday politeness to the extremes of political hypocrisy, formal society entices us to be dishonest about self-interest and to present ourselves as other than we really are. The relevant duplicitous behaviors are everywhere to be seen. Elected leaders for example, are arguably inherent liars inasmuch as they pretend impossible and illogical blanket interest in many millions of complete strangers. Meanwhile, salespeople everywhere artificially befriend potential buyers in the interests of gaining a sale. And we are generally habituated to smiling rather unnaturally when introduced to others – all as part of some desire to come across as a *nice person* for our own social benefit. Hence, much so-called *good social behavior* is revealed as no more than learned conduct displayed in the interests of gaining social traction.

However, all such *role-playing*, as the sociologists would call it, can be another means by which the mind's ideas are distorted. Successfully presenting oneself as one wants to be perceived is a strategy that benefits from a true conviction in the act one performs – but this can be at a cost. Since simply mouthing one's preferred ideas is not socially as persuasive as having those ideas psychologically internalized at a level where they effectively become parts of *who one is*, many come to hold deep attachments to whatever beliefs help them through life, regardless of any supporting evidence or lack of. Thus, given the individual's interest in arming himself against anything that might challenge his mode of existence, a constant temptation exists to self-indoctrinate with whatever dogma and propaganda meet this interest. Truth can be a ready casualty of such self-defense.

But the thinking behind all this still relies on the dubious position that as individuals we are basically disconnected from the world around us. It is too easy to think of ourselves as discrete entities: essentially separate components that taken together comprise some optimized understanding of reality. This highlights a huge philosophical conundrum: the idea that the self is an independently meaningful *something*, alongside the knowledge that one's organism is conceived on a microscopic level and will one day have rotted away

beyond any recognition. How does the self, as seemingly the most complex entity known, effectively appear from nothing and return to nothing? What is its essence – if such a question is even relevant – and how can it really be anything more autonomous than just a temporary mirage of independence?

Interestingly, these seemingly impossible questions are themselves wholly contingent on the idea of the self as something beyond a mere idea – that is, something other than just another *tale of reality*. But as soon as we see *self* as no more than one convenient idea amidst countless others, the need to provide incontrovertible answers to such questions is removed; *self* becomes nothing more than a common but disposable tool of cognitive processing, and not the logically intractable set of contradictions it ultimately appears via straightjacketed rational thought. To make sense of this altered perspective, it need only be considered that dispensing with *self* as something to be fully and correctly delineated is not denying our everyday reality in which the concept proves extremely useful; it is simply denying that any such entity must exist as some discrete *thing* the conscious mind might properly comprehend.

Failure to spot a clash between the rigidity of conceptual language and the intrinsically nebulous and fluid nature of reality is arguably at the heart of human culture's general inability to see the shortcomings and limitations of abstract thought. Far from reasoning that any concept within a continually changing universe can be no more than a cognitive and somewhat illusory place-marker for observations potentially misunderstood to indicate *something* with a distinct and discrete existence, culture generally promotes the opposite idea – in this instance, the notion of *self* as a discrete entity.

It is in any case quite arguable that a cultural focus on the idea of *self* has atomized modern civilizations in manners that leave people overly ambitious, devoid of much in the way of community spirit, and often troubled by predictably alienating lifestyles. This seems only natural when individualistic goals are so heavily promoted and embraced: everywhere from spiritual enlightenment to personal fame and fortune.

Given the underlying cognitive illusion, a degree of failure becomes an almost inevitable feature of all ambitions and goals framed in terms of the self. The infinite number of imaginable influences impacting both the organism and its world is so obviously beyond the scope of any train of thought – even if the mind might foolishly imagine itself up to the job.

Upon closer inspection, there are in fact plenty of reasons to be suspicious of all such ideas the mind otherwise takes seriously, including even the general idea that we know the self, other people, and the world around us as extensively as culture encourages us to believe. Such suspicion is justified inasmuch as human ideas often do not materialize through any recognized means of establishing their would-be authenticity. It would seem instead that, given we are social animals, we rather unthinkingly accept a great number of things from those around us. Popular falsehoods can therefore prove contagious.

The alternative notion that our ideas represent *real understanding* may be somewhat useful in the professional pursuit of scientific or *objective* perspectives, but this is not what drives most people's decision-making processes. Within cultures rife with deception, people's behavior appears motivated by deeper drives they themselves may deny or even be unaware of, with their adopted ideas serving more to legitimize their behavior than to explain it. As is often remarked, people can enact behavior for one set of reasons whilst expressing quite different reasons as supposed justifications for their actions.

The self – if such a concept is helpful at all – is at least somewhat illusory, at the same time as anything considered *the mind* is influenced by a myriad of internal and external forces defying full comprehension. In total, this constitutes an argument that the mind – especially

as regards its peculiarly human preoccupation with abstract thought – is actually something quite trivial and overrated in terms of its supposed abilities to understand the human condition. Meanwhile, and quite misleadingly, the extensive visible impact on the physical world of actions founded on abstract ideas only serves to obscure how little we humans have really evolved.

Hence, accepting any thoughts – however axiomatic they may appear – without at least attempting to probe the nature of thought itself, is arguably worse than ignorance in terms of understanding our true condition. If we humans possess a new and potentially dangerous evolutionary development within the technology that is our minds' ability to perform highly *abstract thinking processes* – a technology arguably threatening all life on this planet – the real issue is perhaps our hitherto lack of willingness to think about thought itself.

Meanwhile, the fact that current human culture generally sees things in a very different light wherein knowledge framed within abstract thought is reflexively considered to be of unquestionable benefit, is analogous to the drug addict's fixation on nothing other than the very thing that threatens his end.

INTERLUDE: Thoughts About The Speed Of Light

As originally devised, the *theory of relativity* rests on the speed of light being a constant, and time being a fourth dimension to be added to the three spatial ones. The origins of these ideas include late nineteenth century experiments to investigate the possible role of a postulated *aether* in the mechanics of light. The reasoning at the time was that, similar to the manner sound waves are theorized to travel through air, light must travel through *something*, given that it can travel through what is otherwise considered a vacuum. But to the surprise of the researchers – by virtue of their *failed* experiment that didn't find what they were looking for – it seemed their postulated aether did not exist. To be accurate, we should only say that they found no evidence to support its existence, as you can never find an absence.

Despite the experiment's failure, the results were of some use in theory-building. To some, they proved that light traveled at the same speed in all directions – at least under the experimental conditions involved. This was taken a bit further by others who simply said that light's velocity was an unchanging constant.

Of course, measuring the movement of anything has to be done *relative to something else*. For example, if we were in a speeding van, we might ask a dog traveling with us to *sit still*, meaning that the dog should not run about relative to the van. But we can't reasonably expect the dog to become still relative to the road below, given that both van and dog are traveling *relative* to the road. So what the experiment showed might be more fully detailed by saying that the velocity of light is constant in all directions *relative to the source of the light*.

Intuitively we feel that if something is moving away from us and something else is moving away from that first thing in the same direction, then the second thing is moving away from us faster than the first. So, as regards the velocity of light, common sense would expect that light sent from something already traveling at the speed of light would travel at twice the speed of light. But there are a couple of problems here. Firstly, the basic speed of light – relative to its source – is *incredibly* fast. We can forget all ideas about directly seeing or measuring light traveling, given that it moves *at the speed of light*. To measure its velocity, we must rely on our minds to think through various experimental challenges. But this leads to the second problem which is – again because light moves so incredibly fast – that nothing works fast enough to *catch* just how fast it moves. Nonetheless, it has long been agreed that the *basic* speed of light – i.e. relative to its source – has been measured through a combination of experimentation and reason – and is therefore known.

The theory of relativity is based on a significantly more concrete position and has different ideas about what happens as velocity increases. The original version of relativity thought that light always travels at the same speed and can never travel faster than that speed, *relative to anything at all that we might consider*. Typically, illustrations of this principle consider for example, what might happen when a very short burst of light is emitted from the front of a theoretical rocket traveling at the speed of light. Just as mentioned above, common sense makes us want to double the speed of light to get the resultant speed, but relativity refutes this idea. According to relativity, *faster and faster* is the wrong principle when things are already moving near the speed of light. Relativity says that rather than an accelerating object just continually getting faster through time, time itself actually gets distorted at very high speeds. In fact, many physicists currently believe nothing at all can travel faster than the accepted speed of light.

Given how we normally think about our world, this sort of idea is more than just surprising –

it's positively mind-bending as it also includes other bizarre notions such as that space is somehow curved, and that time travel might be possible. Relativity also says that if you are speeding incredibly fast towards light that is itself speeding towards you, the light will meet you no faster than if you stood still.

An important point to note here is that none of this stuff can be directly seen or demonstrated. It's mostly theoretical: projections of the human mind based on reworking previous theories alongside some very limited observations. A lot of the theory is in fact based on purely mathematical reasoning that is disconnected from any *real-world* theories, never mind actual observations.

To get a feel for how relativity *thinks*, consider how you would handle a situation in which you added two apples to a hundred apples but only got a hundred and one apples. We immediately say this is impossible, but if you were working on a different problem in a purely mathematical situation with complex formulae the impossibility of this might not be so obvious. How would you work out what was happening? There are two obvious approaches to this. One is to say that the principles or the information you are working with must be incorrect – a bit like saying someone must have miscounted and maybe the *hundred* apples were actually only ninety-nine. The other way to resolve the problem is to say that we must somehow expand our thinking to allow things to be taking place that we do not normally consider possible. As regards the apples, this is maybe like considering, for example, that as you accumulate a lot of apples the odd apple gets hidden away in some other universe and so you lose one.

Of course, relativity is not about counting apples. The problem with verifying certain ideas of relativity first hand is that perception and the brain are just too slow to capture what really happens at incredibly high speeds. So, crazy though relativity might sound, we cannot actually look at anything to directly check whether it is appropriate or not. What actually happens at very high velocities must ultimately remain conjecture. So, is there a fault in relativity theory, or do we really live in an apparently crazy universe? Or have physicists inadvertently made it sound crazy because without experience of traveling remotely near the speed of light no one can truly know what they are talking about?

To make things simpler, we can examine an example of objects moving at slower speeds. Consider a car moving at 50km/s that fires a projectile in front of it at 150km/s. Discounting the slowing effects of air resistance etc., the speed of the projectile, relative to stationary observers is obviously 200km/s. However, the speed of the projectile relative to occupants of the car is still only 150km/s. Unsurprisingly, this seems to contradict any idea that the projectile has a uniform defined velocity for all observers, and this is why the idea that light always travels at a uniform speed for all observers seems unsettling to us. According to relativity, the speed of our light burst can't just be added to the speed of our rocket letting us conclude that the burst of light is traveling at a velocity twice the accepted speed of light. But why not?

Let's de-construct this and look for errors in the thinking. When we are working with our slow car-and-projectile model we can obviously discount the negligibly small time taken for light to reach our eyes or whatever recording devices we use to time the trajectories and to subsequently calculate speeds. So, if we take two points along the trajectory, and record the time for the projectile to travel between the two points, this will obviously give us the essentials to calculate speed. Note that the speed thus calculated by a standing observer would now be the same as that of the occupants of the car, or anyone else, and would indeed be 200km/s. The conclusion would no longer be *relative* to the specific observer and would indicate that the differences between their previous perceptions of different speeds were

indeed only relative to their different conditions in terms of movement. Using this second methodology, the speed of the projectile is uniformly 200km/s regardless of an observer's position or movement. Notably though, there is no fixed speed of the projectile, should we care to repeat the experiment but vary the specifications. Had the projectile been fired, at say 100km/s from a car traveling at 250km/s its speed would have been 350 km/s for all observers in all positions. This is all intuitive common sense and not something the average physicist would dispute. And note that this demonstrates observations of constant speed for all observers of the same moving objects, regardless of observer conditions, whilst not in any way suggesting that all moving objects move at the same velocity. If all this were extrapolated to the speed of light, we would say that the speed of a specific instance of light is constant for all observers, but that different instances of light can travel at different speeds – ultimately all relative to some set positions in space, or a specified *frame of reference*.

But we know that things are more difficult to investigate when we consider movements at or near the *basic* speed of light. Specifically, things happen so fast that the time taken for light to travel from any points along a trajectory to any observers can no longer be neglected as insignificant and must be factored in. What will happen when we do another thought experiment analogous to the moving car and projectile, but at much higher speed?

Logically, no key principles should change simply because we speed things up, as that only changes the figures we use. A variation on the car-and-projectile example should not change our common-sense perspective of what's happening. Or so we think. But relativity steps in at this point and says we need to change the rules. Because relativity refuses to allow speed to increase indefinitely as the slow-moving projectile is effectively able to do, it has to put any would-be extra speed somewhere else, and so it changes the speed of time to allow the would-be extra speed of light to be *slowed down by time itself*.

Consider an experiment in which a stationary object at X emits a burst of light at the exact moment a rocket passes X at the speed of light and also emits its own burst of light. The rocket is traveling towards Y which is distance D from X, and an observer at Y is ready to decide if he'll accept the theory of relativity or not. Relativity states both bursts of light will arrive at Y at the same time, whereas common sense says the burst of light from the rocket will be faster and so arrive at Y in advance of the light from the stationary object. It looks as if this experiment should settle matters.

Now let's consider two scenarios of the light arriving at Y and compare how relativity and common sense would interpret them. Firstly, suppose the observer at Y reports that both bursts of light arrive simultaneously. If we really trust what we have already hypothesized in our thought experiment to be true, it would look as if the situation is decided and relativity has won the debate. However, someone who believes firmly in the conventional perspective could argue that the experiment was rigged and that things are not really as they appear. They could for example, argue that the burst of light from the rocket was actually emitted at distance D *before* X and so, although it was traveling at twice the speed of the other burst of light, it had twice the distance to cover and so arrived at Y at the same time. Any number of other theoretical *cheating* ideas could allow for the fact that both bursts of light appear to arrive simultaneously at Y when they were nonetheless traveling at different speeds. What we establish by this thinking is that to remove doubt from the situation we need trustworthy observers everywhere to tell us exactly what happens.

Our second scenario is that one burst of light arrives at Y in advance of the other. But however much the conventional thinker might want to then argue that his theory wins the case, the adherent of relativity is equally entitled to argue that the experiment has been rigged in a different manner, and so, once again, nothing can be settled until we have reliable

information about what really happens within a fully monitored experiment leaving no area for doubt.

Next, it is agreed between our two thinkers that a plan should be devised to ensure both bursts of light do indeed leave point X at the same time. However, they cannot agree on the correct plan. The problem is that everything happens so quickly with light that it is obviously impossible to simply use eyes to record what is happening. But at least both thinkers are agreed on the nature of this particular problem which can be summarized by realizing that when we look at light coming from, for example, some distant star, we have absolutely no intuitive means of knowing its velocity and so would not know if it was instantaneous or had taken billions of years to reach our eyes by moving *relatively* slowly.

A curious side to this problem is that if we did know how fast the light struck our eyes we could calculate an idea of how long it had taken to travel from the star and – assuming we knew the distance between ourselves and the star – work out its speed. But why would we bother to do that if we already knew how fast the light struck our eyes? We wouldn't. Our reality remains that we cannot know the speed of light from our eyesight – but we can work it out if we know the distance to the star and how long it has taken the light to reach us. But how are we to know the distance between the star and ourselves? We can actually use the speed of light and its time of travel to do this. But aren't we using the distance to the star in the first place to calculate light speed? Such thinking is obviously circular. And it's only more worrying that we haven't yet considered relativity's idea that the speed of light is inflexible. Even if the star was receding away from us, relativity says the light would still reach us at the same speed. It seems the speed of light and the way it supposedly behaves controls too much of this thinking.

Nonetheless, within modern physics, these worries are largely dismissed. Light travel is recorded using technology that responds incredibly quickly, and using theory and mathematics, the inflexible speed of light has been calculated – or so most physicists believe, even if not everyone is convinced of all the related ideas. Anyway, the next problem our two thinkers face is that they cannot even agree on how to set up their experiment. Exact timing is obviously crucial.

The relativity thinker explains that by using light from a third stationary source at X and bounced back to X using a mirror at Y it is possible to check that everything is measured very accurately by subsequently compensating for the known time delay for light within the setup. This he argues is one element within a sort of perfect clock system providing the required accuracy of measurements plus all compensations essential to a reliable experiment. But the conventional thinker says there is still something funny about using light to manage a system designed to measure the speed of light.

Let's take up their conversation. The conventional thinker is called Thicko and the relativity thinker is called Dimbo. Thicko doesn't mind his name as he feels modern physics is mostly over his head and so he thinks with what he calls *gut feelings* – even though that's why some people call him thick. Dimbo, on the other hand, is annoyed at his name. He's the studious type and even though this means most of his ideas have just been learned from others, he doesn't feel that he should have to waste time explaining *established facts* to people like Thicko.

Dimbo: Okay, so we are agreed that we need to monitor things fully. Yes?

Thicko: Sure.

Dimbo: You don't sound totally happy.

Thicko: No. I'm trying to think.

Dimbo: Think about what?

Thicko: Well I've realized that that is all we do.

Dimbo: You mean, think?

Thicko: Yeah. It's a problem.

Dimbo: I know. We have lots of problems. That's why we're thinking! To solve them.

Thicko: But that's *another* problem.

Dimbo: What is?

Thicko: Thinking to solve problems.

Dimbo: You think we're going to solve them if we *don't* think?

Thicko: No. But it seems sometimes that the more we think, the more problems we create.

Dimbo: You're thick! We already have some problems and I'm thinking about how to solve them while you're wasting time thinking that thinking makes more problems. If you think thinking creates more problems, at least stop thinking and make it easy for the rest of us.

Thicko: Sorry, but I think I've got another problem.

Dimbo: What?

Thicko: We're just imaginary people in a big thought experiment.

Dimbo: How did you figure *that*?

Thicko: I didn't. It was just a thought.

Dimbo: Okay, okay, okay! You win. It's not worth an argument. We're both just imaginary people in a big thought experiment. Have it your way. Now can we get back to sorting out this speed-of-light thing?

Thicko: Okay... sorry, where were we?

Dimbo: I suggested a technical timing system to verify exactly what happens at both X and Y – a sort of light-based clock. But you, unfortunately, were not happy with it.

Thicko: Well what now?

Dimbo: How would I know? If it were a game of chess, I would say it's *your* move. Any *bright* ideas? Any light-bulb moments?

Thicko: Nah. But I have come up with another problem.

Dimbo: I have been known to get violent.

Thicko: Violence never solved anything.

Dimbo: Mmm... Progress comes from questioning accepted ideas.

Thicko: Are you sure about that?

Dimbo: Yes. See! Now you're questioning my idea.

Thicko: Yes. I'm trying to make some progress.

Dimbo: Mmm... *You'd* have more success trying to *regress*!

Thicko: You know that's impossible. How can anyone *regress*? You can't bend time

backward.

Dimbo: Let me think about that one. Actually, you're sort of right! Regression would be uniquely impossible in your particular case... though not for the reason you mention.

Thicko: So, can we continue with the progress?

Dimbo: One wonders... Any suggestions?

Thicko: Yes. Can we get back to my last problem?

Dimbo: Amazing! We both thought it impossible, but you're successfully regressing.

Thicko: You don't understand me. I'm responding to your request to make *progress*.

Dimbo: You don't believe in ESP by any chance, do you?

Thicko: I might. Why?

Dimbo: Might have known! Crank! Anyway, I just understood your problem without you explaining it.

Thicko: Nonsense! I bet you can't tell me what it is.

Dimbo: You're right. But again, not for the reason you think. It seems no one can tell you anything.

Thicko: You really do waste time. Why did you start talking about ESP?

Dimbo: That wasn't a waste of time. Just the fact that you had to *ask* that question proves there's no ESP. Let's say I ran a successful thought experiment by actually thinking.

Thicko: Oh yeah? Well, let's say I *still think* you waste time – if that keeps you happy.

Dimbo: I'm supposed to be happy because you think I waste time?

Thicko: Let's say that was another successful thought experiment and it just *proved* you're wasting time. I mean, didn't you say you wanted to get back to the speed-of-light thing? As regards *that*, it's actually *me* who wants to progress!

Dimbo: You mean *regress*, even though you *think* it is progress.

Thicko: You are mad. I said *progress*, you tell me I think *progress*, and yet you say I mean *regress*. How can anyone have a meaningful conversation with someone like you?

Dimbo: You're just wasting more time. What's that question got to do with the speed of light?

Thicko: Everything! I am trying to communicate with you – to ask you how we can make progress on the matter if we regress?

Dimbo: Don't you know that light travels out at the same velocity in all directions from a fixed source? Now apply that idea elsewhere.

Thicko: You mean progress and regress are the same things?

Dimbo: Sort of.

Thicko: Well it's funny you should say that because if you want to *regress* back a few hundred years, I think you'll find no one was talking all this relativity nonsense.

Dimbo: You're even better than I imagined at regressing! Maybe those wackos who believe we humans roamed the planet among the dinosaurs had something after all. Hmm...

Thicko: Why do you always do that?

Dimbo: What?

Thicko: Tag something on the end of what you say that you don't explain.

Dimbo: Believe me, explanations are sometimes a waste of time.

Thicko: Oh, how convenient! Say something and then refuse to explain what you meant or why you said it. Now that *really* is a waste of time! And energy. On stuff that doesn't even matter!

Dimbo: Okay, sorry. You didn't pick it up, but I was being a little sarcastic by suggesting that your thinking is seriously out-of-date – like, in the dinosaur age! You can take a joke, can't you?

Thicko: Excuse me while I die laughing.

Dimbo: You're welcome. How long will it take?

Thicko: Ha ha ha. I can see why you're not a stage comedian. By the way, sarcasm is the lowest form of wit.

Dimbo: Have you tested that? I mean, have you, for example, scientifically measured the levels of all forms of wit and found sarcasm to be the very lowest? Was the study peer-reviewed and approved?

Thicko: Don't be facetious. It's just an expression that reflects the way many people feel about sarcasm.

Dimbo: I'm not being facetious. I'm building an example-based case on an expression *you* chose, to show how people can accept certain things without testing them at all.

Thicko: You mean like the idea that nothing can exceed the speed of light?

Dimbo: Not at all. That has been thoroughly tested.

Thicko: How?

Dimbo: You wouldn't understand.

Thicko: Well there you go again! Why don't you try me, and I'll tell you when I get stuck?

Dimbo: The problem is that if you could understand what I'm saying, you would see that I'm right, but as long as you don't see what I'm saying you won't understand any of it in the first place.

Thicko: That's too complicated for me. Just tell me something and I'll tell you if I agree or not.

Dimbo: But how will you know what to make of what I say if you don't understand it?

Thicko: But how can I understand it if you don't at least tell it to me? Got your new improved ESP kit yet?

Dimbo: Okay, let's give it a go. Do you understand my light-based clock system?

Thicko: Oh, we're back there again. Is this part of your regress-equals-progress theory?

Dimbo: Yes and no. Just give an unambiguous answer. Do you understand the light-based clock?

Thicko: Eh... no.

Dimbo: Well that's just part of setting up the experiment so what chance is there of you understanding the results?

Thicko: That doesn't matter.

Dimbo: It doesn't matter that there's no chance of you understanding the results?

Thicko: No.

Dimbo: Do you mean *no* or *yes*?

Thicko: Depends how you frame the question.

Dimbo: Right. Does it matter that you cannot understand anything about the experiment?

Thicko: Which things do you mean?

Dimbo: I said *anything*!

Thicko: You mean *everything*?

Dimbo: If you want to put it that way, okay. Let me be precise then. Does it matter that you will not understand any part of the experiment at all?

Thicko: Who says I won't?

Dimbo: If you are incapable of understanding just the clock, the rest will be too difficult for you.

Thicko: How do you know? You didn't even mention the rest.

Dimbo: Yes I did! Two seconds ago!

Thicko: That's not fair. All you said was that it would be too difficult. You didn't tell me what it was. You didn't give me the chance to not understand it.

Dimbo: Okay. Let's take one bit at a time. The clock on its own. Do you understand the clock? The answer has to be *yes* or *no*.

Thicko: That doesn't matter.

Dimbo: What sort of answer is that? You either do or do not understand the clock. Hey but let's cover all options and include that you sort of maybe think that you could perhaps understand one or more bits of the clock to any number of varying degrees as you pass through time, or space or space-time or any possible or impossible combination of these at any speed or form of velocity that the human mind could imagine and... well let's even throw in all other options that the human or an utterly imaginary mind could never imagine, including those with variable degrees of uncertainty as regards their ability to imagine weird stuff... or not. Is it *yes*, *no* or somewhere in the middle or anywhere else within all possible universes and multi-verses of answers... and non-answers or anti-answers?

Thicko: You don't really want an answer, do you? Like I said, it doesn't matter.

Dimbo: What the hell *doesn't matter*, or *doesn't energy*, or doesn't whatever it doesn't? What are you talking about?

Thicko: The clock.

Dimbo: Of course it matters! We can't do the experiment without the clock.

Thicko: You misunderstood me. I meant it doesn't matter that I can't understand the clock.

Dimbo: But if you can't understand the clock, you will not trust any results – even if you totally understand every other part of the experiment. We're going around in circles.

Thicko: But it still doesn't matter.

Dimbo: So even if you understood the entire experiment except for the clock you would not

bother to even try to understand the clock so that we could agree that the experiment was done correctly?

Thicko: That's too hypothetical. Right now I don't understand the clock and I don't have enough knowledge of the rest of the experiment to not understand it.

Dimbo: Right. But you asked me to explain it all to you and I only got as far as the clock and you started saying it didn't matter. Right now, I'd be happier if it could be proven that you will never ever understand the clock – because at least I'd know where I was.

Thicko: Well it doesn't matter anyway.

Dimbo: Why do you *keep* saying it doesn't matter?

Thicko: It doesn't matter why I say it doesn't matter – all that matters is that I say it doesn't.

Dimbo: Okay. But even if you say that it doesn't matter why you say it doesn't matter, can you please just tell me anyway?

Thicko: No.

Dimbo: Why in heavens not?

Thicko: I don't know. I mean it's a philosophical question that people have argued over for centuries. Why do we do and not do the things we do and don't do? Is it free will or determinism or some mix of both or something else? Who knows?

Dimbo: Well once we go down that route, you could say we maybe know nothing at all. But this is not philosophy – we're trying to find out things about the speed of light.

Thicko: But if we want to rule out all doubt we cannot just ignore philosophy since we know it is a source of doubt.

Dimbo: But philosophy has *always* had doubt and I reckon it always will. So we might as well just give up trying to find out anything at all as long as you keep thinking that way.

Thicko: Is that your gut feeling?

Dimbo: Yes.

Thicko: Then I agree.

Dimbo: But that means we can't get to the bottom of this speed of light issue.

Thicko: You're probably right – but you said it.

Dimbo: Ha! You said *probably* which means that you are not certain, which means that there *must* still be a possibility we can sort this thing out.

Thicko: I suppose you're right, but I still have a lot of doubts – especially about certainty.

Dimbo: Well we'll never know anything if we don't try.

Thicko: That's another philosophical issue. How can we be sure that all knowledge comes to us through effort? You know how to breathe. Do you remember trying to learn it? No!

Dimbo: Fine. But I'm talking about another type of knowledge. Also, it doesn't matter even if there are a million ways of gaining knowledge, we only need one reliable one to learn something.

Thicko: Well okay. Do you have a plan?

Dimbo: Yes.

Thicko: And?

Dimbo: Make you understand that clock!

Thicko: That's pointless.

Dimbo: Apparently, but it hasn't stopped me trying. And why say it's pointless before I even start?

Thicko: Start? Geez! By your own words, you haven't stopped! Ever thought of becoming a clock?

Dimbo: I've got no time for your stupid ideas!

Thicko: Well I don't have any time for yours!

Dimbo: So, we're back here yet again. Even if I got you to understand my clock you still would not be convinced. Is that what you're saying?

Thicko: No... it's what *you* just said. But it so happens I agree with you.

Dimbo: But that's nonsensical!

Thicko: Maybe. But we are agreed on it at least. And you said it first!

Dimbo: I was only clarifying what you think.

Thicko: Why? Do you think I don't know what I think?

Dimbo: No! I mean, *I* don't know what you think!

Thicko: Then why try to clarify it?

Dimbo: Look! Why do you think it doesn't matter what you think about the clock?

Thicko: We've already done that. It's philosophy. You said we should use some other means of knowing things.

Dimbo: Okay. Please try to answer it in a non-philosophical way.

Thicko: You mean without thinking about it?

Dimbo: If you like.

Thicko: So, I've to tell you why I think something doesn't matter without thinking about why it doesn't matter?

Dimbo: Look – the sensible questions aren't working so let's try some daft ones. I don't even understand what exactly I'm asking you now, but maybe that's something else that doesn't matter. Just try to answer. Please...

Thicko: You mean like, answer with my gut feelings?

Dimbo: With anything!

Thicko: Okay – no thinking allowed – here we go... I'd say it doesn't matter that I don't understand your clock because even if I did I still would not trust it to get the timing right.

Dimbo: But is there any possibility you would trust it at some point?

Thicko: Given intractable philosophical uncertainty, there must be at least a possibility. But as you don't like philosophy, I'll just say a flat *no*.

Dimbo: Why not *yes*?

Thicko: Because my gut feeling is *no*. I told you right at the beginning that I didn't trust an

experiment to measure the speed of light if it uses light as part of its measuring process.

Dimbo: But if I convinced you that it was all perfectly logical?

Thicko: Doesn't matter. I wouldn't trust the logic even if I understood it to be right.

Dimbo: You mean you think right logic can be wrong?

Thicko: It doesn't matter if logic is right or wrong. I can't sense it, and so I don't trust it.

Dimbo: Have you forgotten that we are supposed to be only imaginary people? We can't sense anything at all.

Thicko: So what? Even real people can't sense logic. They shouldn't trust it so much.

Dimbo: Maybe. But isn't logic all that imaginary people like you and I have? Don't we have to use logic to work out this speed-of-light thing.

Thicko: That's illogical.

Dimbo: Why?

Thicko: Because we don't have to do anything just because logic makes it possible. We could just do nothing and give up on this speed-of-light thing. Fancy a beer?

Dimbo: What I meant was that if we want to work out the speed of light, we can't use anything other than logic.

Thicko: I knew what you meant. I just said what I said to point out that there's no problem in not being logical, so it is illogical to say that you have to use logic.

Dimbo: Very smart! But isn't being illogical just another form of being logical then? I mean you can't judge anything to be illogical unless you are using logic as a comparison.

Thicko: That's very logical... and illogical too. So there's plenty of logic here – but how are you planning to use all this logic to measure the speed of light?

Dimbo: Well, at least, I've got you to start being smart about logic!

Thicko: So what?

Dimbo: Well now we can start using logic to sort out the speed of light.

Thicko: That's a waste of time.

Dimbo: Why? Eh... no philosophy allowed!

Thicko: I told you. Even real people shouldn't trust logic so much and we're just imaginary people. Real people can at least see real light. Real people can do real experiments in the real world and get real results. We can't do any of that.

Dimbo: Okay! We're imaginary people. So, we should be able to imagine that we are those real people in that real world doing all sorts of real things with real light.

Thicko: Speak for yourself.

Dimbo: You've no imagination!

Thicko: Now you're trying to trick me into thinking I'm not just an imaginary person. That's a waste of time because if I'm not an imaginary person, how will I be able to imagine all this stuff about the real world? Sorry. Gut feelings tell me I'm not in the real world and I cannot imagine my way into it.

Dimbo: You've made a logical error.

Thicko: I'm not talking about logic – I'm talking about gut feelings.

Dimbo: That's what I mean. Even if we're talking gut feelings, well my gut feelings tell me you've made a logical error because you assume that imaginary people can imagine whatever they want.

Thicko: I don't assume that. I imagine it.

Dimbo: You only assume you imagine it. Anyway, my point is that whatever you assume, or think, or imagine – it's all just what the author makes you do if we are imaginary people. You've no free will and are just a mouthpiece at best. It's not really you talking.

Thicko: I did notice that while you were talking. But you mean the author is some sort of god, creating our reality and the things we think and say?

Dimbo: I don't know.

Thicko: How do you know you don't know?

Dimbo: I don't know that either – he just wrote the words for me.

Thicko: Hey – you think he's writing this response for me too?

Dimbo: He says he doesn't know.

Thicko: How do you know what he says?

Dimbo: He writes it down, you idiot!

Thicko: But suppose he's wrong.

Dimbo: You mean he says he doesn't know, but he really does?

Thicko: Well even if he knows, it doesn't help because it seems he doesn't know he knows.

Thicko: Wow! If *he* doesn't know, who does?

Dimbo: Maybe nobody.

Thicko: I've lost track. What is it that maybe nobody knows?

Dimbo: Maybe lots of stuff. Who would know?

Thicko: Like... maybe *everything!*

Dimbo: I don't believe in absolutes.

Thicko: Ha! Like a maximum speed for light travel?

Dimbo: No – it's not as simple as you think. When things go that fast, *funny things* are involved.

Thicko: What *funny things*?

Dimbo: Things you can't understand!

Thicko: Oh, and of course *you* can.

Dimbo: Actually no. No one fully understands them. They are theorized because we can't observe them directly.

Thicko: Ah... so more stuff with your weird clock no doubt!

Dimbo: Well... that sort of thing, but the clocks are sort of theoretical clocks – not ordinary ones.

Thicko: I see: it's *clocks* – plural – now. So, let me guess – theoretically they all keep perfect time, but some are there just to make sure that others don't try any funny tricks?

Dimbo: Well yes and no.

Thicko: Right. So, they keep perfect time, but they don't.

Dimbo: No that's not what I mean. Because of the *funny things* that happen, the clocks that are keeping perfect time can actually show different times to people in altered states.

Thicko: So... tell me. Can you buy these *funny things* over the counter? Are they legal?

Dimbo: Okay – it sounds really weird, but it makes sense.

Thicko: Would that be before or after you've done the *funny things*?

Dimbo: Be serious. They are just part of the theoretical plan.

Thicko: Maybe. But they make your ideas sound *really* weird. Why not just get rid of them?

Dimbo: Because they hold everything together.

Thicko: Only because everything you think is equally weird! But I suppose it could be like many *weirds* make a *sensible*. Maybe there's hope for humanity after all.

Dimbo: Look it's the best plan I have. What's yours?

Thicko: I told you. We just add the speed of the rocket to the speed of the light and stay away from those *funny things*. And none of your right and wrong clocks either! Maybe then we can forget the whole experiment. What's the problem?

Dimbo: Nothing except that everyone who studies this stuff disagrees with those ideas.

Thicko: Eh... just out of curiosity... how many of them use those *funny things*?

Dimbo: You're just making fun of me.

Thicko: No I'm not! I'm making fun of you and all the rest. It's an honest question. How many of you people use those *funny things*?

Dimbo: Okay... all of us. But the *funny things* are in fact concepts used methodically by people of sound mind.

Thicko: Says who?

Dimbo: Me!

Thicko: Well you're hardly an impartial commentator. You're on the *funny things*!

Dimbo: Look! This stuff is the product of millions of study-hours, exacting measurements, calculations, scientifically planned and verified experiments and lots more. Many have dedicated their entire lives to moving all this thinking forward. And all you can do is mock it because you can't think with anything better than the feelings in your gut! You can't even understand the first thing about it!

Thicko: But just suppose it was wrong.

Dimbo: No. *You* just suppose it was *right*!

Thicko: Okay. It's right. Now what?

Dimbo: Thank you! *Now*, in the interests of balanced debate, I'll suppose it to be wrong.

Thicko: So, you think it's wrong and I think it's right. Right?

Dimbo: No. That's *wrong!*

Thicko: Huh?

Dimbo: I said I'll *suppose* it's wrong, not *think* it's wrong.

Thicko: You mean someone can think one way, but suppose the other way?

Dimbo: I *suppose* you're right! In fact, I *know* you're right.

Thicko: But you might nonetheless *think* I'm wrong?

Dimbo: No. I mean yes. In this case, I *think* you're right because I *know* you're right. But, yes, you are right inasmuch as theoretically there could be a case in which I would *suppose* you were right but, because I *knew* you were wrong, I would *think* you were wrong.

Thicko: So, let me get this straight. It is possible to *think* something but *suppose* something else. However, this is partly dependent on what you *know*. If you *know* something, that seems to control what you *think* but doesn't affect anything you might be supposing.

Dimbo: Well that's sort of right, I suppose.

Thicko: Yeah – but what do you *think*?

Dimbo: I didn't really mean that I was just supposing you are right – I really meant to say I really think you are right.

Thicko: So, someone saying *I suppose so*, can actually mean *I think so*?

Dimbo: I suppose so.

Thicko: Or think so?

Dimbo: Sure.

Thicko: But you don't really know?

Dimbo: Know what?

Thicko: I don't know; I've forgotten where we were. But I do like this *know* thing. It beats everything. So, is there a lot that you *know*?

Dimbo: Absolutely? No. But relatively? Well I suppose so.

Thicko: Remind me again...

Dimbo: Things known absolutely are beyond all doubt. Some people think you have to be a god to have such knowledge. But things you know in a relative sense are like the time according to clocks. You know what time *your* clock says, but someone in a different time zone will see a different time on a different clock.

Thicko: Is that why your theory is called *relativity* – because you know certain things are relative to other things – like your time zone?

Dimbo: Absolutely!

Thicko: You mean *relatively*, I think.

Dimbo: I suppose so.

Thicko: But you don't really *know*...

Dimbo: You've got a point. This knowledge thing can be a bit overrated. Suppose...

Thicko: But I want to *know* things – not *suppose* them!

Dimbo: Yes, but maybe you need to suppose some things to know others. I mean, suppose I told you two times four equals seven. What would you say?

Thicko: I'd say you'd been at those *funny things* again.

Dimbo: Be serious!

Thicko: Well to be serious, it's no weirder than some of your other funny ideas.

Dimbo: But you'd be surprised?

Thicko: I would?

Dimbo: Yes, because everyone knows the right answer is eight.

Thicko: Everyone knows that if you keep accelerating you keep going faster!

Dimbo: Yes, but let's forget about that.

Thicko: Oh, how convenient! Why not forget about relativity? Now, about that beer...

Dimbo: What I meant about *two times four equals seven* is that you would have disbelieved my arithmetic – said I was wrong – looked at me funny.

Thicko: Who wouldn't?

Dimbo: But if I just say I *think* the answer is seven you'd look at me differently.

Thicko: I would? What are you on about? You know – it was *you* who told me to forget all that weird stuff, but now it sounds like you believe it after all. You need help.

Dimbo: Well maybe you can help me right now.

Thicko: Okay... you're deranged. There. Feel better?

Dimbo: No...

Thicko: I can only try.

Dimbo: No, I mean, understand the difference between how you react when I say I *know* something and how you react when I only say I *think* something.

Thicko: Give me an example.

Dimbo: I gave you one. I tell you some arithmetic is right that is wrong.

Thicko: Well if it's wrong and you know it is, neither you nor it is right.

Dimbo: But if I say I really *know* it's right.

Thicko: Then it's beyond all doubt.

Dimbo: It can't be beyond all doubt – we both *know* it's wrong!

Thicko: Then why keep saying it's right? You are so weird.

Dimbo: Listen! I tell you something that you don't believe but I say I *know* it's right. So you just think I'm wrong and say no more because you don't want a fight. Then I tell you another thing that you don't believe but this time I only say that I *think* it is right. You see the difference? Because I sound less convinced in the second case you think you can maybe convince me of what you believe and so it is easier to discuss these things.

Thicko: Can't say I had noticed.

Dimbo: So maybe thought is better than knowledge. Besides knowledge is always open to that philosophical doubt thing, whereas thought is not. Now I'll admit that some of the

things we have said have cast a little bit of doubt on some of the things that I thought I knew. So now I'll just say that I *think* relativity is a good theory.

Thicko: A *good* theory? Don't you mean *the right theory*?

Dimbo: No. Theories are never *right*. They only fit the observations to differing degrees of satisfaction. You could invent many other theories about the speed of light – but they would probably not fit the observations so well.

Thicko: But then you could just twist any old theory in any direction so that it was always in agreement with observations?

Dimbo: Yes and no. You can do what you like with a theory, but no one will accept it unless it ties in with what can be observed in the real world.

Thicko: Yes. That's pretty much what I said – just twist it till it agrees with observations. What's the *no*?

Dimbo: Well people like things to be simple. So, if your theory is too complex and includes all sorts of weird things, no one will want it.

Thicko: How I wish I had recorded what you just said there!

Dimbo: You've already forgotten that I said it had to fit the observations.

Thicko: What observations?

Dimbo: About the speed of light of course!

Thicko: But we can't observe the speed of light. Well – according to you, not unless we use your wonky clocks, learn to make mistakes in arithmetic and go on those mind-bending, space-curving, time-warping *funny things*! You'd trust observations that come out of *that*?

Dimbo: I *think* I would.

Thicko: Okay. Maybe I get your point – but only because I *think* I don't. Sounds funny put like that, doesn't it?

Dimbo: See! We can discuss it once we only *think* about what we think. *Knowing* things is a problem.

Thicko: Does that allow thinking about what we *don't* think? I'm thinking progress and regress here.

Dimbo: If you're angling that I should suppose you might be right although I don't actually think you are... well yes, I suppose that's part of what I'm saying. I even think it. But I don't *know* anything. That's *progress*!

Thicko: So, don't go back to supposing stuff! Let's keep *thinking*.

Dimbo: Quite interesting that – you know – or think. I'm thinking you're maybe right and not right at the same time. That proves that I don't know.

Thicko: Yes, I think we can learn a lot by not *knowing* things – ideally, by not knowing anything at all.

Dimbo: Okay. Now we know only thoughts are allowed.

Thicko: Correction: we *think* only thoughts are allowed.

Dimbo: Agreed!

Thicko: Well at least that's one thing we know. I mean *think*. Damn it! I didn't know this

would be so hard. I mean I didn't *think* it would be.. oh, you know what I mean! I mean you *think* what I mean.

Dimbo: Indeed. Keep it simple! *I think...* Now what? Add something!

Thicko: Therefore I am.

Dimbo: Therefore, you are what?

Thicko: Therefore, I am thinking.

Dimbo: What are you thinking?

Thicko: I think therefore I am thinking that I am thinking.

Dimbo: Keep going! Don't stop. Adlib a bit!

Thicko: Eh... Let's see. I think therefore I am thinking that I am thinking that I know – I mean, think the speed of light.

Dimbo: Right.

Thicko: Is that it?

Dimbo: Well we seemed to miss out a bit of something in the middle, so we haven't quite finalized the speed of light yet.

Thicko: Bummer!

Dimbo: Let's *think* of something else.

Thicko: Like the price of washing powder?

Dimbo: Don't waste energy!

Thicko: But the cold-wash stuff is useless.

Dimbo: Let's do the very simplest possible thought experiment.

Thicko: You mean like just don't think? Just *know* the speed of light? No – that wouldn't count – would it? So... Maybe just *think* the speed of light without thinking at all? No... just *don't think* the speed of light without thinking at all? Sounds full of problems.

Dimbo: Now, that's good physics.

Thicko: Problems are good physics?

Dimbo: *Keeping it simple* is good physics. And only thoughts allowed. Observations would be nice, but we can't do them with light so... Thoughts-plus-simplicity it is. Where do we start?

Thicko: With thinking?

Dimbo: I imagine so.

Thicko: But do you think so?

Dimbo: Yes. I don't imagine so.

Thicko: So, I'll assume you think so. Now, I am thinking of someone called Mr. Light walking along the road.

Dimbo: Sounds promising. What speed is he walking at?

Thicko: The speed of light of course. Let's just say he had a fall-out with Mrs. Light.

Dimbo: Wow! That was some fall-out! Can't he go a bit slower?

Thicko: You say the speed of light is constant!

Dimbo: But he's only walking. Be sensible!

Thicko: Okay – he's *running* at the speed of light.

Dimbo: No one can run at the speed of light!

Thicko: You've no imagination. Right – he's walking at normal walking speed.

Dimbo: Carry on thinking!

Thicko: Let's say we make a film of him to check we don't do any nonsense thinking.

Dimbo: As if!

Thicko: So, after one hour of walking we *absolutely*... sorry, I mean pretty damn well surely nearly – *know* how far he has walked... Sorry again, I mean *think* how far he has walked. You know what I mean!

Dimbo: No I don't. I *think* what you mean.

Thicko: Maybe you should learn ESP. Anyway, we can *think* Mr. Light's average walking speed!

Dimbo: I thought you would say that.

Thicko: You're learning. So, the next day we put him on your *funny things* and because he's walking like crazy, our film shows him completing the same distance in less time. Again, we work out his speed and of course, it is faster.

Dimbo: It's almost just like we are saying that when he goes faster... well he goes faster!

Thicko: Well, bingo! You wanted simplicity!

Dimbo: The problem is, you cheated. You made him speed up; light can't do that.

Thicko: You do not *know* that – remember you are only allowed to *think* that. And why do you think it anyway?

Dimbo: Because it solves problems.

Thicko: What problems?

Dimbo: Problems with the speed of light.

Thicko: Problems in your head, more like! We don't know – sorry, *think* – the speed of light, so how do we know – sorry again, *think* there are problems?

Dimbo: There are problems, believe me.

Thicko: I do! But unlike you, I think – no damn it – I actually *know* they are all in your head! Shouldn't the deciding factor here be the simplicity you said was so important? Take away your problems and all your weird ideas go away at the same time. Simple!

Dimbo: You do have a point I'll admit, but you see there are other rules in science.

Thicko: Like what? Oh, here we go! Let me guess... *It's got to be complicated at the same time as being simple* or some other such cuckoo clock idea? Yeah? Wow, that sounds *really* simple, or complex... or maybe like something that you can twist to make *your* theory fit anything at all you want. Sound familiar?

Dimbo: The laws of physics should be the same for all observers at all times. That ensures

simplicity. There!

Thicko: So?

Dimbo: That means all light must be observed to be traveling at the same speed by all observers regardless of the position and motion of the observers.

Thicko: Let me think about that.

Dimbo: It's actually quite simple – but do take your time.

Thicko: Okay it sounds good... But what follows from it sure is *not simple* if it's all those funny clocks, curved space and stuff like that.

Dimbo: Take all the time you want, but what do you think could be wrong here? Are you going to say that maybe different observers should observe different things?

Thicko: Okay. Listen. Let's say Mrs. Light comes out the house hurling abuse at Mr. Light and is moving after him. Wouldn't that make it look to her as if Mr Light was moving away from her more slowly than he would look to... say his cat who was just sat on the window sill watching him walk away?

Dimbo: Correct. But you've gone back to the slow-motion stuff again and forgotten that we're dealing with light.

Thicko: But I'm just trying to check your idea. What was it? All light must be observed to be traveling at the same speed by all observers regardless of the position and motion of the observers. I mean, maybe it is a slow speed experiment but how are Mrs. Light and the cat to observe Mr. Light if they are not observing the light that makes up his image?

Dimbo: Are you seriously suggesting that Mrs. Light and the cat see slightly different images of Mr. Light because one is moving and the other is at rest?

Thicko: I suppose so... *think* so, or whatever. It's a bad example because they wouldn't be in a straight line. I mean the cat would not be looking through Mrs. Light but, in principle, that is what I am suggesting.

Dimbo: That could never be tested! Even if it were correct it would be so infinitesimal in terms of difference that it wouldn't matter.

Thicko: But what about stars that are so far away from us? Wouldn't it matter in that case?

Dimbo: You're confusing me.

Thicko: Join the club.

Dimbo: The principle remains. The laws of physics should be the same for all observers at all times.

Thicko: Say that again.

Dimbo: The laws of physics should be the same for all observers at all times.

Thicko: But according to *my* theory... *they are!* It's *you* who wants to change them when things go faster.

Dimbo: Put that way, you do have a point. But the change is necessary.

Thicko: Why?

Dimbo: It's so that the theory fits the observations.

Thicko: *What observations?* Remember, we have none. I mean, no direct ones about the

speed of light. But Mrs. Light and her cat *can* observe Mr. Light's light! Something is not right in all this. Run that by me one more time.

Dimbo: If you must... The laws of physics should be the same for all observers at all times.

Thicko: The *laws* of physics...

Dimbo: ... should be the same for all observers at all times.

Thicko: You mean the *observations*.

Dimbo: No I don't! *Laws!*

Thicko: Well it's non-existent *observations* that you're trying to make the same.

Dimbo: Let me think about that for a moment...

Thicko: It's quite simple. But take all the time you want...

Dimbo: Okay. Let me see... Could I maybe... eh. Nope. Ah!

Thicko: Fuck off!

Dimbo: Pardon!

Thicko: You heard! Fuck off! No way!

Dimbo: No way, what?

Thicko: No *funny things!*

Dimbo: I never said anything about *funny things*.

Thicko: Doesn't matter. I knew what you were thinking. At least, I *thought* I did. You were going to use those *funny things* to get you out of a problem.

Dimbo: Oh I suppose that was your ESP then?

Thicko: You mean, you *think* it was my ESP.

Dimbo: No I fuckin' *suppose suppose suppose* – nah nah nah nah nah - it's your fuckin ESP! *Fuck you!*

Thicko: Are you angry?

Dimbo: Are you ready to die?

Thicko: No! Admit that you were thinking about using those *funny things* just before I told you to fuck off.

Dimbo: You're scaring me now. Stop it!

Thicko: Just admit you *were* thinking about them. Nothing to be scared about!

Dimbo: You really *do* believe in ESP, don't you?

Thicko: Yeah, but I know you don't.

Dimbo: How do you know that?

Thicko: How do we know anything?

Dimbo: Hah! You should have replied *ESP* there.

Thicko: Very funny! I asked you seriously how we know anything.

Dimbo: Well... I suppose we just see some patterns and a bit of order in our universe and sort of try to make some sense of it all. Sort of like a child watching a game of chess to learn the

rules.

Thicko: What a wonderful analogy!

Dimbo: Thanks.

Thicko: If the child pays attention and stays observant enough he'll eventually understand it.

Dimbo: Provided the players know the rules and are not cheating!

Thicko: For sure. *No cheating!*

Dimbo: Hey! Do you *really* have ESP?

Thicko: Who knows?

Dimbo: Surely *you* do?

Thicko: Sometimes I wonder... It's not so much that anyone has ESP – more like ESP has *them*. Tell me... Your game of chess – do you think it's easy to learn the strategy of different players as well as just the rules?

Dimbo: Strategy is harder. I suppose you learn that better by actually playing instead of just watching.

Thicko: By playing you're no longer just concerned about rules but start hatching plans to outsmart the other player! And I suppose that means you try to work out what he's thinking while he's busy trying to work out what you're thinking. A bit like mind-reading really!

Dimbo: That's how it works... Listen! About this speed of light thing...

Thicko: Yes?

Dimbo: You don't seriously imagine that so many people could have had that all wrong for so long, do you? I mean, someone would have come across something that just didn't fit and found the mistake by now.

Thicko: It's not about being right or wrong. It's just about whichever theory best fits what is known. You said it yourself. Anyway, what makes you think they would have discovered their mistake?

Dimbo: Well all the scientists with fancy telescopes peering out into space... They've found out so much. They *know* what happens millions of light years away... black holes, pulsars, all those galaxies... I don't know even a tiny fraction of all that knowledge.

Thicko: Then why believe it? Because someone told you it?

Dimbo: No. If it wasn't solid science, they would have come across something that didn't fit.

Thicko: Nonsense! They are too busy making sure it fits together, no matter what.

Dimbo: But something would have stood out as not making sense.

Thicko: You mean like *dark matter*?

Dimbo: What's dark matter again?

Thicko: No one seems to know.

Dimbo: No, I'm thinking of something that we *do know* but can't make sense of.

Thicko: Not dark matter then. No one knows anything about it. They just seem to know it *is there*.

Dimbo: How can *that* work? They must know *something* about it to know it's there in the first place!

Thicko: Apparently not. They're actually theorizing about why they can't find it.

Dimbo: *What?* They don't know *anything at all* about it but they're trying to understand why it can't be found? That's like being perplexed at not finding a needle in a haystack when there's no reason to think there is any damn needle in the haystack to start with!

Thicko: Except it's one *fuckin' monstrous* needle!

Dimbo: Why do you say that?

Thicko: Some people think it actually makes up most of the energy, mass or whatever of the universe.

Dimbo: Give over! It's *you* that's on the *funny things* now!

Thicko: Seriously! It's true!

Dimbo: No one knows anything about it... can't find it... and yet somehow, it's supposed to be most of what's out there?

Thicko: So they say! Don't shoot the messenger!

Dimbo: But why are they looking for it in the first place?

Thicko: Maybe they're just scared that if they didn't keep looking for it... well people might begin to think it wasn't there.

Dimbo: I think we better leave dark matter alone!

Thicko: But don't you need to find things first in order to leave them alone?

Dimbo: You mean we can't leave it alone until someone finds it?

Thicko: Well it sure looks that way.

Dimbo: And if no one finds it... ?

Thicko: I don't know. Anyway, that's the current state of *progress*. You *were* looking for something that didn't fit.

Dimbo: That's right. But something *sensible* that doesn't fit!

Thicko: I suppose that excludes things that can't be observed, even if lots of people are looking really hard to find them.

Dimbo: But why in the name of Jupiter are they looking for that stuff?

Thicko: I think they've theorized that it *must exist*.

Dimbo: Ah! That makes more sense. They've got some theoretical evidence for it.

Thicko: Some what?

Dimbo: They have worked out that it *has to be there*.

Thicko: Oh yeah. Like the aether! Anyway – I wish they could find it.

Dimbo: Why?

Thicko: Because they'd stop wasting time not finding it when it is maybe not there. And they could check out if it fits the theory.

Dimbo: Which theory?

Thicko: The theory that says it's there.

Dimbo: Well it would certainly fit that one!

Thicko: Maybe not. What if dark matter was there for another reason?

Dimbo: Well they'd need to get a new theory, I suppose.

Thicko: I suppose it's like when they thought the Sun and the Moon went around the Earth. Then they found stuff that didn't make sense and eventually had to come up with a better theory.

Dimbo: Good example!

Thicko: Yeah but the problem is that we still can't find some of the other stuff that doesn't make sense. That stops progress.

Dimbo: Right. Now I see why they're looking for it!

Thicko: Yeah, it makes sense to me too. We learn things by looking for stuff that doesn't make any sense! And, with a bit of luck, we find it.

Dimbo: Brilliant!

Thicko: And if we can use theory to help us find lots of stuff that doesn't make sense... we'll learn as fast as possible.

Dimbo: Keep going. This sounds so good! Eh... So what sort of theory is best for that?

Thicko: One that is total nonsense! It will find stuff that doesn't make sense all over the place.

Dimbo: Great reasoning!

Thicko: So, maximize the nonsense within the theory so as to maximize its ability to find stuff that doesn't make any sense at all. *Absolutely beautiful...* if I say so myself.

Dimbo: But then we'll need to adjust things to take account of all that stuff that doesn't make sense and it will all start to make sense again, and we won't be able to find so much stuff that doesn't make sense. Logically, it would end up making too much sense to be any use to us.

Thicko: *Oh fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!* What an absolute bummer! We nearly had it there!

Dimbo: That was such a letdown! You *do realize* that we were briefly right on the edge of one of history's greatest ever discoveries!

Thicko: But only theoretically. You know, I *hate* this fuckin' theory crap!

Dimbo: Now what? Bloody chess?

Thicko: Or the bloody speed of light? I'm depressed!

Dimbo: How *abso-fuckin-lutely wonderful!* Mind you, maybe regress is progress after all. Listen! Before I forget. What did you mean about ESP?

Thicko: What about ESP?

Dimbo: You said it wasn't really that anyone had ESP but more that ESP had *them*.

Thicko: Somehow, I knew you would ask that sooner or later.

Dimbo: Well?

Thicko: Well what?

Dimbo: What did you mean?

Thicko: Sorry. It's just left me.

Dimbo: Hey... Hold on... Right! I see what you're getting at *now*.

Thicko: You do? Sorry, you've lost me.

Dimbo: No I haven't.

Thicko: What do you mean?

Dimbo: Don't be clever. I mean... *I see what you mean!*

Thicko: Any chance of explaining it to me then?

Dimbo: Oh, come on! You're just playing games!

Thicko: I am?

Dimbo: Look, I'm not stupid.

Thicko: No comment.

Dimbo: And you won't catch me out with that one either!

Thicko: Any chance we could change the subject? I mean – so that I actually know what the hell we're talking about. I think it was ESP last time I checked.

Dimbo: You don't give up playing coy, do you?

Thicko: Fuck off. Are you on those *funny things* again?

Dimbo: Oh yes. Good strategy. Blame me!

Thicko: So you're back on the *funny things*! I'm outta here. My brain's melted listening to you.

Dimbo: Yeah... I suppose it would heat up.

Thicko: I really am tired. Look, no hard feelings. I just need a break.

Dimbo: Well okay. But you know, you're not really as thick as they say.

Thicko: Why thank you... *Dimbo!*

Dimbo: No, I mean there's obviously something in your ESP thing after all. Never thought I would hear myself say that...

Thicko: Oh, so we're back on ESP? Give it a go! I don't know much about it, but I get the idea you might be a real natural.

Dimbo: That's the point! I already *knew* you did! Yee-hah! *ESP – ESP – ESP is the thing for me!*

Thicko: You've become unstable. And you're going too fast. Remember, it has to come to you; you don't go to it.

Dimbo: Oh whatever. Listen! How fast do you think I'll learn?

Thicko: I'm not sure but in your case... if I'm any judge at all...

Dimbo: Yes?

Thicko: I'd say very fast – *if you play by the rules*. No cheating and *no funny things!*

Dimbo: Yeah, but how fast is *very fast*? No – wait! Hold it right there. I'm receiving you

again.

Thicko: You are? You're *way beyond me!*

Dimbo: You just thought *at the speed of light!*

Thicko: Don't be silly. No one thinks that fast.

Dimbo: No: you thought I might *learn* at the speed of light.

Thicko: You're still being silly. No one learns that fast. But as it so happens you are not totally wrong. I was thinking *about* the speed of light. Not *at* the speed of light.

Dimbo. Whatever. That'll do for me. A little bit slower is just fine. Wow!

Thicko: Slower than what?

Dimbo: The speed of light, *Thicko!*

Thicko: What's a little slower than the speed of light?

Dimbo: Pretty darned fast! That's what's *a little slower than the speed of light.*

Thicko: Well that's fuckin' obvious!

Dimbo: Well why the fuck did you ask then!

Thicko: I must have lost the thread somewhere.

Dimbo: Yes. Hardly going at the speed of light, were we?

Thicko: It's not my fault! You were going too fast.

Dimbo: It's all relative. I think you were going too slow.

Thicko: Your thoughts moved away from mine.

Dimbo: No. They separated relative to each other – but only when you couldn't keep up with *the speed of light* thing.

Thicko: No! You went beyond the speed of light.

Dimbo: Say that again!

Thicko: Why? Can't you keep up with me? Not going at the speed of light? Eh?

Dimbo: No. I went beyond the speed of light.

Thicko: I just told you that. That's the problem. You were going too fast.

Dimbo: No. You don't understand. I mean I actually went *beyond the speed of light*. You said it yourself.

Thicko: Don't be stupid. You are sat in a chair and don't even believe it's possible to go faster than the speed of light.

Dimbo: Yes, but you think it is. And I didn't believe in ESP, but now I do. I suppose I'm learning to open my mind.

Thicko: No. You *think* you're learning to open your mind, but unfortunately...

Dimbo: Funny. I was just thinking that too. Tell me more about this ESP stuff.

Thicko: –

Dimbo: –

Thicko: See how much nonsense we talk when we resort to words!

Dimbo: That's the smartest thing you've said all day.

Thicko: You do talk total crap!

Dimbo: You see, I don't mind that you say that. I am not insulted. In a sense, you are correct.

Thicko: You think there is a sense in which I am not?

Dimbo: I mean... Okay. I suppose we all have our different ideas, opinions, views, theories, beliefs, perspectives and all the rest of it. We live our unique lives. We pick up little bits of information here and there. We argue with one another as if we were so clever and knew more than the next man. And yet the whole universe, together with all our different ways of seeing it, thinking about it and trying to explain it – it's all just relative! So, don't you think we only disagree because we don't properly understand each other?

Thicko: No. And I suppose yes.

Dimbo: No? And yes? You mean *yes and no*?

Thicko: No!

Dimbo: And *yes*?

Thicko: Well *yes*; *no and yes*! But *no*; not *yes and no*... which – okay – all put together does make a sort of *yes and no*, but I did actually say *no and then yes*.

Dimbo: But they are both the same!

Thicko: You think *yes* and *no* are the same?

Dimbo: No!

Thicko: You might as well say *yes*!

Dimbo: No! I meant *no and yes* and *yes and no* are both the same!

Thicko: Ah! You should have said that.

Dimbo: I did!

Thicko: Well... technically you're wrong in any case. However, to be complete, you could have said *no and yes and yes and no*. But then that leaves out *yes and no and no and yes*. So, we should really say *no and yes and yes and no and yes and no and no and yes*.

Dimbo: Phew! Well at least that's one question answered. Wouldn't you agree?

Thicko: Yes and no. We've answered it for sure, but I've forgotten the question.

Dimbo: It was about the speed of light. So I reckon we established that it both is and is not possible to go faster than the speed of light – philosophical doubt notwithstanding of course.

4 – See What Thought Did

Whether or not the peculiarly human form of knowledge is somehow causally linked to identifiable problems in human affairs, it is certainly a well-established evolutionary development. And even if abstract knowledge is considered to have some negative impacts, it is not readily obvious how the mind might evolve to transcend these; we have no developed principles of *distilling that which is considered known*. In any case, with knowledge being culturally regarded as beneficial or of no harm at worst, there is little desire to question its value or consider it occasionally troublesome. Effectively, there is no cultural perspective that imagines factual knowledge could have tangible downsides, and no cultural impetus to even think about such a possibility. We simply assume our general form of knowledge to be as inherently useful as the air we breathe. Specific ideas may be judged *right* or *wrong*, but the wider process of constructing knowledge-based understanding through apparently proven ideas is generally seen as inherently beneficial and to be pursued without reservation.

Any examination of potential problems rooted in our abstract form of knowledge is therefore exploratory and wrestles against much that is taken for granted and generally considered beyond doubt. It may involve posing questions about positions otherwise presumed axiomatic. Stepping outside habitual modes of thinking may prove difficult, with unreasoned defenses of conventionality and reflexive responses based on accepted ideas blocking unfettered critical thinking. Tackling this largely ignored area that nonetheless concerns the very heart of human culture is tricky; an uncompromising interrogation of the everyday model of objectivity and knowledge only threatens to make certain people look stupid for never having done it.

The reluctance to probe these matters can be traced throughout the very area where they are supposed to be the main subject matter: *philosophy*. The history of philosophical ideas appears wide and riddled with competing ideas and arguments that initially look to be asking each and every question the mind could dream up. But in terms of postulated answers, do philosophers – or intellectuals of any ilk for that matter – balance their works with an acknowledgment of their own motives and how such motives might distort their ideas?

Whether those motives be simply to generate income from academic conformity, book sales and occasional speaking events, or whether they are also to promote some political cause or ground-breaking theory, all such *intellectuals* are flesh and blood subject to the same worldly conditions and concerns as the rest of us. In terms of pursuing whatever social goals they seek, tuning the content of their works to meet those goals is an ever-present potential source of bias. To imagine that anyone pursues *truth* in a manner completely indifferent to how their ideas are received by the wider world is illogical; statements made can have powerful consequences – both positive and negative. It is not only in times of social upheaval that mere ideas can be demonized, books burned, or intellectuals persecuted and murdered; even in times of social calm a book or even a single statement can make or break an entire career. But how many of our *great philosophers* have ever acknowledged this? And if few have, why would that be, and what overall cultural distortions have resulted?

From early childhood onward, we are all influenced if not indoctrinated by our education: a mountain of ideas fired at the mind long before anyone might consider *doing philosophy* or simply questioning the information and worldviews thereby disseminated. And of course, on the basis that no one does anything for no reason at all, the extent to which anyone pursues degrees and diplomas through conventional education can be regarded as roughly proportional to their reluctance to criticize whatever is taught. Hence, academia represents a subtle but authoritarian policing of knowledge that neither rewards intellectual rebels nor

welcomes their transgressions. Meanwhile, other minds pick up on the benefits offered by educational conformity and recognition and simply play the game without ever really questioning its rules. Original thinking is an obvious casualty.

Quite regardless of how anyone views any content within the many fields of knowledge educational institutions dispense, the awarding of stripes by these institutions is based on a conservative model of knowledge, as opposed to an open and self-critical one. Marks are not awarded for challenging the *teachers, schoolmasters* and *lecturers* who are all employed to *know better, at the same time as failure* is arguably just failure to comply with rules enforcing intellectual conformity. Consequently, the forces opposing any form of *thinking differently* are formidable. Therefore, it is no surprise if philosophers and many others appear either already too indoctrinated or too comfortably indifferent to acknowledge such forces even exist – never mind the insidious manner in which they pervade and color all areas of human thought.

Just as we are naturally inclined to put our best foot forward, the educated *professional philosopher* is no more likely to critically undermine thought itself than a doctor is to criticize the medical profession. And given that people in general, if they bother to think about these issues at all, see philosophy as just so much convoluted cognition of no fruitful outcome, any genuinely critical and incisive *thought about thought* involves entering mostly uncharted waters. But at least there are no established rules to follow: a freedom notably missing within conventional views of thought and knowledge.

Simplification as a necessary compromise

The defining characteristic of human thought appears to be its abstract nature – something which can be seen as an *imagined* symbolic representation of the world, no doubt related to graphic symbology and, less directly, the encoding of thought within written language.

All such formats are by nature highly simplified in their depiction of reality – not only because real-world complexity has no identifiable limits, but also because whatever underlying motivations bring about the mind's processing of reality, they are presumably primarily focused on achieving goals, and thereby indifferent to extraneous detail of no relevance.

This overall process of simplifying complexity is particularly obvious within the field of graphic representation. Modern pictographs are often deliberately simplified in the interests of getting a message across without extraneous and potentially distracting information. At the other extreme, even the highest quality digital photography is but a collection of *pixels*: flatly-colored squares that drop a degree of real-world detail whilst nonetheless retaining enough to meet the photographer's goals.

Both these instances involve simplified representations of the world such that a tremendous amount of detail is lost – modern *digitization* processes being no exception. Importantly, there is also a measure of *unreality* introduced – again, even with the most exacting photography. As anyone who has ever zoomed-in close enough on a digital photograph knows, the lattice of colored square *pixels* composing the image does not marry up well with anything seen in reality. Similarly, any magnified examination of pre-digital-era photographic prints eventually shows too much *grain* to represent anything meaningful – much as similar inspection of portrait painting can eventually reveal little other than brush strokes.

Any model of anything at all inevitably involves *compromises*: losses in detail plus *processing changes* which, taken together, should really be seen as *distortions*, in that the depiction of reality is not just simplified but somewhat altered. Therefore, whether

recognized or not, such a depiction constitutes a more or less flawed model of what it seeks to represent. Moreover, as reality remains unfathomably complex and inherently *other* than any model, all models can only be *refined* by adding detail – but never *completed*. And even this idea assumes that detail being added is an authentic representation of the relevant aspect or feature of reality it signifies. But as the detail itself will inevitably be somewhat flawed, supposed *refinement* also means more flaws, plus more overall convolution. Hence, no model of anything can progressively approach the reality it mimics – albeit it may become progressively practical and more convincing. Therefore, to the extent that a model is refined to appear more authentic, it arguably becomes correspondingly more illusory and deceptive by remaining other than that which it increasingly appears to be.

If this modeling issue proves relatively easy to discuss by examining graphic reproduction – as opposed to human cognition’s modeling of reality – it seems reasonable to assume the ability of cognition to accurately represent the world must be at least as prone to flaws, given cognition is generally more remote from direct sensory input. And this is underscored by considering that, whatever its faults, photography can quickly snap a scene complete with many details our mind would struggle to recall, even if it had studied the scene at length.

However, and quite curiously, we cannot easily envisage how to graphically illustrate *joy* or *horror*, or any of the rest of our many emotions. Artists can obviously create something suggesting *blissful-and-inviting*, or *ugly-and-menacing*, but whatever emotion they try to depict obviously has no known physical form of itself – a curious observation that highlights how thoroughly the mind can believe in *things* never seen in the physical world.

Thoughts can obviously draw on everything and anything experienced in any way – thereby mingling received ideas with immediate perceptions, emotions and memories. Furthermore, everything falling under the heading of *imagination* also has to be factored in to the mind’s machinations. Additionally, in terms of influencing thinking, it seems naïve to discount whatever the organism might be doing or experiencing below the radar of any conscious recognition at all. In short, the mind hardly appears independent. Even if it be equated with the brain, the brain is hardly an isolated organ.

Without getting mired in the convoluted and highly speculative ideas of cognitive psychology that try to piece together what in effect is the *gazillion-part-jigsaw* of subjective experience, how are the full workings of human thought to be addressed – if indeed this is at all possible? To further complicate matters, *rational* ideas in relation to thought sit alongside countless metaphysical ideas postulated in manners that even their most ardent disbelievers cannot logically discount or fully disprove. Consequently, any apparent *progress* in researching this area obviously ought to be treated with extreme circumspection, being inescapably susceptible to distortions and delusions. Try as we might in the face of whatever appears obviously nonsensical, none of us can wholly escape what conventional sociology labels our *conditioning*. Meanwhile, the notion of *theory* has a feel arguably way too simple and dogmatic to address the impenetrable question of exactly why we think as we do. The temptation to speculate wildly about all this is unlimited, but only because the possibility of reliably confirming or debunking anything at all proves negligible.

But whatever its hidden wellsprings may be, the human evolution of thought together with its use of abstract modeling has allowed our species to envisage and exploit the *potential* of circumstances such that, as a foundational technology, abstract thought enables other technologies to be built upon it. Hence, when looking at the surrounding world, we can see possibilities based on its current configuration and our amassed knowledge of how it can be reconfigured to meet our ends.

When for example we see a stone, we are able to think of it as a weight, a step, a weapon, a hammer, a grinding tool and so forth – in general, an object with the potential to help us achieve numerous different ends. But inasmuch as our different conceptual ideas of the stone do not directly alter the reality that is *just the stone*, the different uses we envisage for it constitute different ways of seeing the *same* world: different models or *tales* of what we otherwise like to consider as a singular reality. And as proven by the possibility to have this discussion without any particular stone being seen by either writer or reader, we are cognitively able to model and remodel the world in complete abstraction. This is a key attribute of human technology: the mind's ability to generally *play* speculatively with our models of reality in ways that somehow use past experience to plan courses of actions that, once implemented, generally produce intended results.

Compared to the uses of a simple stone, those results may be hugely more sophisticated when seen in for example, the stunning innovations of computer modeling and *virtual reality*, but the same principles of us using abstract ideas and models to think through *what is* and *what might be possible*, are at the core of even these technologies. In fact, the extensive reach of technology within our modern age can be seen as simply the long-term outcome of ongoing remodeling of the world for either direct results, or to make further remodeling faster and easier. In general, the changes and increasing sophistication of our abstract models roughly parallel similar changes and refinements in our external environment.

Of course, the key role of abstract modeling is somewhat buried beneath the many technologies it has now spawned, and which have continuously developed within a snowball-effect spanning thousands of years. Hence it is too easy to overlook that basic technologies such as graphic representation, writing, simple tool and weapon-making, and even agriculture, were all things that likely evolved from scratch. Such things presumably only became shared *knowledge* through grappling with early forms of the same interpersonal communication techniques we use today – most notably language. And it is sobering to consider that without the developed social techniques by which we now encode and impart our abstract knowledge to our offspring, civilization would likely resort to some drastically primitive form in just a generation or two.

Although the human brain seems to have evolved specific attributes for managing abstract thought alongside its unique forms of cognition, the actual substance or *content* of cultural ideas is not generally considered latent within the newborn and therefore needs revealing afresh to each generation. Notably, if this were not the case, social conditioning would not be possible – an observation that asks a related question about whether or not anyone can ever be considered a truly *original thinker*. Although we are arguably still very animal-like in many respects, this is heavily disguised by the visible *civilizing* results of acting upon our technologically communicated knowledge and structuring our societies around whatever was achieved by those who went before us. True originality of thought can therefore appear an impossibility.

This overall version of human development reaffirms the importance of motive-based behavior, as opposed to some purely intellectual development of our species. It appears the technology of thought developed, not primarily to *explain* the world as conventional philosophers and other academics might imagine, but because it helped survival as a minimum, and allowed us to thrive as an advantage. Significantly, the considerable benefits of technology have always stood out in times of war where one technology was often developed to outsmart competing technologies of perceived enemies. In this respect, the everyday simplistic position that technology is intrinsically beneficial – *without any qualification* – somewhat whitewashes our bloody history in which the reality was more

about an absence of suitably developed technology proving fatal.

In many respects, and for many minds, the results of technology are nonetheless seen as an unqualified *success* – *even if* from at least one perspective this is illogical. When the core technology that is the mind's modeling of the world is demonstrably flawed, such *success* should logically be tainted by some degree of *failure* or problems – and this of course is exactly what history reveals within various forms of what could be considered *human madness*.

Far from technology working exclusively to humanity's benefit, it can be argued that we are unwittingly allowing it to frighten us – at least in the sense that its formidable powers are threatening and overpowering the mind's ability to impartially assess technology's true nature with a view to taming its worst excesses. This is arguably the real existential dilemma of our current evolutionary state. One fear of technology has always been that it will be used against us – and of course, history relates how that potential has often been unleashed. Hence, a secondary concern emerges – the fear of *not* developing technology, as arguably demonstrated within the *balance of terror* approach to avoiding a nuclear holocaust.

However, addressing the real dangers of technology within the modern age is not directly about technologies themselves. It is in fact questionable if much can be achieved by for example, reining in nuclear power, attacking internet surveillance, or refusing to tax-fund hi-tech wars – even if individuals might very understandably make efforts in those directions. Philosophically, these and other current forms of technology *gone crazy* should not detract from just how long-standing and elementary this whole issue really is. The technology at the very heart of matters – abstract thought – remains the most valid focal point on the basis that many uniquely human problems are founded on this root technology.

An inherent trait of abstract thought is its inescapably divisive way of seeing the world. Whereas we habitually think of the world as full of *things*, the reality is that such things, *as seen by the mind*, are only place-marker inventions that allow the processes of abstract thought to proceed. *As things*, they are only *abstract things*. But given without them there simply cannot be any thoughts related to such *things*, every last idea or thought must employ them. Moreover, if the mind wants to sell apples according to size, it will likely divide the *world of apples* into big, medium and small apples – illustrating how the preferred divisions of the mind are unsurprisingly based on its intentions.

Abstract division is everywhere. For example, the political mind might divide voters into left, right, center, undecided, and so forth. Alternatively, the same population may be divided into various classes, such as working, middle, upper and ruling. Yet other labels exist such as the *political class*, the *leisure class*, the *intellectual class*, and even the *chattering class*; where specific individuals might fit into such classes is less than obvious. Similarly divisive ideas include *white-collar* and *blue-collar* workers, or *management, employees* and *the unemployed* – the possible groups available to the mind being effectively unlimited. But is such rather haphazard choosing of labels to pigeon-hole huge swathes of the population really justified or beneficial to properly understanding anything, considering each person on the planet is actually unique in countless ways? What motivates the mind to engage in the dubious use of such blanket terms?

Note that these examples do not concern some esoteric philosophical technicality; they actually form the basis of much real-world political thinking, debate and campaigning. Many popular ideas and debates reflexively divide populations into such groups in manners rarely questioned as regards supposed justifications or possible weaknesses. And this remains the case even if it is only logical that a corollary of such divisive thinking is the

deeply divided societies that humankind has largely come to regard as both endemic and inevitable.

Regardless of the wisdom or foolishness of all this divisive thinking, such reflexive classification of populations is now so integral a part of mainstream culture that challenging it typically meets with a similarly reflexive opposition. The approach has long been standard practice within academia, having been birthed by minds that sought to theorize about societies without ever thinking to factor in their own conditioned thoughts and personal motivations when creating those theories – never mind the corrosive social consequences of promoting such inherently divisive thinking.

In terms of furthering academic careers, simple and dogmatic theories – other things being equal – have always trumped the intellectual humility of circumspection. Hence, the class-based approach to supposedly understanding society has become utterly accepted and integral to expected intellectual thinking within many academic circles. Even some so-called *laymen* can be seen eagerly embracing such an approach within efforts to partake in supposedly *informed* debate.

All such accepted *scholarly* ideas obviously bestow social and academic prestige on both their originators and their adherents. And they presumably become accepted because they in some way develop human thought in a manner judged *useful*. This of course is the history of *class* succeeding as a political and sociological concept; it proved useful in various ways to different people – from creating academically prestigious theories about how society supposedly works, to writing political manifestos targeting social change. Hence, anyone who embraced the concept tended to be lauded by certain academics and political fighters.

But however much the adoption of such theories may have benefited certain individuals and academic institutions, and even provided an intellectual backdrop for the understandable political struggles of many, the dubious consequence of all such theory is that we live increasingly within an abstract vision of reality that diminishes our common humanity and replaces it with divisive conceptualizations. In this instance, supposed *intelligence* frames us as class members, and thereby as different from those of other classes – as opposed to being their fellow human beings. But how convenient such thinking proves to those who at some deep and possibly subliminal level seek to have themselves intellectually confirmed as *superior*, and therefore meriting of their privilege – all whilst academia quietly reaps the benefits of its general subservience to those of power who also enjoy privilege.

Despite the truly catastrophic real-world results of trying to construct societies that addressed certain excesses portrayed within class-based theories – particularly under the moniker of *communism* – *class* as a concept remains omnipresent and of unquestioned importance within many intellectual circles. Even so-called *right-wing* arguments often access the concept. But notably, there are effectively no challenging theories postulating that such widespread reliance on the concept of *class* might twist our understanding of social reality and seriously distort our cultural views of the human condition.

Given manifest atrocious results from social engineering based on accepted theories rooted in *class* thinking, logic dictates such theories to be at least somewhat flawed – if not open to nefarious manipulation. If this was about rocket science for devices that exploded on the launch pad and caused mass casualties, would we still be taking such science seriously? But little or nothing has been done to ask any real questions about the whole paradigm of thought from which concepts such as *class* emerge. Such complacency is of course quite general and reflects an academic reluctance towards self-criticism concerning any possible wrong-thinking. Hence, it most certainly is not any proven relevance or generally beneficial value

of the class concept that has imbued it with lasting popularity; it appears as just one more artifact of an intellectual conservatism so typical of academia.

This example of how and why the mind labels up the world touches on why key weaknesses within abstract thought are extensively ignored, along with their consequences – the overall situation being a feedback loop in which ideas gain academic and cultural inertia in manners having little to do with any demonstrable understanding of reality. As shown, such weaknesses are actually quite easy to spot in light of the unfathomable complexity of reality – a truth which simplistic thinking boldly and foolishly ignores. Meanwhile, the clamor for academic recognition and related benefits has people all over the world trying to concoct the next supposedly great theory-based breakthroughs in various fields; it would appear that academic acclaim and insightful thinking often exist in mutual exclusion.

As regards building an understanding of human behavior, we are not dealing with elementary aspects of the material world such as a chemical element or a well-defined phenomenon in physics; the subject matter is so utterly complex and open-ended that any simplistic theory should be seen as inherently suspect before it is even formulated. Moreover, given the preferred design of scientific theories is to remain parsimonious, it becomes questionable if the use of conventional theoretical thinking is at all appropriate when dealing with human behavior. Can the simple ever comprehend the complex other than as something that it in fact cannot comprehend?

But there is no academic prestige in highlighting the pitfalls of reducing real-world convolution to theoretical simplicity. In fact, the opposite is true: uncomplicated one-size-fits-all thinking is often preferred – albeit often obfuscated behind concepts and jargon to make it appear disarmingly complicated to any neophyte who might otherwise spot its weaknesses.

Academia is itself a political pursuit: the promotion of formalized and somewhat exclusive knowledge in the interests of achieving social goals. Hence, it seeks to create and promote anything it can successfully pass off as *knowledge*, regardless of any inherent flaws or consequences that slip through unnoticed. The unfortunate psychological fallout within our modern culture can be that minds seek to justify their ideas by simply referencing accepted academic ideas rather than by actually thinking for themselves. For example, amidst endless debate over what a *social class* supposedly *really is* and how it might be defined, almost no one demonstrates the intellectual savvy or academic courage to point out that *social class* is merely a potentially misleading concept invented by the human mind. In effect, *social class* is whatever one thinks it to be. But when political theory based on this type of mass pigeonholing of individuals has been the backdrop to multiple genocides and other human atrocities, this issue is not one of merely posing challenging philosophical questions over the derivation and structure of knowledge. Nonetheless, endless well-accepted but ludicrously simplistic ideas remain too central to what many see as their *wealth of knowledge* for them to ask the relevant questions.

To better understand the silliness of a concept such as *social class*, the individual need only reflect on how few if any daily decisions they base on the fact that they supposedly belong to such-and-such a social class. Wild and sweeping generalizations about *social class* or other such cartoon-like ideas may have some limited validity in thinking through human affairs, but that is only true to the extent that we do not lose sight of the fact that they are indeed wild and sweeping generalizations. But perhaps the mind's inability to get beyond such generalizations helps explain why such concepts are so prevalent and taken so seriously within modern culture. Meanwhile, any ideas of cognitively addressing this world's true complexity for what it really appears to be, is in effect to imagine that the part can somehow

comprehend the whole.

Unlike the motives behind early human ideas and technologies that appear easy to grasp, the motives behind their modern equivalents can be complex and obscured behind multiple layers of abstract thought. Whereas weapons, tools and fire helped meet very immediate physical goals, what would our ancestors have made of the stock-exchange trader sweating over images flashed-up on electronic displays, or the car assembly-line worker repetitively doing the same task over and over amidst the robots of a mechanical jungle? The shared motive of both – making money – can only be approximated within complex models of the world that include all the social conventions concerning how money is earned, distributed and used to purchase goods and services. Many other areas of our modern societies demand similarly complex understandings and internalizations of the world in order that our complex behaviors can meet the complex demands of living in today's equally complex environments. Not only is reality inherently complex, but civilization has progressively become complicated to navigate. So, although simplicity may be desirable in terms of certain efficiencies, it is inherently at odds with any fuller understandings of our true condition. Hence, while the habitual use of *too-simplistic* concepts within intellectual pursuits is perhaps inevitable, it also represents a permanent distortion in terms of understanding how truly unfathomable reality ultimately remains.

Perhaps very little or even nothing at all should be imagined as easy-to-understand from any theoretical perspectives – especially as we ourselves are rather enigmatic variables that pervade all thought processes. As individuals, we build and maintain ultimately unique and personal models of reality to help us manage our specific roles and to generally *fit in*.

Perhaps some underlying innate desire to simply live and be socially accepted and protected within our group – come what may – is the most real and emotive element unifying all our otherwise diverse behaviors and ideas. From an evolutionary perspective, this at least is one simple idea that seems substantiated on the basis that without successfully fighting for survival, nothing within the living world can continue.

Delusion and its dangers

Without the abstract thought process to label up the surrounding world, none of our modern conceptions of that world would be possible. And of course, with each new generation and wave of technology more *things* are created and labeled for the mind to track. However, no *additional reality* is created when such apparently *new things* come into being; often they are only creations of the mind. There may of course be some corresponding physical change in the material world, but such apparently *new reality* is just a different way of regarding already-existing reality. Hence, people can be intellectually regarded as members of previously-non-existent *social classes*, pretty much as building materials become houses on a physical level. At least, such is one analogy that suggests how *things* are formed in the mind and related to one another. The implication is that *things* we label up as if existing *in reality* are just whatever concepts aid the goal-driven human mind.

Not entirely dissimilar to the manner in which a simple stone can be seen as different things according to whatever goals we have in mind, a more complex item which cannot be comprehensively understood for what we imagine *it really is* – for example, a computer – is nonetheless easily understood in terms of the many purposes it can serve. Would anything be of any interest at all without a utilitarian value? Notably however, as regards concepts less directly connected to anything physical, our imagination is obviously less tied to tangible reality and more prone to inventive concepts having nothing much to do with anything observed by the senses. *Social class*, as an example, appears a useful concept to the extent human behavior sometimes involves many people living similar lives and expressing similar

ideas, but the huge danger in this example lies in imagining that because humans are grouped by the mind, such groups and ideas about them actually define group members.

Identifying common qualities and aspects apparently shared by different identified entities is a key function of cognition, but we should not allow it to diminish whatever distinctions allow us to see those entities as separate instances in the first place. Nor should we conflate such entities as if focusing on some commonality or umbrella concept was anything more than a shift of conceptual attention – a mental act entailing inevitable oversights regarding unknown amounts of distinguishing detail.

Philosophically, the potential for error here is bigger than it might at first look. Given academic theorizing is a potentially beneficial career activity, the motive for creating any theory and its concepts easily evolves into an agenda-based development and promotion of whatever is thereby proposed. Impartiality can be a casualty. A temptation exists for supporting evidence to be hunted down and then reflexively examined and filtered through the lens of the theory – all whilst discounting any contradictory evidence. This is sometimes referred to as *confirmation bias*, but it is more easily understood as just interpreting matters to support preferred ideas.

In a hierarchical academic world where the few are considered as specialists and the majority as their students, the conditions and incentives for promoting highly speculative, ill-founded, and somewhat obfuscated *tales of reality* are obvious and many. And it is notable that woolly ideas and concepts of no direct connection to the physical world are in fact more suited to this end than basic ideas related to tangible phenomena – obvious nonsense being easier to debunk than nonsense that is obscure.

Given the academic mind profits from perceptions that it embodies forms of esoteric knowledge, certain nebulous concepts within accepted theories can persist to meet that end. The prime motive of theorists has never been to consider the challenging notion that complexity within their subject area may be such that it renders the inevitable distortions of parsimonious theorizing counterproductive or even dangerously misleading; such a position would effectively debunk whole swathes of academic ideas. But such a *dangers-of-theory* criticism is nonetheless perfectly logical and, as regards the example of modeling human societies as *classes*, has ugly historical evidence to back it up.

Academia however, has never seriously examined this criticism – not just as regards the concept of *class* and related theory, but as regards the much wider idea that any theory at all tends to provide a misleadingly simplistic view of reality to the point of leaving the mind perilously deluded – and all with undesirable results likely from any actions that might be based on such delusions. Notably, if academia has ever refuted such a criticism, the refutation is so invisible as to suggest it was motivated more by a desire to simply silence the question than to address it. Has human culture ever thought seriously about how this issue impacts knowledge in general or is the conventional model of learning just too valuable a currency for anyone to take a good hard look at its inherent flaws?

When the doctrines of various churches have been ridiculed within certain academic circles for promoting ideas that they stubbornly refused to question, it is only to be expected that the *church of academia* will in turn seek to retain its hold on power by a similar unwillingness to examine its own positions. Both are populated by people with obvious motives for blocking anything that might challenge their social image or standing.

Culture appears to have locked itself into an *unthinkingly* positive view of thought, to the point that any philosophical challenges are reduced to minor embarrassments of only abstract importance – if indeed they are considered at all. As a consequence, any notion that *thinking*

could be problematic and may actually have *real and bad results* – were such a notion ever to be entertained – would likely be reflexively brushed aside by some comment such as *Yes, but we have to try*. The effective attitude is one in which even confused thoughts and misguided theoretical positions are considered better than none at all. But is there any sound justification for such a position?

In general, so much faith is placed in our uniquely human way of modeling, manipulating and supposedly understanding the world, that we naturally exhibit strong emotional objections to anything challenging that faith. This is no surprise. It is a faith that probably has its roots right in the very birth of language and abstract thought itself. And assuming that the development of these things shaped our evolution because they offered advantages, it is only logical that all human cultures would develop a deep attachment to them – a faith far deeper than in any consciously realized belief-based faiths in gods, nations, or the scientific view of reality. Such *ideological* faiths – founded on certain assumptions as they are – can all be seen as secondary add-ons to our core conviction that thought and abstraction themselves are inherently valid endeavors. The basic faith that through thought we can more or less know the world around us to our advantage may be so deeply embedded that it is better viewed as an instinct than as a consciously accepted belief.

Embracing the ideas of any conventional religion or of *scientific objectivity* may be important in terms of helping us act out different roles within specific areas of modern societies, but they all remain founded on the fundamental basics of human cognition. And the hard-to-define essentials of such cognition and abstract thought are arguably of an evolutionary importance on a par with standing upright and learning to walk; although not strictly necessary for survival, they are key essentials of an individual's successful social integration.

Abstract thought within modern human societies is far more important than even money, inasmuch as money is a mere product of abstract thought; no one would show the slightest interest in it if not for the internalized model of the world by which the mind knows of money's societal significance. In contrast, it can be noted that animals neither have money nor any interest in it. Hence, the human mind's attachment to money constitutes a situation wherein familiarity with culture's main *tales of reality* can be seen as pragmatically more important to the individual than anything physical such as money itself could ever be. No amount of money would be any use to minds that could not understand its social function nor the social rituals surrounding that function – an observation illustrating that, even if we never consider the matter, our ability to process abstract thought is effectively the real passport to modern societies and their cultures.

For better or worse, we have built a world in which any human on a par with our fellow intelligent *animal* species – that is, someone with a perfectly functional organism but devoid of our developed skills of abstraction, thought and symbolic communication – would be generally considered as *seriously retarded*. And such a person would indeed be *retarded* in terms of the seemingly unshakable and profoundly subliminal global conviction that abstract thought and its exponentially mushrooming effects are the unquestionable stuff of *human progress*.

However, much as such a vision of *progress* may be one way of describing human development to date, it does not necessarily define our future, nor what might truly constitute *meaningfully beneficial* progress. Any basic reflection on our current situation suggests we have come a long way down one particular road – but a road that was never part of any planned route. Perhaps a change of direction that includes *thinking about thought* is the only way forward that will outwit the apparent trap evolution has set in our path. Absent some better approach, our form of intelligence includes frighteningly self-destructive powers

operating in manners that are in truth largely out of control.

Like every other species, we seem to be following something between a *chance* and an *evolutionarily-determined* developmental path. However, in our particular case the continuing absence of any other regulatory mechanisms is singularly worrying in light of the terrifying powers evolution has conferred upon us.

Illusions born of ideas

Regardless of any apparent need to completely rethink reality, our established ideas of that reality, based as they are on a philosophically reckless approach of *thinking thoughtlessly*, actually come unstuck with remarkable ease. Thoughts about thought readily illustrate a highly reflexive aspect of *normal thinking* that is in fact far less rational than mainstream culture would have us believe.

In cognitively selecting and naming the *things* that apparently populate our reality – the believed *objects* of objectivity – the human mind has no set strategy or discipline. Everything, or *every thing*, believed to physically exist can be described via any number of concepts – all the way from being a collection of sub-atomic particles to being a part of the cosmos. So is a brick a collection of particles, or atoms, or gravel – or is it a part of a house, a town, the Earth, or the universe? There is no standard measure or self-evident units from which reality is composed; we simply work with whatever conceptualized *bits of reality* suit the ends of specific thoughts and communications. From the rather elusive *fields* within modern theoretical physics to the entire universe – by way of every other concept we can imagine – reality is effectively made of what we want it to be: whatever framing meets our immediate goals.

Our ideas of reality seem framed by the motivations of the mind as much as by *reality itself* – whatever *real reality* might be. The words *universe* and *particle* are themselves etymologically based on what are in effect mental acts of *unifying* and *partitioning* – indicating how nouns do not necessarily correspond with any supposed *things out there* but result from the mental acts of what might be seen as *pure abstraction*. As with any tool, thought can help achieve worldly goals, but it comes with limitations and dangers in the same way that the sharpest knife is worse than useless as a glue.

There are no agreed or established units of reality precisely because reality does not *of itself* appear defined – definition being yet another act of the mind. No matter how we deploy any label or concept for some supposed *thing*, there is no evidence beyond the mind for the implied division of reality that would create such a *thing* as distinct from other supposed things. The mind simply cannot frame evidence of anything existing entirely beyond itself, given that the relevant cognition is inevitably one of its functions. Of course, the mind can certainly entertain the idea of some mind-independent reality, but such an idea remains utterly rooted within the mind.

No *direct* perception of reality can exist independent of the mind – at least, certainly not as something we can frame via any thoughts or ideas. Although rarely stated in such a straightforward manner, this is in effect the dilemma of human thought and cognition – a position which rather curiously makes the whole concept of *objective reality* look more like a convenience than a demonstrable truth. It is in fact difficult to take the concept of *objective reality* seriously once it is realized that everything supposedly known about it is ultimately known in subjective manners.

The vision of reality emerging from these ideas can appear as *all-is-mind* but is perhaps better framed by simply stating that all ideas, models, or abstract *tales of reality* exist primarily within the mind – as opposed to anywhere else. Of course, other non-mind reality may well

exist just as we commonly assume – even if only visualized as such for convenience. However, philosophically, that must all remain speculation. The immediate goal in any case is only to recognize that there is actually no evidence suggesting our abstract models of reality accurately reflect anything other than the preferred operations of the human mind. The issue is not so much about whether or not *all is mind*, but more that whatever might be considered *not-mind* but nonetheless imaginable by abstract thought, is constrained by whatever limitations abstract thought imposes. It is also distorted by whatever colorations abstract thought may introduce.

The philosophical ramifications of seeing all concepts as nothing more than abstractions based on human convenience and expediency – as opposed to representing any hard and fast *things, objects* or phenomena – cannot be over-stressed. The world is simply not as we think it to be. Or to word this less emphatically, there is no demonstrable world corresponding to our ideas of it. Logically, we must accept the position that *all is mind*, or choose the more modest position that whatever other reality may exist, it is more or less mysterious and beyond the direct reach of our thoughts.

Seeing these ideas as other than madness benefits from a realization that they do not in the slightest detract from our abilities to use thoughts and ideas as we habitually do in daily life – a truth which actually highlights how utterly superficial abstract thoughts can be. Even the seemingly craziest ideas have little effect on the universe – just as do supposedly brilliant insights. Whatever ideas go through the mind, the everyday popular ones prove every bit as useful as ever, even when sat alongside notions that all ideas of reality are somewhat delusional. Utterly rethinking our most fundamental *ideas about ideas* certainly does not cause reality to implode, or the universe to disappear before our eyes. Asking for a cup of tea will likely still produce something roughly in line with the desired result, even if the mind knows no one can ultimately define or determine some supposed essence of either the *cup* or the *tea*. However philosophically flawed language and abstract thought are revealed to be, they are no less convenient if not essential to life as we know it.

The idea that thought does not properly reflect reality poses no issue from the perspective that it is a part of animal-like goal-motivated behavior; it only becomes a problem if insisting that any human ideas can represent *true tales of reality*. While the mind obviously operates largely in search of the organism's desires – to seek out *a cup of tea* in the example above – the idea that any such request properly or fully defines any specific actions or *things* is obviously nonsense. Given that, as we normally think of reality, the request could be met by an endless number of different cups and different teas served in endless manners, the mind can be seen to operate with mere approximations of reality, as opposed to the sort of exactitudes so commonly associated with *being objective*. Hence, language, thoughts and ideas in general are seen again as instruments of social behavior – expedient activities of the organism, rather than reliable tools for accurately grasping some supposed true nature of reality.

Of course, if abstract modeling of reality is flawed, so logically are any and all other thought paradigms based upon it – a situation in which all conventional ideas, being just so many credible *tales of reality*, fall like so many dominoes on a shaky table.

Examining the common concept of *system* illustrates just how easily popular ideas can embody illusions. Because the human mind deploys technologies based on what it considers *systems* consisting of defined entities designed to operate in more or less known fashions, it can too-easily assume that nature also works this way. But there is no direct evidence of this, while there are reasons to believe that any supposed *systems* we see in nature are of a wholly different order, and likely beyond our comprehension. We may use our concept of

system within efforts to detail whatever we observe in nature, but we should recognize that our interpretation of nature is inevitably born amidst whatever mental assumptions and prejudices we bring to our investigations.

Whereas our technologically constructed *systems* employ abstract thought, planning and subsequent activities within highly contrived processes not directly seen elsewhere in nature, the creative *system* of nature seems to operate a form of *unthinking chaos* in which countless projects in the form of living or potentially living entities are thrown at reality in a sort of blunderbuss approach to promoting life in any and every viable form. These two supposed *systems* could hardly be more fundamentally different. Even species closely related to humans do not seem to plan much beyond satisfying their immediate needs; they apparently lack the cognitive machinery for involved systematic thinking and technological planning. Activities such as nest-building or the weaving of a spider's web are obviously tremendous skills, but they seem more like instinctive extensions of the organism's mode of living than the fruits of conscious invention. Even as regards our long-established technology of farming, no other species plants saplings in the knowledge decades will pass before the planned benefit of mature wood can be harvested. More generally, no other species has invented technologies and machinery to bend vast tracts of land to their own goals.

But whereas we ploddingly build separate instances of technological objects in laborious production processes requiring careful management at every stage, nature appears highly indifferent to the success or failure of specific instances, within a situation where endless possibilities are relentlessly tried out: the *survival of the fittest* scenario, as it is sometimes crudely put. The seed of most lifeforms is created in huge abundance and scattered wide in a seemingly reckless manner compared to how humans manage industrial raw materials. Moreover, if there is any generic *system* within natural creation, and if the mind can understand it at all, it appears highly independent and autonomous. No external conscious management appears necessary, other than perhaps the fairly instinctive desire to copulate, or for parents to feed and tend their young – and even those actions can be argued to be instinctive.

Not only is natural creation self-perpetuating, but it so often grows rather magically from minute origins in seed form – whereas human technological creation almost invariably requires that all raw materials are painstakingly assembled and utilized within a deliberate industrial process. Hence it is noticeable that any forms of life considered to be *human-made* effectively copy or merely mimic that which is already seen in nature. The *man-made* robot that can genuinely reproduce itself without human intervention remains a myth, whereas countless species of the natural world have all successfully operated self-replication as their very means of existence – often over millions of years.

Nature recreates herself, whereas human technology is destined to eventual failure in which no automated fixes repair or perpetuate the *system*. Furthermore, whereas the scrapping of defunct technology involves industrial recycling or the disposal of waste materials in ways associated with life-threatening environmental damage, the equivalent *waste materials* in nature are generally highly recyclable for recreating and nourishing life – all without any external intervention.

Arguably straddling this divide is the world of so-called *biotech* – the deliberate manipulation of nature and lifeforms for our supposed benefit. Specifically, as regards the ability of human thought to understand the natural world, it is noticeable that almost all of the activity in biotech can be seen as merely tinkering with *existing* lifeforms – as opposed to genuinely creating new ones. In principle, this no more indicates a proper understanding of natural lifeforms than does the ability to cross a donkey and a horse to produce a mule. Achieving

intended and arguably-beneficial results by playing with existing lifeforms is no indication that such lifeforms are meaningfully understood; not even to the basic level of understanding humans have of the physical world.

All this sloppy thinking and casual use of *system* as a common concept underlying both nature and human technology overlooks fundamental differences in the mind's abilities as regards grasping these two very different areas. In one, the concept describes intellectual attempts to grapple with isolated details amidst the vast and complex mystery of life itself, whereas in the other, the concept describes invented abstract plans underlying the creation of temporary contraptions and processes. Notably, whereas a detailed *system* in relation to human technology is a more or less comprehensive description of the mind's understanding of its own creations, any identified *system* within nature is at best a limited understanding of essentially mysterious and self-replicating structures. Hence, the widespread use of the *system* concept across both these paradigms obfuscates the limits of human understanding – a blindness that is possibly motivated by a culturally subliminal desire to do exactly that, and thereby present a bloated view of what is actually our very limited understanding of nature and its lifeforms.

In part, such intellectual sloppiness may also result from the increasingly mechanical and unthinking approach to scientific research. The unquestioned modern cultural reverence for the whole scientific endeavor has reduced much modern so-called *knowledge* to nothing more than a collation of robotically-derived facts and theories, whilst respect for the more fundamental philosophical issues regarding the reliability of any form of knowledge is reflexively glossed over. It is nonetheless interesting that in contrast to the fumbling attempts of the conscious mind to understand *how life really works*, humans can actually create entirely new life via sexual intercourse and orgasm: a physical experience hardly characterized by abstract cogitation over what supposed *systems* may possibly be at work. When the continuity of so many species on the planet has in effect been assured by this same process, it is a highly dubious idea that human abstract thought ought to be afforded any special pride-of-place in the grand scheme of things.

Even the basics are fragile

Time is another notable source of confusion – being another *thing* ultimately invented by thought. On examination, the cultural use of this concept is generally quite nebulous within a situation where physics has nonetheless laid down its own rules regarding *what time is*. If regarded as an intuitive concept in relation to the human interest in recording change, the history of *time* is one in which efforts sought via observable and quantifiable events to measure whatever *time* was thought to be. From pre-sundial technologies to the creation of atomic clocks, minds progressively targeted technologies in which a steady movement or beat seemingly operated as constantly as possible in the face of changing conditions. Of course, as with all measuring, there is no absolute reference scale – and so checking the accuracy of different technologies inevitably requires assuming something else to be a reliable reference – even if it appears that nothing at all is *absolutely* reliable. Curiously, it can be noted in the passing that any possibility that the entire universe may be slowing down or speeding up, or even oscillating relative to something else cannot be discounted. How could such a phenomenon ever be known? Such ideas are in any case no more bizarre than the increasingly accepted ideas that time can be dilated or that space is curved.

One philosophical problem for human affairs, and especially for physics, is that if time is truly immeasurable, then a lot of practical tasks must be either logically impossible or somehow illusory. Of course, the reality is that measurements of *observable change* – but very arguably not of *time itself* – have been made for thousands of years within the general

assumption that suitable cyclical changes exhibiting more or less fixed relations to one another indicate the passing of time. For example, the various movements of bodies in our solar system can quite accurately be described in terms of each other, and the apparent movement of the Sun has of course long been used as a viable clock.

But is *measured change* to be equated with *time*? Physicists might say so, but *time, as it is commonly understood*, passes regardless of whether it is measured or not. And in any case, procedures that supposedly measure phenomena do not inform us directly of what those phenomena might really be. For this reason, it is possible to form competing theories of what time *really is*, and even to overlook in the process that all such theories and their concepts are mere products of the human mind.

If physics is regarded as another form of goal-driven human behavior, it is easy to understand that its practitioners' search for convincing theories that potentially further their personal prestige was never too concerned with any intractable philosophical issues regarding what *time* might really be. It is no surprise then that *time* has long had the same curious characteristic as so many other supposed *things*: although we cannot fully agree on whatever it supposedly *really is*, we nonetheless use the concept so extensively and reflexively that its enigmatic nature is lost amidst its familiarity.

In relation to real-world human motivations, the course of human activity is always towards results – all the way from eating to satiate hunger, to gaining academic accreditation for groundbreaking theories, or acting upon those theories to *make things happen*. Consequently, use of the concept *time* is generally unquestioned within physics or within any other academic spheres – even if some uses of the concept are at odds with others. From the history of art to the events of quantum physics, everything is seen as happening *in time*, and so there exists no more incentive to question the concept than for a church to question its concept of god. In fact, there is probably far less, given the longer and more global adoption that the concept of *time* has so obviously enjoyed.

A curious problem nonetheless remains regarding the idea of time dilation within theories of relativity. Any idea that time dilation equates to, for example, one-and-a-half seconds per second, is inherently illogical. Time dilation within *relativity* is of course the idea that the observed passage of time within one set of conditions – or *frame of reference*, to use the jargon – varies relative to the observed passage of time within another set of conditions. But as *time* within physics is in effect always some measured or calculated rate of change, it is actually more logical to omit the label *time* and say that *observed rates of change* alter relative to one another.

Given this is just a semantic revision that nonetheless makes certain phenomena far less counter-intuitive – and that it in no way impacts physics' popularly accepted formulas – failure to adopt such an approach is odd. It can be seen as sitting suspiciously alongside other obfuscated ideas within an academic culture that sometimes likes to mystify rather than clarify. In this respect, *curved space* also seems a dubious idea; actual space appears to have no inherent shape, just as time has no inherent speed – at least, none that we can know or detect. Spacetime itself therefore falls apart as something we can comprehend – other than within the very limited sense of *doing physics* using currently accepted ideas and formulae. But the fact that any theory proves generally useful in terms of successfully calibrating and manipulating our universe does not indicate that such a theory has improved our understanding of the overall human condition, and not even of the physical reality surrounding us. Achieving a specific intellectual end does not rule out that the full impact of the related thinking may ultimately be misleading. How many theories has mankind already devised, employed and subsequently discarded?

But the real fruit of all such discussion lies in the observation that what are obviously abstract concepts are in fact every bit as real as any other concepts in that they are integral to some accepted *tale of reality* – the theory of relativity in this instance. Relativity, whatever lingo it is couched in, appears to many as the most suitable collection of formulae and conceptual *relationships* physics has yet found for meeting many challenges. Hence, any craziness its concepts may appear to embody is arguably equally applicable to each and every other concept the mind entertains, given all concepts are just elements within abstract models that serve human ends.

Ironically, another aspect of human thought highlighted by the world of physics is the workings of *faith*. The unthinking faith physicists and other scientists hold in whatever is widely accepted by their community no doubt results from the somewhat authoritarian aspect of whatever *knowledge* is processed through academia. However, such a bias is largely buried beneath a widespread and general failure to examine the cultural norms by which accepted theories become established – with the result that due circumspection about the resultant *faith* is often absent.

The most obvious specific example of this is seen in statements along the lines that *classical physics was wrong*. Alternatively, this position might be stated as modern theories being *right*. But whatever the presentation, all such approaches constitute a god-like omniscient stance that is obviously ridiculous given the ongoing evolution of human ideas over many thousands of years. Moreover, *right* and *wrong* are judgment terms that surely belong to moralistic thinking, and possibly pure mathematics or logic, but not to *theory* – the *best* practical theory never being more than one that proves useful whilst embodying the fewest problems.

Far from classical physics being *wrong*, it actually remains an extremely useful body of theory that is widely taught – illustrating the real value of a theory is something other than conformity to some absolute or supposedly superior truth. More pragmatically, serious contenders to the mainstream ideas of modern physics and cosmology suggest the current edifice of such *knowledge* may soon crumble under the weight of contradictory evidence.

This all illustrates that even theories with known flaws can be useful, whilst it is obviously foolish to presume flaws do not exist in any particular theory just because none have yet been discovered. But as with almost everything that humans pursue for social goals and personal prestige, it seems humility is easily subjugated to dogmatic faith in whatever ideas appear immediately profitable.

In terms of humility, we humans might understand our condition better by embracing the truth that we do not even know what reality is made of, and that even the idea of a physical world is just a useful thought paradigm. However habitual certain perspectives might be, they remain mere perspectives.

Most physicists have for the time being reduced everything to *mass* and *energy*, that somehow *does stuff* within the fabric of spacetime. But this effectively ignores *mind* and consciousness – ironically as if the last thing *the observer* might want to bother with was himself. This *ignore-mind* approach is almost comical given that the human explosion of abstract thought appears as the defining characteristic of the human race, at the same time as abstract ideas about anything at all only exist as a result of that explosion of thought. This is all somewhat like a scientist using some measuring tool which he religiously refuses to examine, calibrate or ever doubt – all on the basis that he just magically *knows* it to be reliable: a position particularly silly given science itself generally states that even the best calibrated measuring devices inevitably affect results. Meanwhile, the tendency within most

scientific thinking to reduce mind and consciousness to aspects of the brain can be viewed as a rather pathetic unwillingness to look beyond dogmatically materialistic views of reality and to admit that, for better or worse, consciousness simply cannot be laid on the lab bench and dissected as an object of science.

A curious aspect of the grand search for more and more factual knowledge is that both the microcosmic world of quantum mechanics and the macroscopic world of cosmology suggest counter-intuitive findings – almost as if our conventional ways of thinking were only *relatively relevant* at our everyday scale of things. This is yet more evidence that human abstract thinking evolved primarily as a practical survival aid, rather than as some would-be pointless tool for the acquisition of *pure knowledge*. It may well be that the apparently weird probabilistic aspects of quantum mechanics and the mind-bending concepts of relativity only fox our minds because they are radically different from that which is familiar – not because they have any inherent strangeness within themselves. But this is not to deny the manner in which irrational partiality against certain very credible alternative theories in both areas only reflects a sort of academic inertia that would rather protect the *familiar-but-weird* than seriously examine the *not-so-familiar-and-not-so-weird*.

The very idea of *being strange* is notably just about being at odds with the familiar. It is therefore perfectly conceivable that even the most cherished and apparently solid elements of human knowledge are nothing more than convenient ideas about how to cope within our narrow band of what remains a mystical and seemingly unbound reality – a reality far vaster than we could ever imagine, if indeed it is at all quantifiable using normal ideas.

Note that the idea of truly infinite space is as incoherent to the average mind as the competing idea that space has some sort of edge beyond which there is no more space – or no more *beyond*. At the same time as we have problems trying to frame space as either infinite or finite, any other possibilities are at least equally hard to conceive. And yet, we feel some conviction that one of these positions must hold. Logic may give us a reassuring feeling as regards many things, but if our habitual states of mind are pushed to their logical conclusions, they can actually appear quite illogical.

Similarly, given we have no concept of either a higher or a lower limit to the scale of things, it could be said that physicists are abusing their minds with the unnecessary stress of tackling open-ended and possibly pointless questions regarding cosmological phenomena and sub-atomic reality. Within what might be seen as the misguided priorities of our current cultures, such quests are much lauded from on high and therefore provide career paths for those so inclined – but what end does this serve other than to promote yet more of the technological development that underpins our already dangerously imbalanced state? With no end or conclusions to such pursuits in sight, do we not have more pressing priorities to consider? While some of our supposedly best minds busy themselves peering into atoms or out at the depths of space, our ordinary daily lives on planet Earth remain under threats of our own making which we are very visibly failing to address.

Far from the current thrust of human thought progressively bringing us closer to finally solving *the big questions*, it is arguable that it only acts as a distraction in terms of what we might otherwise realize to our real benefit. Our search for endlessly detailed abstract knowledge appears troublingly interminable at a time when resolving major real-world problems appears increasingly urgent. While we examine the physical world through more and more disciplines, and particularly from within a mindset that science and technology are inherently worthwhile, we rather studiously avoid looking inwards at who we are, what motivates us, and perhaps most importantly, why we ourselves have become the greatest threat we face as a species. By any account of *being sensible*, a species that threatens its

own existence is both mad and in need of corrective action. What then is to be made of such a species that, even when it sees this, still makes no effort to diagnose or treat its madness?

5 – Beyond Nonsense

For all it is often said that there is no arguing with facts, who if anyone has really examined this idea? In general, the view seems to rely on a presumption that is actually quite shaky: the idea that facts flawlessly represent *bits or aspects of reality*.

Even basic facts such as *the Sun is hot* can be analyzed to demonstrate logical imperfection. For example, sometimes the concept of *the Sun* is astronomically considered to extend to the edge of our solar system such that very *cold* regions are included – *hot* and *cold* being only relative terms in any case, and the Sun *itself* being actually *cold* relative to certain cosmological bodies.

These issues essentially concern how the mind frames its thoughts and ideas as *facts*. In doing so, the mind is not dealing directly with external reality, or what we might consider actual temperatures in this instance. In relation to what it considers to be *reality*, the mind's description of that reality as *facts* is simplistic, of only relative relevance, and potentially misleading. Even if the mind thinks about the *actual temperature* of the Sun, it faces a new problem: which part of the Sun is it to consider? And on top of *the fact* that what is commonly thought of as *the Sun* allows no direct temperature measurements in any case, there is also the issue that temperature measurement is simply another comparative system of human invention – reality displaying no inherent system of measurement.

In terms of a truly generalized theory of relativity, the Sun becomes whatever one includes within the concept *the Sun*, and it can be considered either hot or cold, given these are only comparative or *relative* terms. But even if we move to more exacting ideas such as the specific temperature of a specific part of the Sun, we thereby reduce the scope and relevance of whatever information might be delivered. Hence, increasing the specificity of the information only decreases the legitimacy with which it can be generalized to describe *the Sun* as the term is commonly used. By next adding in the variable of time with its ongoing temperature changes, it becomes obvious that even by the most conventionally objective views of reality, *the temperature of the Sun* can never be anything other than a wild generalization. That such a generalization is inevitable within any attempt to constructively answer a question regarding the Sun's temperature is perhaps the only thing in all this that can be called a reliable fact.

Although we cannot seriously question reality itself without risk of being branded insane, we can indeed legitimately question the conceptualization and linguistic encoding of it as *facts*. Given that any fact is merely a description of reality somewhat removed from whichever part of reality it describes, it is arguably foolish to do any philosophy that fails to question the entire paradigm of factual information.

In terms of trying to authentically represent reality, integrity problems result from the related encoding processes, given that the abstraction of reality into concepts and ideas is susceptible to both accidental and deliberate distortion – not to mention crass simplification. For example, *the sky is blue* is a stark statement that the sky is in an arguably impossible state given the planet's atmosphere is highly transparent. Furthermore, such a statement can be misleading even in everyday terms if applied to situations in which a few clouds exist.

Because both *the sky* and its supposed *blueness* are hugely generalized concepts in relation to the complex physical reality they seek to encompass, the factual statement's simplicity becomes a philosophical travesty in terms of authentically informing us about reality. The reason we are nonetheless happy with such statements is that, far from forming unquestionable facts that no one could argue with, they rather humbly convey loose casually-

formed thoughts that are at least useful when, in this instance, we want to communicate that the sky is not overcast.

But the problems with factual information are more than just the problems of abstract thought seeking to accurately frame the endless complexity of our surrounding world. That world is also one in which everyone from the scientist to the salesman has identifiable motives for promoting linguistically framed facts that are often more or less remote from reality, if not intentionally twisted or even based on lies. Even the definitions of concepts that compose supposedly factual information are inherently woolly. Consider *the fact* – as many would see it – that *technology is good*. Without bothering to pick over possibly tricky issues defining the concept of *technology*, the concept of *good* alone is obviously wide-open to different interpretations – leaving the entire statement a poor candidate for any pretensions of being factual.

Knowing language to be a model incapable of exactly describing reality, should facts not be regarded as nothing more than merely *useful* at best? The statement that *technology is good* simply cannot be unequivocally verified as either *true* or *false* in any meaningful sense – its loose terminology reducing it to a mere *comment* on a par with stating that one's preferred football club *is the best*.

Minds can nonetheless grab hold of such ideas and argue vehemently as if some great truth was to be revealed by sorting out whether, in this particular example, technology *really is* good or not. The tacit underlying presumption of all attitudes concerning such ideas seems to be that reality has certain absolute and true qualities, and that argumentation only exists because those qualities remain poorly recognized by whoever contradicts one's own position. Hence, such arguments are typically framed by intellectually vulgar assumptions that one of two positions must be *correct*, with the other being therefore *incorrect*.

Such stubborn binary thinking can prohibit any recognition that social competition often lurks behind such crudely polarized positions. The desire to convince others of one's own ideas easily inhibits any awareness that simplistic and linguistically expressed *tales of reality* will never grasp the unbounded complexity of the real world. As a result, throwing in a phrase such as *It's a fact* is not unusual: an apparent appeal to some idea that human knowledge has achieved forms of absolute certainty that actually appear philosophically impossible.

Also revealed within such arguments is that disputed facts tend to concern highly abstract, obscure and ideological subjects, as opposed to directly perceived experiences and observations. Naked reality before our eyes is never confusing and is inherently hard to refute. Hence, impossible as exactitude may be, we generally do not argue about the sky being blue, the Sun being hot, or water being wet. It is other ideas more disconnected from experience and sensory perception that engender our real misunderstandings. Notably, our many seemingly interminable debates about less tangible issues possibly reveal far more about ourselves and our confused thinking, than they do about anything else.

As there is no end to the number of facts that can be produced by the interplay of the mind and human experience, facts can be found that appear to support just about any conceivable idea. Furthermore, since so much factual information rests on comparative forms of thinking, two or more logically opposing facts can easily be seen as equally relevant or even *correct*. For example, the weather on any given day is both *good* and *bad* depending on whether you talk to an exterior painter or a farmer who wants rain.

Meanwhile, today's mountains of highly-disconnected information make it easier than ever to cherry-pick facts supporting any and all sides of a given argument – a situation in which different sets of facts can cobble together competing and apparently incompatible supposed

factual realities. But multiple real-world simultaneous realities notwithstanding, such *fact-wars* only render many of their combatants rather foolish for adopting the absolutist approaches that fuel such conflicts. Nonetheless, for minds oblivious to any greater overview of all this, a veneer formed of supposed *factual proof* offers the convenience of easily making the case for just about anything. Notably, the world of political campaigning consists of grown adults enthusiastically engineering such purposefully biased re-framing of reality: the assembly of more or less dubious facts to create even more dubious arguments.

Identity issues

It is arguable that the only indisputable facts exist within mathematics – for example, in an equation such as $3 + 4 = 7$. However, even this can be disputed inasmuch as what appears either side of the equal sign is strictly speaking not the same from a philosophical perspective – the addition of two figures being something different from stating their total as a single figure. In truth, the two sides of the equation are rather obviously not equal or *the same*, and this becomes obvious from even a simple inspection of their graphical representation. Furthermore, to the extent that the equation might be accepted as being factually correct, it amounts to a circular argument that a total count of 7 remains a count of 7, however we envisage it. Should we really expect anything else? The equals sign therefore only reflects a convention that the process or concept of adding two numbers be equated with their total. Nonetheless, even within a concept of *pure abstraction* in which no words or graphics are used to represent mathematical values, envisioning $3 + 4$ is surely not the same as envisioning 7? Even thinking through two instances of what we might think of as *exactly the same thing* involves separate instances of cognitive activity at different times.

As is the case with seemingly *identical* electrons, the mere idea of two discrete *things* – such as the two sides of an equation – logically necessitates the identification of one or more distinguishing features in order that such *things* can be conceptually differentiated as not actually one and the same thing. Without this being the case, not only mathematics, but most human abstraction would be impossible. Nothing would be conceptually distinguishable from the rest of reality. This can be approximated by reasoning for example that, although $3 + 4 = 3 + 4$ is mathematically pointless, we can still distinguish two different sides to such an equation. A more tangible example might be stating that *the sky is the sky*: a statement ironically hard to argue with because, of itself, it informs us of nothing, and so there is nothing to argue over. So, although some sort of incontrovertible logic can be seen within such statements, there is no substance beyond that logic. Using the concept *sky* in such a context does not even provide a clue as to what that concept refers to. Philosophically, it would seem that, however useful it may appear, the mathematical device known as *the equation* ultimately lies somewhere between a pointlessly circular form of thought, and a logical absurdity for equating two things that logic itself determines must be different in at least one identifiable respect. Absolutely equal instances of anything would logically be impossible to distinguish from one another.

Other weaknesses exist as regards more *worldly* knowledge. Once we leave the heady abstraction of mathematics and relate thought to the world as experienced – the only world commonly agreed to exist – the supposed entities from which facts are built become subject to the muddiness of flexible definitions and changing perspectives. Hence, even the world of physics with its *laws of the universe* and theories about that universe's origins can be seen as just more *tales of reality* that require occasional rewriting – yesterday's *facts* being reframed as *previous misunderstandings* when they no longer fit whatever ideas and observations create supposedly *better facts*.

Removing any lingering doubts regarding the mind's willingness to embrace *factual*

knowledge without properly questioning what such knowledge represents, many everyday ideas illustrate our extensive ability to believe in contradictory *tales of reality*. For example, most people seem to consider it a *fact* that they act from a position of free will, at the same time as they more or less accept *factual science* and its basically deterministic view of the universe in which free will plays no part. Short of cranky metaphysical perspectives on how reality works, these two positions are obviously incompatible – but nonetheless coalescing in billions of human minds.

Perhaps nothing as clearly exemplifies the fundamental knots created by abstract thought as this and other traditional dilemmas of philosophy – free will-versus-determinism being just one. As regards how people develop, the *nature-nurture* debate concerning the different roles played by genetics and social upbringing provides another example, whilst the *mind-versus-body* dilemma seeks to delimit the roles played by those two entities in relation to many phenomena. In a situation where these dilemmas can feel somehow related, the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity can appear similarly awkward – many human phenomena appearing partly objective and partly subjective in manners hard to disentangle.

At their most basic, all such conundrums are obviously posited in terms of distinctions between one supposed *thing* and another. Hence, and with dramatic ease, they disappear – as opposed to being resolved – in the absence of those distinctions. Logically, the core problem has nothing to do with reality *out there*, but everything to do with flawed human attempts to understand it. All these long-standing philosophical dilemmas resolve to nothing more than artifacts of the human mind's abstract approach to modeling reality; their real resolution therefore being found in transcending that approach.

More explicitly, we can state that the problem of trying to, for example, distinguish the role of the mind from the role of the body, stems from an unwitting and unwarranted presumption that the two are properly separate. Notably, without such a distinction, the problem cannot even be formulated.

Of course, one reflexive response to this position might be that much as this logic is sound, we cannot just pretend that mind and body are one and the same thing on the basis that this resolves a long-standing philosophical dilemma. But the error here is to assume that the only alternative to distinguishing two things is to conflate them.

On the basis that abstract cognition is a goal-based activity, it seems natural that separate concepts such as *mind* and *body* would evolve to fulfill different communicative functions within a situation that nonetheless cannot be fully understood by imagining them to be either *the same thing* or *two different things* – all because no such properly discrete *things* exist anywhere in the manner abstract thought readily imagines. It should be remembered that the distinction between such concepts is hatched and embraced essentially at the cognitive level and is therefore ultimately just an invention of the human mind. Mentally distinguishing *body* from *mind* is obviously useful in many situations, but in assuming such convenience to reflect some true division within reality, we arguably take the mind's inventiveness too unquestioningly. This is an inherent issue of abstract thought itself: the intellectual enthusiasm with which it has been embraced by humans creates the potential to overlook the limitations of the modeling processes on which it relies. And the evidence of this permeates all areas of human culture as umpteen seemingly intractable disagreements and controversies over what are in fact, mere ideas.

Like other key aspects of abstract thought, the origins of this are ancient. To meet certain social ends, the heavens were once populated by multiple gods that in today's world are widely considered to have never existed. But countless fights and battles nonetheless raged

amidst efforts to establish some supposed *truth* about those gods – battles that to some extent continue to this day. However, the main issue in all this is not about whether one or more particular gods might really exist, or about the intellectual problems of trying to relate *body* and *mind*; it is about how abstract thought can successfully build all sorts of concepts for practical purposes, with the supposed existence of any corresponding *things* being rather incidental. In effect, we generally prefer practical and useful ideas and explanations over any would-be authentic *tales of reality*. A notable reason for this is that on close examination nothing at all fits reliably within the latter category.

The most popular *tales of reality* are created, promoted and adopted primarily to fulfill personal and social goals. Thus, the relevance of such stories to supposed *objective reality* is actually of secondary importance, and arguably never more valid than in some relative or circumstantial sense. This is all well demonstrated by the many scientists who spend time embroiled in the study and principles of *empirical science*, only to later pray to gods of whom they have no evidence whatsoever, but that are nonetheless embraced enthusiastically within culturally respected religions. As is so often the case with all animal species, the primal desire for social integration is revealed as the common factor underlying much activity.

But given gods are commonly seen as at least metaphysical possibilities, and also that we think of *bodies* to be physical flesh and bones right before our eyes, is it not reasonable to consider that some of these *things* might really exist? This question only highlights how easily the mind ignores that its *tales of reality* are based on conceptualizations exhibiting no necessary correspondence to anything at all of a *demonstrably discrete nature*. Crucially, the overriding *tale of reality* behind all others is the effectively absolute and thoroughly subliminal conviction that the world is made of *things, bits, objects*, or whatever we like to call its supposed *parts*. Being the very basis of abstract thought itself, this conviction is so widely held that to work with it at all – as we all do all the time – is arguably to be blind to its utter ubiquity and blanketing pervasiveness.

The world reflexively imagined by abstract thought is intractably a world formed of components and, where helpful for practical understanding, relationships between those components. Or from an alternative perspective, the relationships can themselves be seen as just more components. Hence a challenge naturally arises as regards the relationship between any two conceptually-entangled supposed things such as *mind* and *body*. What exactly is that relationship and how does it work? What is its nature and scope? Notably, although such troublesome questions do not appear to even exist outside the human mind – or perhaps *because* it is so – they are the very stuff of many long-standing philosophical dilemmas. Thought creates the problem, but human culture has so far been too stupid to notice that all of this can be reduced to abstract thought chasing its own tail.

Given an overall connectedness of our situation, every attempt to define *mind, body* or the relationship between them must inevitably meet circumstances that will undermine whatever is put forward. As an example, what is to be made of *exhilaration* or any other emotions that, as we normally think of matters, simultaneously course through both mind and body? From the conventional perspective, it seems body and mind are two things too deeply interrelated to properly understand either of them individually or the relationship between them. But such an argument only highlights how our crude form of thinking is bogged down within its habitual *things-plus-relationships* model, and it thereby overlooks the truth that concepts such as *mind* and *body* remain mere inventions of cognition.

A rectangle consisting of a square of blue to the left of a square of green is easily described as done in this sentence. Such a description is of course a hugely simplistic compromise in terms of the detail within any real-world situation that might be thus described, but it is

nonetheless suitable for the basic purpose of providing graphic description. However, suppose instead that the blue on the extreme left is the start of a smooth color gradient that extends all the way to green on the extreme right such that there is no noticeable sharp change of color – and then ask where the blue changes to green. Any supposed point at which the color *really changes* from one to the other is not something people will be able to agree on. Exactly what colors are covered by terms such as *blue* and *green* is open to debate – even within color science. Complicating matters further, any color the eye sees is a function of other variables such as personal eyesight and lighting conditions. With such points in mind, it makes no more sense to think of *the blue* and *the green* within the gradient as separate colors than it does to imagine they are the same color. Furthermore, even the supposed relationship between the two colors can only be approximated by stating something along the lines of *one fades into the other*. All in all, the exact nature of the color gradient cannot be accurately detailed by any amount of verbal description.

This illustrates a situation in which language including the terms *blue* and *green* is reflexively chosen to loosely describe a very small corner of reality, despite the fact that both terms are beyond absolute definition and arguably don't really represent any *things* or qualities that exist in isolation from one another. Notably, the difficulties in defining either the colors or their supposed relationship stem wholly from a mental approach that unthinkingly presumes *discrete things* and relationships between such discrete things to be an entirely sound basis for modeling reality. The fact that the human mind's modeling of the world struggles to transcend this *things-plus-relationships* paradigm is the source of countless problems in so many areas, rather than any aspect of whatever external reality the mind seeks to address.

Responding intelligently to various key philosophical dilemmas that have dogged philosophy for centuries has nothing to do with figuring out, for example, if free will exists and, if so, what its nature might be – or if we instead inhabit a deterministic universe, and why we are then deluded with ideas of free will. Neither does the meaningful response lie in some supposed better understanding of what some posited entity called *mind* really is, or how it relates to a similarly posited entity called *body*. The missing jigsaw piece lies in exposing the error abstract thought makes when it presumes its *things-plus-relationships* paradigm can truly mirror reality – as opposed to just being a generically useful and convenient framework: a tool of inherently limited functionality.

The causality illusion

Despite its stunning effects on the planet, the evolution of abstract thought within the human mind is very arguably at only an embryonic stage compared to its potential. The evidence lies in the difficulty it has transcending its own conviction that its modeling of reality is inherently sound and flawless – even when faced with intractable problems resulting from that conviction.

In evolutionary terms, holding steadfast to such a self-limiting position is hardly surprising given the huge dominance the technology of abstract thought has accorded our species. Hence, most minds do not think at all about how they think, and the process feels almost as natural as breathing. But the interesting issue in terms of a further evolution of human ideas is that any development beyond our current position does not necessitate dismissing our present ideas. Human culture could add a corrective adjustment by embracing a wider perspective. Nonetheless, for this to happen, certain habitual and deeply ingrained notions within current human thinking require uncompromising re-examination.

For example, it needs to be seen that the common notion of causality is troublesome; the conveniently simple idea that *events* occur in which *causes* produce *effects* breaks down on examination.

If a car smashes at speed into a stationary car, the normal thinking is that the speeding car *caused* the accident – or *event*. But the notion that one car is any more the cause or effect than the other makes little sense given that if either car is removed from the scene the event does not occur. Moreover, the understood states of both cars are altered by the event, and so it is no more logical to state that the stationary car caused the motion of the speeding car to alter, than it is to describe the event the other way around.

The inclination to label the speeding car as the *cause* likely comes from a very primal perceptual interest in movement and change, as opposed to anything that appears static. In nature, active change typically represents either a threat or an opportunity, whereas the absence of change is of no immediate interest. In the modern world, this bias in terms of distinguishing supposed *cause* from supposed *effect* is amplified by societal norms such as insurance claim attitudes in which arguing a stationary car caused you to smash into it would be seen as ridiculous. However, civil *blame* is not the same thing as the philosophical notion of *cause*.

But the structure of modern life makes it effectively impossible to escape our fixation on causality. Just about all human technology is thought out on the basis that we can obtain desirable outcomes by *causing predictable effects*. But although this is obviously a massively tried-and-tested model in practical terms, that again is no indication that it correctly understands reality; it is simply a strategy for producing desirable results – somewhat akin to a child successfully operating certain devices with no knowledge of how or why they behave as they do.

As regards technology, it seems we often consider *cause* as simply whatever prior conditions we create, and *effect* as merely that aspect of the result that we seek or judge important. But although we would typically think it is the electricity that produces or *causes* heat within a heating element, it is just as logical – or illogical – to state that the heat in such an example causes electricity to be burned. Both are necessary ingredients of, as it were, *causing the effect* of the other. The fact that our intention is to produce heat rather than consume electricity, and that we name the device a *heating element* are indicators of our aims – not of anything inherently causal about what is physically happening. And of course, it is hard to market a heater as an *electricity consumption unit*.

Opponents of this thinking might argue that heating the element by other means will not cause electricity to flow, and therefore electricity is the cause and heating is the effect. But it could just as well be argued that passing the electricity through a heavy-duty cable will cause negligible heating to occur, and so the electricity itself is not a cause. The perfectly logical issue here is that properly understanding any supposed cause and effect within any given situation certainly cannot be achieved by examining any other situations. The understood key components – that is, the heating element, the electricity and the heat – are best understood as inextricably linked in terms of what is observed; changing any one changes them all. Causality in the sense that one thing governs one or more others is reduced to a mere invention of the mind and its quest for a manipulative framework by which its surrounding environment can be bent to its wishes.

The concept of *time* also plays a key role in our habitual propensity to analyze matters through the causal paradigm. Before-and-after ideas always invite the notion that the *before* set of conditions caused the *after* conditions. Inasmuch as reality does not proceed in a totally chaotic manner, and that the mind identifies patterns within temporal change, the causal concept appears sound. But to the extent that the principle of causality does not of itself identify any specific entities as *causes* or *effects* – other than perhaps past, present and future – this all reduces to nothing more than an observation that our world does indeed, as

far as our mind understands it, exhibit patterned change. Hence, causality could be summed up in the simple idea that the past causes the present, and that the present causes the future – all within what appears to be a somewhat ordered world.

As such, causality becomes a pretty useless position, and so it is easy to see why the mind invariably populates it with additional concepts, as in *anger causes fights*, or last night's exercise *caused* this morning's fatigue. The issue highlighted here is how causality – flawed though it may be compared to the more general concept of *propensity* – is nonetheless useful and need not be discarded as inherently *wrong* simply because it is imperfect. However, any idea that it is actually a *correct* model is undermined by observations such as fatigue being not a wholly inevitable consequence of exercise – not to mention that causal thinking is inextricably mired in all the more standard weaknesses of abstract thought. Even by conventional thinking, more variables are inevitably involved in *explaining* such situations and, as there are countless imaginable variables at play in all real-world situations, attributing one supposed *cause* to one supposed *effect* is a philosophically ridiculous simplification, even if we might otherwise opt for the practicality of such an approach.

Propaganda is often framed the same way: using simplistic concepts that if not scrutinized, only leave minds brainwashed by crude ideas at odds with reality's endless complexity. Typically, various ideas associated with nations, races, religions or social classes are projected as if mere labels could in some meaningful way encompass the complex realities of millions of unique individuals. Glib statements that such-and-such a nation caused a specific war, or that some problem is caused by this or that factional group, only numb the mind's ability to understand that huge chunks of reality – tricky to grasp at the best of times as they obviously are – certainly do not reveal themselves through lazy cartoon-like simplicity.

Such simplicity aside, the illusory conviction that we live within a causal reality ultimately rests, like so many ideas, on the notion of *things* as discrete entities within an objective reality. For example, the idea of a *man killed by a bullet* contains the causal inference that the bullet killed the man, and thereby ignores endless other contributing aspects of any such real-life scenario. Within a process of infinite regress, it can be asked what *caused* the gun to be pointed at him, what *caused* the trigger to be pulled, and then what *caused* that condition, and so forth, ad infinitum. It could also be argued the man was killed because he was in the way of the bullet, or not wearing a bulletproof jacket – or even because gunpowder was invented. The point is that the mind too readily labels a few *things* to form an idea that meets some communication goal, but nonetheless jettisons a mountain of pertinent information in a process that only reduces unfathomable complexity to a crude model of *x caused y*. Fine though this may be for certain goals – including stopping minds from examining situations in more detail – it is a generally stupid approach for failing to examine many troublesome issues concerning thought itself.

Propensity as intellectual humility

Even if the mind must remain constrained within its vision of more or less discrete *things*, a less presumptuous position as regards how reality unfolds is possible by replacing the concept of *causality* with one of *propensity* – a paradigm in which, rather than simple *x-caused-y* thinking, conditions *x* only create a *propensity* for conditions *y*. This new position removes causality's implied but unwarranted inevitability of outcome and, within the notion of *conditions*, removes the idea of single before-and-after causal entities – all from within a perspective that sees reality as too complex to be fully described or understood, and therefore ultimately destined to defy any full prediction of outcomes.

As a less rigid concept, *propensity* allows a form of purposefully vague generalization in which our conceptualized understanding of situations is recognized as limited, somewhat

problematic, and most important of all, hardly justifying the sort of dogmatic certainty modern culture otherwise encourages. Predictions made from this humbler position can still be usefully probabilistic in terms of real-world outcomes, without pretending to understand exactly how and why matters turn out as they do. And if this sounds like too loose a framework to be convincing, this is deliberate given reality is inherently far more convoluted than the mind could ever comprehend. We humans have an extensive history of thinking we know what we are about, only to be surprised by outcomes that by their very occurrence prove our conventional ideas to be overly presumptuous.

Propensity can be seen as the dissolution of causality's awkwardness, similar to the way debunking models that view reality as a set of discrete entities, objects, things or component parts dissolves the otherwise intractable dilemmas of philosophy. In both cases, the hard crystallization of reality produced by the lens of abstract thought is identified as a wildly simplistic distortion to be countered wherever its apparent certainty and absolutist ideas are taken too seriously. Put more succinctly, any wholly dogmatic statement is recognized as an inherently unjustified position in the absence of omniscience.

Conventional causality may be a psychologically impressive tool in terms of appearing to leave no room for doubt, whilst working with pleasingly simple ideas, but these benefits speak more of causality's immediate convenience than of any philosophically demonstrable merit. Notably, although causality is arguably sufficient for many issues within the more simplistic sciences such as physics – sciences that typically deal with a small number of well-defined inanimate phenomena – *propensity* appears more appropriate for carefully approaching a limited but optimized understanding of intractably complex matters such as human conduct or lifeforms in general. Studying the role of energy within the entire cosmos is arguably simpler than determining why a single individual has reached any given decision. Not even the most enthusiastic *social scientist* can pretend he has uncovered any laws or formulae that explain or predict human decision-making. And there are clear reasons why this is so.

Blinded by objectivity

The subliminally adopted model of objective knowledge that underlies the scientific outlook includes the similarly subliminal assumption that reality is to be understood by relentless analyses and increasing levels of conceptualization – an approach that in effect assumes understanding comes from ever-more-detailed observations of reality, as opposed to generalized overviews. But although neither of those two approaches can be conclusively argued to be superior to the other, conventional science leans heavily to one side in a manner that effectively denies the other credibility. Consequently, many who see themselves as informed scientists appear neither aware of this assumption, nor that they have unwittingly assimilated it.

To illustrate this issue, we can say both metaphorically and literally that peering through either a microscope or a telescope leaves one largely blind to other goings-on in one's immediate vicinity and within one's organism, whereas a more rounded investigation has no such exclusion areas. Arguably, the latter position better relates ideas to one another and thoughts to immediate circumstances – and is therefore the more appropriate position within a universe where nothing exists in isolation or can be well represented via absolutist thinking.

However, we should not expect the modern scientific mentality to embrace this issue in any balanced or self-critical manner – science's history having increasingly emphasized narrow and highly specific focal points, and having thereby divided itself into endless more or less disconnected specialisms that effectively discredit the generalist's outlook.

Conventional science's typical response here is that specialisms exist to probe individual areas in depth, with the overall result of the scientific endeavor being that all areas are deeply examined as parts of a greater whole. But coherent as this defense may be, it is locked within *objectivity* in the sense that it regards reality entirely as *out there*, and thereby ignores personal experience and how the individual embraces the world around himself. It is also a dehumanizing approach that places the sum total of one particular form of knowledge above the process of managing daily life and questions of how to best address life's many challenges. Once focused on the objective vision of reality – a position science generally promotes with little or no acknowledgment of the narrowness involved – any efforts to understand the individual's beliefs, ideas and emotions are rather reflexively rejected amidst science's systematic shunning of subjectivity.

This is a profoundly stupid position given that every species relies primarily on their subjective experience and immediate awareness in order to survive and do just about anything. Hence, in terms of understanding humanity – the *real* people we are – it is hard to see how the pursuit of meaningful and useful knowledge could be more lopsided than it has now become through the ruthless and unthinking insistence on *objectivity*. Assuming that all knowledge involves some subjective processes of the mind, intellectual culture's unbalanced fixation on *objectivity* – at the cost of subjectivity – is analogous to a botanist who stubbornly refuses to examine one side of a leaf. Such is culture's unquestioning and rather exclusive obsession with *objectivity*, and its cost in terms of misunderstanding both our individual and our collective existence.

Consequently, if you ask scientists – or almost anyone for that matter – to explain their workplace actions, their response is likely to be narrowly framed within some explanation of their role in relation to the wider goals of their organization. But if it be suggested that their primary motivation is in fact the subjective desire to conform with modern social norms such as earning money and generally fitting in with so-called *normality*, they will likely react negatively – exactly because the learned social game of politely avoiding life's subjective dimension has been openly breached. The fact that such an uncommonly frank perspective arguably details a more honest and relevant version of who they and many members of the human race really are only risks making enemies by speaking an otherwise silent truth. Expected social attitudes on such matters involve expressing belief – whether real or feigned – in the limited and superficial perspectives individuals present of themselves and their motives. Hence, the mere truth of some other underlying psychology being at work is thereby denied any meaningful social expression – leaving all would-be discussion that might properly address this matter as just so many lies of omission.

Modern people and society in general can therefore be seen as somewhat schizoid in the sense that consciously expressed thoughts are often somewhat disconnected from true motivations. Being a stranger to oneself – or perhaps a number of strangers that come alive within different social settings – becomes understandable if not socially expected, however destructive such fragmented behavior may be as regards any well-rounded understanding of our true condition.

A propensity towards rigid ideas

Given the cultural emphasis on *objectivity*, it is no surprise at all that conventional science is particularly bad at making sense of the subjective experience – and arguably of life in general. Within scientific disciplines, lifeforms are treated in the same dispassionate manner as inanimate subjects – reducing all emotions and deeper feelings to sterile observations of physiological activity or behavior. Emotions, direct experience, and subjective observations are generally ignored as potentially informative channels – even if it is a reasonable

presumption that we all experience roughly the same range of emotions.

Conventional science's general disdain for all things subjective is typically defended by the idea that subjective reports are both unreliable and unverifiable. But it is just as arguable that human culture developed this disdain because it suits those holding power that others be internally confused, distracted and doubtful of their own ideas. Portraying the subjective worlds that we all inhabit as unreliable and deceptive at the same time as an emphasis is placed on formalized, standardized and centrally controlled forms of knowledge, is an obvious mechanism for disempowering the individual.

While the general scientific endeavor has battled many challenges against which it eventually made headway, it is markedly happy to abandon wholesale any ideas of directly addressing the subjective world – short of psychology occasionally using personal reports as partial evidence of a subject's state of mental health. But even such personal feedback is addressed within a paradigm where socially unexpected responses are conveniently seen as signs of *mental illness*. Hence, modern psychology can be viewed as an ongoing effort to constrain behavior to whatever is deemed socially acceptable and to keep culturally accepted thinking within narrow parameters. Stepping outside such confines quite literally runs the risk of being branded *mad*.

By way of contrast, a holistic view of reality in which generalities replace science's obsession with the particular and the highly-detailed can constructively accommodate the subjective experience – even if it proves tricky to model matters clearly. This addresses an important limitation of the objective outlook: given that nothing of the human condition can legitimately be dismissed as *not reality*, any form of inquiry that dismisses any aspect of that condition is blinkered from the very start. Hence, focusing exclusively on *objectivity* is arguably like going to a movie in which either the sound or vision is entirely missing; the movie's story will of course be more or less misunderstood.

Albeit quite ironic, the paradigm of science, together with most of academia, can in fact be seen as a product of the human mind's subjective desires to seek influence and control over other minds – much as religion and politics are more commonly recognized to do. By effectively privatizing knowledge under the control of elitist groups, outsiders are made to feel inferior, less informed, and therefore more or less deserving of whatever social disenfranchisement they encounter. This is obviously not to say that scientific and academic pursuits and achievements are simply scams, but there is no doubt that such achievements are tickets to privilege, and that privilege is something its recipients pursue and defend in manners that – again quite ironically – can be fueled by subjective goals.

Any mind can easily reason that one moderately healthy functional human is really nothing more or less than another moderately healthy functional human. At least, this is how things might generally appear if not for certain individuals who successfully pretend some air of social superiority by being aware that amassing *accepted knowledge* and *expertise* are one means of achieving that end. Hence, the fact that some enjoy privilege merely on the basis that they learned how to play the education and career system to their personal advantage can be seen as nothing more than a well-respected racket. The same can also be said of other social mechanisms by which privilege is awarded; while some learn how to *game the system* and grab privilege, others must be denied it if only because privilege by definition is an unbalanced phenomenon. Thus, the popular idea that academia somehow ferrets out those of smarter minds is perhaps only true to the extent that it selects those who are more motivated to profit from its rules: rules that very definitely demand a generally conservative obedience to culturally dominant ideas and the existing social order – complete with institutionalized imbalances.

How could such *privilege* even be discussed if not in relation to an existing world of imbalance including the *underprivileged*? Notably, all sorts of real-life questions of this nature can be posed in full seriousness by any individual who manages to transcend culture's subliminally indoctrinated notion that only wiser, better-educated or moneyed people of elitist outlooks are capable of meaningfully thinking through such matters. But it is also notable that moneyed, supposedly better-educated and wiser people also enjoy privileged access to key public platforms in which such questions are aired and answered to the same people's apparent benefit.

The idea that a formal education is required for an optimized understanding of a world sitting right before one's eyes is a deep-seated scam of academia: something so thoroughly ingrained in the whole ethos of education systems that its practitioners can live their entire lives wrapped in comfortable delusions of *being more intelligent* – as opposed to simply being more scheming and complicit in relation to mind-controlling structures that cleverly reward whoever offers obedient and unquestioning subservience.

Hence, although whatever insights the layman might offer for any of life's many issues may never be particularly welcome within the realms of academia or culture in general, we can reason why this is so. We can understand why science has so far not wanted to *open its heart* and properly embrace the vast universe of our common evolution or the more generic and shared aspects of life's subjective dimension. Expanding our vision of science beyond its current fixation on *objectivity* is nonetheless possible by noting how such a sterile and clinical perspective is actually counterproductive when faced with life's big questions.

Significantly, in terms of new approaches to thinking, the concept of *propensity* provides a global approximation of unfolding reality via a model that does not seek to fully identify exact causal relationships. Within a truly holistic view of reality, causality is in any case illogical, as there are no discrete entities in the first place to act as causes or effects. *Propensity*, in contrast, can be married to an awareness of limitations within its loose framing, as well as abstract thought's liability to error: forms of circumspection that nonetheless allow propensity to cautiously approach vast areas of reality in manners effectively alien to objectivity and rigid causality. In effect, *propensity* is simply reframing causality and objectivity to accommodate the artifacts and weaknesses of cognitive abstraction.

If the vision of our universe as truly holistic is valid, *propensity* partly corrects the crude concept of causality by accommodating its weaknesses, whilst also accounting for its popularity and usefulness. In contrast, the unquestioning and unqualified conventional notion of *pure causality* appears founded on a delusion regarding the very nature of reality, and thereby offering no effective overview of why this might be so.

Furthermore, the *propensity* concept can admit any degree of ignorance regarding the mechanisms by which events apparently unfold. It can accept that any recognized *propensities* represent tendencies towards certain outcomes that therefore seem more likely – even in the absence of complete information or explanations. For example, it can be seen that discontented populations often but not necessarily opt for politically extremist parties. But this is not formulated as a rule, given that many unknown or unknowable variables – arguably an infinitude – can play a role in forming people's attitudes. So, although the mind might be tempted to formulate such ideas within simple cause-and-effect thinking, it fails within that approach to accommodate any number of other variables that may produce unexpected results. Hence, any apparent understanding of such a situation using a causal model in fact constitutes a form of stupidity and may of course prove incorrect. In contrast, a *propensity* can never be proven incorrect as it embraces the inevitable uncertainty of

abstract thinking.

Notably, *propensity* can also predict an outcome with a degree of reliability in situations where it does not even understand the mechanism by which such a result might come about. So unlike causality which tends to be tethered to theoretical explanations of *this-caused-that*, a propensity towards a given result from given conditions can be formulated from simple observations – even if no one understands much about what happens between would-be cause and would-be effect. Complex subjects such as meteorology and oceanography are actually forced to rely on propensity as the variables involved are too many and too unpredictable for standard cause and effect to be much use. In this sense, it is in fact arguable that propensity is how the mind naturally relates to the world, and that a fixation on strict causality results in part from a corrupted scientific pretense of absolutist knowledge. We may *know* clouds signal rain, but an unexpected change of wind can always prove any such assumptions ill-founded.

The suitability of the propensity approach can also be seen in relatively simple situations such as tossing a coin. Common thinking dictates an even chance on any given throw that the coin will show heads or tails. But how does an apparently random idea like *chance* manage to find itself a place within a *causal* model of the world? The reality is that such so-called *chance* – often dressed up as *probability* – is simply an admission that even a scenario as apparently simple as tossing a coin can in fact be too complex for us to predict the outcome. Even if there is no question that the accepted laws of physics control the coin's movements, the result cannot be known in advance. Here it is seen how even straightforward matters should really be recognized as too complex for causality to function in any practical manner. And it can also be seen how *probability* is posited as an intellectual euphemism for what is in truth a reluctance within strictly causal thinking to observe its inherent weakness as regards the true complexity surrounding us.

Given the ultimate mysteriousness and complexity of the human condition within a world where *things* and *objects* are mere conceptions of the mind, the circumspection and intellectual humility inherent to the idea of *propensity* lends it a form of worthiness absent in the much cruder notion of causality. But of course, such intellectual humility has rarely figured much amidst the human clamor to appear better informed.

Meanwhile, the tendency for all people to more or less embrace the cultural values within which they are reared is another factor confounding any causal understanding of the human mind's relationship to its wider world. Given any *culture* as a supposed single entity obviously cannot be fully defined, an inevitable muddiness arises when using any concepts such as *social conditioning* in a causal context. For obvious reasons, it is nonsense to think of *individuals* as simply being defined by their cultures. And yet the general tendency or *propensity* of people to embrace all sorts of ideas and lifestyles that in some way imitate the conduct of others around them seems indisputable.

Culture can therefore be seen as having a significant impact, whilst never defining anything in absolutist terms. But how is this idea to be framed without creating the illusion that a hugely complex situation is simple? Causality can obviously state something along the lines of *culture causes personality*, but as this is obviously way too crude, something like *culture has an influence on the individual* is more suitable. This is a more guarded position but is still simplistic inasmuch as it fails to highlight troublesome issues with defining *culture* and sums up people in general within the single word *individual*.

Taking language and thought as motive-based behaviors, what can often be seen in these sorts of discussions is the mind's desire to state something perceived as *intelligent*, amidst a

subliminal reluctance to admit the immense difficulties of accurately framing any complex issues within mere collections of words.

It should not be overlooked here that perceived academic stature is the means by which many make their living – often regardless of whether or not that perceived stature is actually grounded in anything that impartial, logical, and honest in-depth thinking would in any way substantiate. The fact is that examination of apparently credible intellectual positions often reveals them as little more than jargonized common sense concocted in pursuit of academic acclaim: intellectual esotericism designed to produce an air of knowledge exclusivity. Such ploys achieve success by simultaneously deploying and obfuscating their trickery: exploiting the individual's desire to appear *knowledgeable* by offering a means to make others feel intellectually inferior – usually with a salary as an additional enticement. But none of this does anything more commendable than to falsely portray comprehension as some inherently academic pursuit.

The politics of pretense

In terms of everything that transpires on the surface of this planet, how many identified events, happenings or phenomena can be said to have zero effect on human lives? No one can say. Our reality is one in which we simply cannot comprehend all the complexities of the overall interplay that moves reality from one moment to the next. And this is only all the truer given the process of identifying supposedly relevant *entities* or *things* framing any abstract ideas is suspect. In everyday life, we certainly like concepts such as *causality* for their convenience, but unexpected side-effects and so-called *accidents* resulting from our seemingly informed actions relentlessly demonstrate failings within our supposed understandings. Knowing this, it actually becomes an act of intelligence to determinedly address the faults of conventional thinking.

Weaknesses of our abstract models of reality exist even in the very heart of the scientific practice of isolating some part of reality to examine it via so-called *clinical experimentation*. The giveaway is the persistent presence of *experimental error* within all sorts of test results, albeit this is commonly and reflexively dismissed as merely indicative of an inability to fine tune experimental conditions.

Such dogged experimental error surely merits more attention given that it is commonplace to all areas of science. To dismiss such error is to dismiss knowledge it provides regarding an inability to achieve the detachment and exactitude that clinical approaches pretend. While the degree of such error may indeed result in part from specific experimental conditions, its effective ubiquity across all experimental results actually stems from misguided presumptions regarding how abstraction should best envisage reality. With the mind's abstract approach being founded on convenience and practicality, it too readily imagines that reality can be cordoned off into isolated chunks – even when existing scientific theory and evidence strongly suggests this is indeed impossible.

Contrary to the rigidity by which scientific ideas are often presented as hard and fast facts, experimental error reflects how the logic and exactitude within mathematics simply does not hold true when examining the physical world. If we divide nine by five the result is not a whole number, but it is nonetheless something that can be stated exactly and with zero error inside the abstract world of mathematics. But this total exactitude is far from evident within scientific experimentation; it is in fact consistently absent. Even at the sub-atomic level of particle physics, it is common to have to resort to ideas of probability – not to mention that establishing true equality among supposedly identical instances of anything is philosophically unsound. It seems that stating anything absolutely or exactly in relation to the physical world is actually to misunderstand the complexity of that world – or at least, to

misunderstand apparent complexity in relation to the human mind's limited ability to grasp it. When the uncertainty principles of quantum mechanics illustrate necessary compromises in terms of knowing the momentary state of a single particle, it is surely ridiculous to imagine that truly absolute knowledge is possible regarding anything on a grander scale. And with change being a central aspect of reality, it is only logical that the apparently static nature of factual knowledge can only access reality to the extent that such change is masked or ignored.

Failure to move towards *propensity* as a more appropriate paradigm in light of our demonstrable failings to fully comprehend reality is a failure that holds human thought and knowledge within a less enlightened state. Whereas causality can be summed up as *x causes y* – often taken to mean *x* cannot fail to bring about *y*, and sometimes that *y* requires *x* – propensity is less dogmatic and less intellectually crystalline, whilst outlining an expanded *reasoning* that can somewhat indicate change without pretending a falsely complete understanding of reality's complexity.

Importantly, because propensity reasons that conditions for any conceived results to occur may be sufficient for such results to be produced, it can predict with some reliability if such results will be seen – even in the complete absence of knowledge regarding the underlying mechanics. For example, propensity can theorize that if a certain state of affairs is possible and even just vaguely desirable, it is likely to result – provided an absence of known obstacles. Hence, even if never deliberately or consciously planned, human desires for any state of affairs will tend to convert the possible into the actual, given an unimpeded route. In principle, this is no subtler than gravity pulling water to its lowest available level – even if the complexities of many human situations may be taxing to the point of being wholly incomprehensible.

The core principle is nonetheless simple: an identified force is acting without observable opposition. Of note in this area is that for all gravity itself is utterly taken for granted and well understood from a practical point of view, it remains a topic of heated debate within physics. Interestingly, it seems we do not need to theoretically understand or explain anything at all in order to observe its nature and understand it from a pragmatic perspective, and this is arguably the true basis of meaningful human knowledge. For example, the first civilizations to master fire had no need to understand the modern idea that the heat which creates fire is a result of friction increasing the energy levels of atoms.

Being devoid of the now-traditional scientific demand for hard proof, the *propensity* approach has ramifications for theorizing, inasmuch as rather than following causality's traditional approach in which specific causes and effects need identification, we can reason loosely that, for example, the usefulness to those in power of a submissive and divided population will of itself tend to create such a population in the absence of any serious opposition. Exactly how such a situation might come into existence can be considered as an impossibly complex and unfathomable issue, but nonetheless explicable inasmuch as there exists a persistent force in one direction that faces no known opposing force. The result in this example is of course manifest as a general and ongoing emphasis on the importance of political structure and control, as opposed to a cultural emphasis on self-determination.

Notably, although all those of competing political parties may be thoroughly convinced of their own arguments, they also act in concert – albeit somewhat unwittingly – to trick people by exploiting their common belief in political choice. In truth, such apparent *choice* only divides the people against themselves in manners that suit all who benefit from the resulting power imbalance: effectively those within the political world. Hence it can be seen that what might for discussion purposes be called the *political class* has evolved the means to protect itself by duping the electorate with supposed choice.

Protecting those of power, the potentially explosive question of why a tiny group should get to boss another much larger group is conveniently replaced by a question regarding which tiny group should do the bossing. From historical experience, this apparent *choice* provides the masses with enough belief in their opinions being heard that they in fact become largely submissive to external control in a more general sense.

Quite arguably, none of the players in these sorts of scenarios properly understands the bigger picture in which they play different parts. And it is in fact arguable that the bigger picture of all human affairs is beyond normal forms of human comprehension anyway. However, through the concept of *propensity*, and by identifying powerful and persistent forces acting within such situations, it is possible to surmise that these sorts of outcomes are all but inevitable – at least for as long as abstract thought evades any proper cultural critique that might unmask how easily it can be abused to thwart a wider awareness.

So, although it cannot be known exactly how specific results come about in such situations, it can be reasoned that anything at all that might in any way favor preferred results is likely to occur sooner or later – if only by accident – and be subsequently allowed to run its course because it will at least be seen as a *happy accident* by those who wield power. If the relevant activity faces no substantial challenges, it will be conducive to bringing about results by any number of imaginable but unknowable and highly convoluted routes.

On a wider scale, this all suggests that the unfolding course of human civilization is understood better as one of mass *societal evolution*, rather than as the collection of intentional historical events our culture would have us believe. Instead of supposed *leaders* managing the situation from on high, *societal evolution* considers us all to be far more instrumental than those supposed leaders would ever allow us to imagine. In fact, it is arguably only through the propensity of the few to pursue unlimited power and influence by any means possible that culturally dominant *tales of reality* keep this truth hidden.

Habitually using causality and other simplistic thought paradigms readily creates the illusion that certain individuals know more than they do. It also gives many a false sense of confidence in what remains an imperfect form of knowledge. But of course, as simply being effective in the achievement of specific goals is so often prioritized over any attempts to develop a wider understanding of our true condition, there has never been much concern over more *philosophical* aspects of knowledge. Thus it can be argued that the ongoing *propensity* of the human mind towards simplicity only invites unexpected problems, given its lack of circumspection and its consequential delusion that reality is better understood than it is.

In the field of politics, it can be theorized that the same propensity of those in power to gain position by any means possible actively promotes if not requires dishonest and clandestine acts – hardly a theory wildly at odds with real-world observations. For example, if power is won through claims of *furthering democracy*, the anticipated actions that might distribute power more evenly actually have to be avoided in order that power can stay in the hands of elites. Hence, we see an almost total indifference of political regimes towards easy power-sharing ideas such as using the internet to further people's say in government policy. Instead of seizing on the technology to better understand their populations' opinions and preferences, those in power have generally regarded the internet as a means to propagandize and spy on people, whilst crushing political opposition and dissent.

The problem with using a causal model to interpret such examples is that within the complex hierarchical structures of human society, it is effectively impossible to disentangle exactly how the multitude of relevant behaviors occurs – precisely because their manifestation involves gazillions of small and individually rather insignificant actions, as opposed to any

one thing *causing* another. Superficially gentle and diffuse but utterly persistent pressure from the top of a hierarchy, in the absence of significant resistance, naturally works its way down through all the ranks in manners only understandable in very general terms, given all the inherent complexity. The net result will nonetheless and quite predictably tend towards furthering the wishes of those at the top of the hierarchy. The exact details are impossible to grasp, but the principle is extremely simple once propensity replaces causality.

By dismissing the requirement for clear-cut causal explanations, all sorts of human beliefs and behaviors become more or less understandable as deeply indoctrinated ideas, or as fear-driven reactions to formalized and hierarchical authorities – our more animal-like tendencies towards copycat behaviors often being exploited as vectors of control. In countless unfathomable ways, people gently coerce the behavior of others, at the same time as they seek security by conforming to the expectations of their peer groups and supposed *superiors*. The ubiquitous presence of authoritarian structures and chains of command throughout all areas of society suggests such nebulous but powerful social forces to be hidden everywhere in plain sight.

Quite damningly, the cultural promotion of *objectivity* can be seen as a means by which insights available through more open concepts such as *propensity* are suppressed. Given political power of all shades relies on a more or less submissive public, the world of politics exhibits a generalized propensity towards sustaining and justifying perspectives that suppress such awkward truths by blocking any widening of consciousness. Hence, much of what ostensibly looks like head-to-head political debate can be seen as a rather contrived circus that mostly serves to distract and obfuscate more significant truths. And a closer look only reveals how all parties religiously avoid ever questioning the basic imposition of political governance; irrespective of which party actually wins any particular election, none of them would even exist if the political centralization of power was dismantled.

Only by rising above all the petty analyses of any given real-life political battles is it possible to understand political power's extensive psychological reach in a more general and revealing sense; the trick that has allowed all this to evolve and to be normalized involves limiting political narratives to specific details, such that individuals never develop any greater overview. It can be noted in this regard that political questions are invariably posed in terms of who should be awarded power, but *never* deal with the more elementary issue of whether or not the individual should consent to anyone at all using politics to diminish his personal autonomy.

This general perspective is perfectly well-grounded but has nonetheless gained little traction for obvious reasons. On the one hand, it is potentially revealing and hardly supportive of the means by which power is sustained within current cultures – so much so that it could even be deemed *subversive*. On the other hand, it is *not science* – at least not science that fits within the carefully patrolled boundaries of what is culturally accepted as *legitimate* – even including the nonsense of *political science*. Nonetheless, any inquiring mind can immediately note two challenging issues here.

Firstly, there is the often glossed-over fact that hierarchical structures exhibit autocratic attributes that are normally taken for granted, but that easily appear excessively authoritarian on deeper reflection. If the majority of citizens had truly and genuinely bought into society *as it is*, why would such marshaling of thoughts and behavior be necessary? The suggestion is that the authoritarian stance of those in power exists to some extent because populations are actually not as invested in the status quo as those in power generally pretend – mere acquiescence to coercion and psychological trickery hardly constituting any endorsement of anything.

Secondly, when mainstream scientific thinking is too corseted to contemplate this sort of perspective, its approach actively restricts the range of ideas that can be acceptably voiced in public. And within science's reflexive ridicule of all such non-standard perspectives as mere speculation devoid of scientific proof, it is easy to see how the resultant insistence on details and causal explanations effectively helps suppress any generalized modes of understanding that might otherwise emerge. But why would any free thinker aware of these artificial constraints not use his own critical thinking skills to examine matters for himself? It is not as if thinking within any given paradigm prohibits shifting backward and forward to other paradigms – at least, not unless the mind remains corseted within the constraints of conventional approaches.

When conventional science and the academic flavors of *the humanities* have little real substance to contribute in terms of meaningfully understanding society and its machinations, their rather pathetic one-sided attempts to get involved perhaps only reveal fears in certain quarters of what might be recognized by less tethered minds. And in terms of why all these things are so and as regards who actually benefits, it should be noted that the *scientific community* is in general far from the bottom of society's overall hierarchy.

Conspiracy theories without conspiracies

Within the perspective of *propensity*, the ideas of so-called *conspiracy theories* can look a lot less ridiculous than they are commonly painted.

As an example, certain attitudes towards *capitalism* can illustrate how this pans out. The common conspiracy theory in this area sees *capitalism* as basically a plot to use money as the means of suppressing the ordinary people of this world: an idea often mocked by the challenge that this infers some small cabal meeting in secret to plan all sorts of dastardly deeds that are then visited on the rest of us. But without inferring that this is a totally nonsensical idea, it can be seen that many people who may even be consciously opposed to the ideology of capitalism are nonetheless to some extent complicit in the very vices they commonly attribute to it. Via the concept of *propensity*, it can be envisaged that the current order is sustained not only by a minority of *capitalist oligarchs* but also by endless small acts undertaken by others – albeit perhaps unwittingly – that more or less support the supposedly *capitalist* status quo.

Notably, there is no single identified *cause* within this view of the supposed *capitalism* or its results. Annoying as it may appear to dogmatic and theoretical minds, the reality commonly described glibly as just *capitalism* actually looks disarmingly complex in manners that no earnest attempt to understand the matter should gloss over. Even the idea that the label *capitalism* might be an appropriate description can be seen as just another *tale of reality* within a world that never conforms to the simplicity of such abstract ideas.

However, even when thinking from within the conventional *tale of capitalism*, the almost universal pursuit of money can be seen as maintaining norms by which even those consciously opposed to capitalism are made to feel they have little choice but to act in manners that actually support it. The conspiracy theory only appears wacky due to its unjustified simplicity. Nonetheless, its core idea that money is used to control people is arguably even truer than the conspiracy theory itself states – the propensities of all involved far outweighing anything a small cabal of oligarchs could ever manage.

Note that the concern here is not really with any description or definition of whatever *capitalism* might really be; it is an overview of why any situation that might be discussed using that concept – or any other concept of the same ilk – will so thoroughly evade even the most extensive attempts to accurately frame it. By extension, conspiracy theories often tend

to sound ridiculous only because they overlook the complexity within whatever they describe; broad social reality can never be understood by focusing on the motivations of just a few people.

Not so dissimilarly, it is also arguable that ideas summed up collectively as *left-wing* are in fact a collection of failed attempts to intellectually frame the undesirable excesses of formalized power structures. Be they churches, governments, corporations, or anything else, all such structures exhibit propensities to misuse their powers in relation to the supposed justifications for granting such powers. Even in the absence of exact explanations regarding how such institutions function, they can be reasoned as prone to abuse of power, given that they are invariably headed up by those who most actively pursue power as an end in itself, as opposed to those who have merely had it conferred on them. This is a truth that so-called *left-wing* thinkers have evidently missed or been scared to voice.

With grass-roots left-wing movements having so often been of an essentially political nature rather than an academic one, they have often targeted intellectual credence by hijacking academic models of society – possibly rather carelessly on occasion. Hence, they readily fail to properly recognize the implications of academia itself being a hierarchical structure of a tacitly authoritarian mindset. Left-wingers' credibility has thereby been at the mercy of whatever weaknesses they imported when they adopted intellectual models to justify their positions – at the same time as academia has generally had a certain interest in not questioning either the flaws of abstract thought or the legitimacy of authoritarian ideas.

It is therefore arguable that from the crude and dubious notion of *social class* to the elusive feminist concept of *the patriarchy*, all the left's various objections to what can crudely be described as *right-wing excesses* have so far failed to pinpoint accurately what in truth the would-be revolutionary is up against. And the situation has hardly been helped by an unthinking and reflexive assumption that removing one institutionalized power structure must automatically require its replacement by another such structure – a mindset underpinning a permanent propensity for humans to structurally exploit others regardless of all other changes. Hence, left-wing parties and movements have often drifted away from core principles as they gained traction and have on occasion even morphed into something that in terms of political power was more or less as autocratic as whatever they sought to oust.

The notion that formalized hierarchical structures – regardless of their professed doctrines or ideologies – are of themselves root sources of social problems has rarely if ever been hashed out. But given our current cultures, we could be confident such a notion would gain little traction if it were. And this is so, even if the generalized unwillingness to merely examine any such idea can be seen as direct evidence of how rigidly minds are enslaved to authoritarian models of society. The idea that a wholly different approach to human cohabitation is possible is one that appears utterly ridiculous to most minds – but not because there is any evidence that any such approach has ever been tested and failed. The real obstacle is that the very existence of authorities and power structures stands intrinsically opposed to such an idea – effectively leaving it entirely missing from cultural debate.

It is nonetheless only by suspending the learned preoccupation with culture's distracting details that the mind can open itself to new ways of seeing the world and society: views that better suggest why human societal evolution has so far been embroiled in division, oppression and bloody conflict. The idea that we are so inherently divided by nature turns out not so hard to debunk if one is prepared to dig into key areas typically skirted by mainstream thinking. One such area concerns the psychological mechanics that define and sustain social groups as we currently know them.

Instead of being tied to the basic idea that defined social groups exist in partial or complete opposition to one another, each social group itself can be seen as embodying its own internal divisions and tensions – no matter how united it may seek to appear. In fact, the promotion of doctrine within any group can be seen as the effort of those in power to suppress internal difference and reinforce the hierarchical nature of the group in the face of competing forces. But any group remains ultimately composed of individuals with all the endless idiosyncrasies that individuals embody, and this poses a constant threat that hierarchical power invariably seeks to suppress. The danger for those in charge is that the group might more or less disintegrate in relation to levels of freedom it tolerates for its members. Conversely, the group appears stronger to the extent that an autocratic approach suppresses personal choice and freedom of expression. And it matters little which ideology any particular group ostensibly pursues; the centralization of power at its head is almost impossible to differentiate from the authoritarian stance it adopts.

Beneath whatever flowery intellectual façade any group may employ to present itself in a good light, it can be seen in less highbrow manners as actually being rather tribal. Albeit composed of individuals, the strategy of all power structures is to subjugate individuality and promote conformity and obedience. Critical thinking, other than at the head of the group, is every hierarchical group's anathema. Hence, for anyone not somewhat blinded with concepts of unthinking duty and mindless obedience-to-authority, there is little to commend such a state of affairs, even if the daily presentation of all this might appear far more benign.

Whether or not one imagines new insights are possible as regards how individuals might better relate to one another and society in general, it is surely naïve to think the complexities of society can be grasped by pigeon-holing the endless thoughts, behaviors and motivations of huge numbers of people into hierarchically structured groups – an intellectual strategy that should only embarrass any serious thinker. As regards the individual, the idea of surrendering one's freedom to the doctrines and diktats of any such structure is logically one in which the excesses of those who hold sway within that structure are more or less enabled – at the same time as one's self-determination is diminished. Hence, unqualified subservience to others should surely be seen as a manifestation of personal weakness and surrender.

The tribalism that underlies formalized human hierarchies may have served us throughout our evolution in terms of combating environmental threats and, more destructively, in terms of specific human groups vanquishing others. But within our current era, the main threats we face arguably result from a failure to realize how that same tribalism has morphed to create dangerous and monstrously powerful human structures – complete with associated ideologies that only cripple the mind's potential to understand any of this.

Any effort to honestly and uncompromisingly examine this situation and to transcend its shortcomings will certainly not be aided by those of conservative outlooks who lack the courage and intellectual integrity to simply be honest about the precarious results – widespread indifference to pressing problems included.

6 – Beyond Objectivity

The inability of abstract thought to pinpoint *what reality itself is made of* invites the mind to invent endless concepts to meet its immediate ends. Such inventiveness has likely been ongoing within human cultures since language evolved, having progressively birthed the many nouns now filling our dictionaries. Hence, the ambitious scientist is one who dreams of discovering *something new* – of making observations that call for new concepts and theories that construct yet another *tale of reality*. But however confident we become in discussing the nature of the world and our experiences of it, the very idea that reality is made of anything at all is a mere presumption, given that the abstract knowledge formulating any concept appears as something merely useful, rather than anything of philosophical perfection.

For example, the human mind invented or evolved the idea of the *nation-state*, and human cultures have for a long time been busy convincing us all that the world is composed of such nations. But although the concept of *nation* has certainly proven very useful for many purposes, is there any sense in which nations exist beyond the mass conviction that they do – including the effects of that mass conviction? Within a rather circular process, the generalized belief that nations really do exist can be seen as nothing more than the result of actions based on that mass conviction – much as populations once acted from convictions in strange gods we now consider the stuff of *mythology*.

But none of this is to diminish the impact of such convictions. *Nation*, as an almost universally adopted concept, leaves little option but to conform to all sorts of demands its supposed representatives impose on everyone – whether they accept the concept or not. However, asked of what any nation consists, even the most ardent supporters of nationalism can only trot out an extended list of human behaviors such as drawing lines on a map, drawing up official texts, making and waving flags, singing anthems, reading history books, and conforming to many other *national* norms including believing in the legitimacy of *national* governments, institutions, laws, courts, police forces, armies and so forth. The list of beliefs and related behaviors may be effectively endless – national concepts begetting other national concepts – but beliefs remain mere beliefs. Nations nonetheless *feel utterly real* because the concept comprehensively influences so much thinking and the behavior of so many. Consequently, denying the existence of any or all nations is in effect ridiculing certain aspects of how billions of people conduct themselves on a daily basis. And given we remain social animals in search of social validation, there are few who dare mount serious philosophical challenges to accepted and socially pervasive concepts such as *nation*; doubting the gods of ancient mythology was no doubt once a similarly risky business. But how can anyone properly separate the supposed *real existence* of anything from their personal conviction of its existence, given all ideas can ultimately be reduced to mere *tales of reality*? In spite of our blanket consensus over the existence of many things, belief in the existence of anything at all reveals itself as nothing more than opinion – albeit an opinion that may be almost universally shared.

In terms of nations *really existing*, the idea is ultimately no more sound than arguing for a god on the basis that many people fill halls, act out various rituals in line with whatever religious doctrine promotes that god, and generally arrange their lives around the related beliefs. Non-critical minds may reflexively fall in line with whatever is socially adopted, but no amount of conformity or consensus validates that which thereby becomes socially accepted and generally believed.

Conviction, however deep and extensive, is no argument in itself for whatever minds are thereby convinced of – as proven many times by people’s ability to be thoroughly convinced

of nonsense.

Nation, as a concept, is also an excellent example of how abstract thought is deployed primarily to achieve ends, it being one of the most effective concepts ever seen for marshaling human thought and behavior. Our entire global population is at least psychologically divided into supposed nations – a testimony to the sheer power of mere ideas. And of course, no matter how dubious any concept such as *nation* may appear once it is stripped of consensual belief, it remains a cultural marker by which most people habitually frame much of their thinking.

The same flimsiness behind the cultural propagation of ideas can of course be applied to all *things or supposed objects* inasmuch as, for all human inquiry may have probed multiple areas, we have still not identified any *essential building bricks* of reality that correspond to any of our concepts. Having in effect battled this philosophical problem since the dawn of abstract thought, the human mind has literally just *made stuff up* to suit its ends. Hence it can be seen that, although all *things* are ultimately mere inventions of the mind, we tend to believe in their *real existence* largely because others do – it being socially awkward to challenge whatever is commonly accepted.

Our ever-expanding dictionary of nouns does not represent an ever-expanding reality, but just more and more concepts to be used within more and more *tales of reality* that, in total, arguably leave our cultures less well placed to understand life and reality in a beneficially wholesome manner. As one example amidst countless others, *cognitive dissonance* presumably did not create a new *real-world* psychological phenomenon when the term was first conceived, but it did create a new concept within the growing convolution of psychological debate. Meanwhile, concepts such as *entropy* are used widely across various disciplines without anyone being able to define what they might really be in terms of anything – or *any thing* – that actually exists. Endless other concepts perform different roles throughout abstract thinking, but no solid proof indicates that any of them correspond to anything finite and properly delineated outside the mind. The suggestion can even be made that *the expert's* penchant for trickier and more obscure concepts actively aims to confound and exploit the naivety or lack of knowledge of others – making them look and feel intellectually inferior if they do not spot his ruse.

This general trend across all areas of culture to continually expand and refine our conceptual models of reality is arguably one that is not as honorable as it might at first appear, detracting as it does from a more balanced and inclusive sensory awareness of immediate circumstances, and dwelling instead on intellectual perspectives that generally overrate the value of abstract thought.

In this sense, all our *tales of reality* rely on a tacit belief that understanding reality is best addressed through abstraction – a worryingly narrow-sighted position when stated so frankly. Such an approach would nonetheless be sound if it could be established that concepts represent *things that exist* – an issue that turns on the very notion of what *existence* itself might be. The common position in this area is of course that the world is indeed somehow *made of things*, even if we are obviously capable of having developed ideas of other things generally considered to not exist, such as fairies, ghosts and devils. Hence this part of the discussion focuses on what the concept of *existence* might truly signify, rather than with the relationship between conceptualization and reality – and somewhat irrespective of whether or not anything conceived includes the quality of existence.

In terms of *bits of reality*, even science's sub-atomic particles do not appear as fundamental building bricks – apparently being just the most minute manifestations so far conceived

within abstract thought's attempts to make some sense of experimental observations. Notably, such observations and their interpretations only seem to raise more questions than they answer. And yet, even such supposed *particles* – obviously individually invisible to the eye and effectively just inferred from theory – are to be found represented graphically in textbooks as little colored spheres – all as if someone knew what they might actually look like. Here again, we have more *tales of reality* – this time complete with pictures – conceived to meet certain social goals at the expense of understanding the mind and its motives for creating and promoting such tales. Given that no one has seen these supposed *particles*, why is anyone drawing them, other than to promote some preconceived idea of what that sub-atomic world might be like, were it not in fact invisible to all intents and purposes. Again, as is the case in so much science, the human mind's inventiveness is largely dismissed as a variable within a perspective that imagines all truth is somehow *out there* and knowable through set methods of inquiry.

But if we cannot discover any basic building blocks of reality at such a sub-atomic level, it would seem fair to suggest we cannot find them at any level at all – especially in light of the common idea that all *things* are made of atoms or their component parts. Hence it is delusional to think that we properly know reality's composition, and the common position that we do should be seen as unwarranted – being founded as it is on endless *interpretations* or *tales of reality* endorsed for purely practical purposes.

What are our many fields of *knowledge* other than a multitude of different ways of interpreting and remodeling reality within the conceptual world of abstract ideas? Moreover, the idea that reality is made of anything at all is itself just an assumption based on common ideas such as trees being made of wood or ice being made of water. The truth of any supposed reality *out there* is that we seemingly cannot know it directly, or of what it might consist – and so it is foolish not to highlight the mind as the intractable link in every attempt to understand it. It may be false to state that *all is mind*, but it also seems false to imagine that we can know anything about anything in the absence of mind.

This illustrates how the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity is ultimately false. Nothing at all becomes consciously known to us other than whatever in some way traverses the mind. Thus, the idea the world exists independently of our perception of it is just an assumption and, much as that assumption may be a universal and arguably legitimate idea, we cannot really know anything at all of what we have not personally experienced. The apparently *objective* view of reality therefore reduces to just a collection of subjectively assimilated *tales of reality* retold by others.

Strict objectivity is also questionable on the basis that no two observers can have identical observations. It may well be that they agree to have observed *the same thing*, but their actual observations will necessarily be different if only because they occupy different positions: a simple truth that the world of physics agonized over at great length, only to eventually accept obliquely as *relativity*. Hence, not only can all experience of reality be seen as essentially subjective, but it can therefore be reasoned that identical experiences are actually impossible: another curiosity glossed over within the convenience of everyday thinking.

Even within the idea that two people can observe *the same thing* lies another instance of the unjustified assumption that reality is made of *things*. The idea for example that a car crash is *a thing* as a single identifiable entity or *event* does not stack up on inspection. However well anyone tries to define such a supposed *thing*, no inherent start or endpoint that might delimit such a thing can be unequivocally identified in either time or space. Hence, much as many minds might be happy to conjure up their own particular verbal definitions, these should all be seen as more or less failed attempts to establish the *thing* that *the car crash* supposedly *is* –

all in the absence of any proof that dividing reality into *things* is anything more than just another convenience of human thought.

Looking at reality as a total, singular, ongoing, indivisible and incomprehensibly complex motion, or as a paradoxically-sounding *state-of-change*, there is actually no rational justification at all for objectivity's vision of a world populated by *things*, objects or even events, other than the convenience such a vision offers human thought and communication. The concept of any discrete *thing* implies both a naturally occurring delimitation and one or more enduring attributes to delineate the supposed *thing* from the rest of reality. But none of these has been reliably identified anywhere within our current understanding of reality. Other than mere convenience, there is no reason at all not to envisage reality as one utterly connected whole. Abstract thought may populate it extensively with *things*, but is that the reality outside of abstract thought?

Even the concept of *change* can only be understood in relation to the dubious concept of *the unchanging* – change *in itself* arguably being logically indefinable but universal. The fact is that across space and time, and even within the dubious idea of space-time, there is no evidence that any truly discrete *things* exist anywhere – however static and isolated so-called *events* or other apparent *bits of reality* may temporarily appear to the mind.

But it can be noticed in the passing that the linguistic and cultural embodiment of *objectivity* as an impersonal world composed of objects and events, is so thorough that it is actually impossible to discuss any competing ideas without indirectly reinforcing the same basic idea that our understood world of objects and events is indeed *real*. The very presence of nouns within a sentence presumes objectivity and is basically at odds with the concept of a *non-objective reality*: a *tale of reality* in which objects and events truly are nothing more than illusory artifacts of cognitive abstraction.

In terms of understanding where this all leads, a replacement concept of an utterly connected universe is maybe as close as the abstract mind can get – even if this is just one more conceptualization produced by thought. All such thinking tilts at the idea of a *thingless universe* – a concept that takes our conventional things-plus-relationships approach to its logical conclusion, if it be considered that the *things* aspect of that approach is just an artifact of the abstract mind's processing of reality, rather than any reliable indicator of what that reality *really is*. From such a position, the universe may be infinitely varied, but is nonetheless only divided within the rather pathetic illusions of the human mind. As regards supposed *relationships* between *supposed* things, these are obviously necessary for the mind's model to work at all if we accept that nothing truly discrete has ever been identified. The relationships component within conventional thinking can even be seen as more evidence that a model based on discrete objects is inherently at odds with the reality it attempts to model.

By conventional models of gravity alone – a force considered to extend infinitely in all directions – any gravitational change anywhere must affect the entire universe. Therefore, given the universe's constant motion, the idea that anything – or any *thing* – exists discretely looks pretty ridiculous. This at least is the case for what we think of as *physical* reality. In a related manner, it also appears logically misguided to talk of any *single change* or *event* as though such a *supposed event could be a discrete thing*, or somehow occur or exist in isolation from the constant spatial and temporal change around it.

In the passing, there emerges a hint of just how constrained and illogical everyday language can be – *constant change* in the above idea being an oxymoron that, like so much language, proves nonetheless useful, given language's prioritization of communication goals over the

impossibility of accurately modeling reality.

By simply combining the popular scientific understanding of gravity with basic logic, it would appear that change anywhere must entail change everywhere. Therefore, the concept of *a state* – as in anything of a physical nature that endures unchanged through time – must logically be nothing more than another useful illusion. In short, even by our conventional beliefs in a universe of more or less discrete objects and events within otherwise static conditions, we can deduce that such beliefs are paradoxical.

A final defense of abstract thought's rigid framing of the world may be that certain aspects or essences endure as discrete qualities, quantities, or *things* in the face of whatever else changes. For example, it may be argued that an electron has a certain charge that remains constant despite its movement. Or perhaps it might be thought that the total mass of water on our planet remains more or less constant despite any vaporization, precipitation, thawing or freezing – chemical reactions notwithstanding. But such ideas of unchanged phenomena and continuity appear to be just more projections of the mind. The charge of an electron is a *tale of reality* – a mere theory deduced from the interaction between that electron and its surrounding environment. The mass of Earth's water is likewise a derived idea serving certain intellectual purposes. Neither is directly observable by any means, even if certain observations are theoretically attributed to them.

But there is no reason why the mind cannot retain all its everyday ideas about an objective world for the utilitarian purposes such ideas serve, whilst simultaneously expanding its overall vision to consider that it ultimately inhabits what appears to be a *non-object-based universe*. Such an approach offers the potential to reunite the objective thought paradigm and its worldly vision with subjectivity and the deeper insights of philosophy – all in manners that could increase the overall value of human abstract thought by removing its long-standing paradoxes and problematic excesses.

What is on offer from such an approach is a marriage between objectivity and subjectivity, as opposed to the current conflict between the two. It is in any case unquestionable that human evolution has created a situation in which, regardless of all academic bias towards objectivity, both perspectives play massive roles in every individual's thoughts. However, minds indoctrinated to some supposed superiority of objectivity can reflexively feel incredulity if its overarching legitimacy is questioned in any manner whatsoever. And the cultural disdain of philosophy in general only serves to support such incredulity via a mocking resistance to philosophically derived visions of anything at all. Such is the closed-mind nature of culture's current *wisdom*.

One immediate lesson for the *non-object-based* idea is how habitually the mind can self-confine itself within its abstract model of objectivity – apparently failing to recognize this to be a self-limiting approach. Such a constraint can serve as yet more evidence that we pursue abstract knowledge for goals other than gaining a true *understanding* of reality – as if more evidence was required. And although it would be ludicrous to imagine abstract thought evolved for no benefit at all, being effective in our actions based on such thought does not imply any particular depth of understanding – any more than successfully making a phone call implies an understanding of telephony.

In terms of the benefits of a *non-object-based* vision of reality, it can be noted that, although this appears to stand logically opposed to our habitual ideas that reality is *full of things*, the *non-object-based* vision does not prevent recourse to that way of thinking wherever appropriate. And in the sense that both these perspectives are ultimately just two extensive *tales of reality*, any validity within one does not negate the validity of the other – especially if

unfettered pragmatism is the measure. The overall discussion is not primarily about reality in any case, but more about the mind's faltering attempts to achieve a functionally optimal flexibility as regards understanding whatever its immediate reality might be.

Nonetheless, the *non-object-based* vision of reality most definitely does circumscribe our habitual *thing-based* or *objective* model inasmuch as it views that model as only one among at least two thought paradigms for envisaging reality – complete with certain limitations for each. The main advantage of the *non-object-based* vision is that it tempers the runaway faith normally placed in the conventional model – a runaway faith that is based on nothing more than our species' limited and somewhat perilous success with that model in the absence of anything as yet offering a complementary balance.

More becomes less

The corrective adjustment of a *non-object-based* vision of reality includes a useful reappraisal of what conventional objective knowledge represents. When the popular view promoted by everyday ideas – and science in particular – is the simple idea that ignorance is diminished via factual knowledge, the *non-object-based* vision introduces a balancing notion that the situation is in fact quite different. Conventional knowledge has long been believed to be inherently sound, with the main challenge being simply to amass more of it, but from within the *non-object-based* vision, such knowledge is no longer seen as inherently sound, but in need of circumspection as regards its unjustified assumptions and related misunderstandings.

This goes hand-in-hand with a potential realignment of how human thought itself might be best understood, as well as a more nuanced position regarding its weaknesses. If thought-based knowledge is primarily of a utilitarian value, it can be reasoned that weaknesses within that knowledge have never been seen as problems *in themselves*. For example, a lack of knowledge about the full effects of burning fossil fuels would never have bothered the species were it not that some of those effects now confront us as tangible problems. In general, only when our ideas appear problematic – or at least less useful than we first imagined – do we begin to re-examine them.

The fossil fuels situation demonstrates how it is inherently foolhardy to deploy a utilitarian form of knowledge that, because it has no interest other than achieving specific goals, simply disregards whatever is of no immediate interest. On reflection, it becomes obvious that relying exclusively on such an approach means problems will only be identified through their eventual manifestation, rather than being preempted and avoided by a deeper understanding of abstraction's limitations.

More generally, all sorts of human activities logically have effects that we are unaware of. But for the most part, our species remains uninterested in even postulating what those effects might be prior to their appearance. Nonetheless, compared to a *thingless* model of reality, all our conventional thoughts, knowledge and believed *things*, actually appear like some sort of self-centered distortion – one extremely elaborate *tale of reality* in which humans take center stage and happily disregard whatever appears irrelevant or beyond their own narrow interests. The implication is that the conventional *thing-based* model of reality – just like abstract thought itself – actually offers quite a poor representation of our true condition, but nonetheless enjoys widespread acceptance simply because it achieves immediate goals. However, in the face of a growing number of ominous signs within the modern age, such indifference is looking less and less like an informed and responsible position.

As a consequence of our generally meddling approach to the world, we are now faced with problems unforeseen when the activities behind such problems were instigated. A short list includes numerous forms of organized inhumanity, the potential for nuclear or other

global annihilation, and collapsing biodiversity amidst an increasingly toxic planet – with much of this sorry list also being tied to socially-corrosive factionalism in religious, political, national and other ideological matters. Meanwhile, within affluent populations that enjoy *success* by conventional standards, significant numbers struggle with various mental and physical conditions that appear unique to our modern age. Arguably stemming from a lack of meaningful challenges or just from plain boredom, a few have even taken to attacking and killing random strangers as a form of entertainment. Any alien would justifiably see all this as a species-gone-mad, and an increasing number of humans are inclined to more or less agree. Hence, the almost unvoiced idea that conventional knowledge together with the behaviors it elicits is awry and therefore leads to multiple unforeseen downsides is not short of evidence.

However, familiarity with the many man-made problems of this world is a problem in itself, inasmuch as they become culturally normalized and are thereby seen as somewhat endemic – as opposed to being matters deserving of corrective attention. Some of the sillier but nonetheless popular *tales of reality* include that we are an inherently exploitative and divided species and are in effect just too stupid to evolve beyond all this troublesome development. And almost as if to confirm such idiocy, this blanket cynicism is often tacitly endorsed as some high form of *knowledge* – even as it is so obviously blind to its own self-fulfilling destructiveness. For some, it even seems that *explaining* our dilemma as *inevitable* appeals on the basis they can then avoid *wasting time* trying to avert our apparently inevitable demise. That such a position can pass for some form of *wisdom* only further crystallizes the idea that our conventional views are highly problematic for our very survival.

By many culturally normalized ideas it could most definitely be said that we are doomed indeed – but notably, only by the seemingly intractable conviction that it is so. Collectively, we are certainly struggling to move forward on many cultural fronts – even if the obstacles are of our own making and should therefore be simple to overcome. But all sorts of academics review human history and imagine that it somehow reflects innate and inexorable aspects of human behavior and thought: a position ironically in complete contradiction with basic principles of evolution in which adaptive *modifications* are the very mechanisms by which a species mutates to overcome whatever challenges it faces. And notably, there is no evolutionary principle that excludes modes of cognition from that process of adaptation. If our unique form of cognitive abstraction is indeed an embryonic evolutionary development, we should be open to the idea that it has yet to fully mature. But in an unwitting demonstration of current thinking's immaturity, many cling to thought paradigms that never entertain such ideas, and thereby actively inhibit the required evolution of human thought.

The notion our current thought paradigm might be an integral part of the problems we currently face – as well as a set of confines from which beneficial transcendence might be desirable – is thoroughly excluded from contemporary ideas. When the foundations of conventional thinking have been shaken by *weird* scientific revelations that leave reality looking quite counter-intuitive in relation to everyday ideas, the deeper implications of those revelations in terms of abstraction's delusions remain sadly ignored. We seem to be clinging to conventional *tales of reality* complete with obvious signs that they do not properly grasp the nature of the reality they seek to describe.

Absolutist ideas are increasingly revealed as dubious at best; measurement has been shown to be mere comparison; time arguably evades scientific explanations; no fundamental building blocks for reality have been discovered; concepts and *things* are only invented for cognitive convenience rather than because their existence is proven; theories and systems are only mental emanations; and even our most intuitive ideas of logic can be undermined. On every

front it would appear reality ultimately eludes our current cognitive approaches: a realization that surely calls for questions to be asked, however big and uncomfortable they may seem.

Divided together

If our conscious understanding of reality is to be examined from any perspective at all, surely the individual is the most natural starting point. We may regard atoms, cells, the brain, society, nations, the species, or even the entire cosmos as relevant concepts for different types of inquiry, but in relation to *thought itself*, the subject matter seems to naturally resolve to each one of us as regards fencing off whatever mind is and how it operates. Given we seem incapable of directly accessing the consciousness of others but are able to entertain any number of elaborate *tales of reality* within our own minds, thought appears fundamentally framed at the level of the individual – at least as regards any specific content. Despite our sophisticated means of communicating and sharing knowledge – as well as configuring so-called *artificial intelligence* – the functioning of conscious thought appears impossible outside the mind, or in between minds. Hence, even if the *self* can be reasoned to be an illusion, it is nonetheless a convincing one of some import as regards thought and consciousness in general.

Ironically, the logic of framing thought at the level of the individual is easier to grasp in relation to non-human species. The observed behavior of individuals within flocks, herds and packs is generally easy to understand as strengthening and protecting both the individual and the overall group. In contrast, the complexity of human societies is so developed that it is not immediately obvious why for example, a politician may apparently speak in the interests of millions of people he will never even meet. And of arguably greater obscurity is the fact that our physicists interest themselves in what they imagine to be happening billions of light years away, or that archaeologists seek to piece together the lifestyles of people who died thousands of years ago. What motivates such apparently fruitless activities?

The first thing to notice here is that, unlike other species, the human race is now divided into politicians, physicists, archaeologists and so forth – or at least, that is the way conventional ideas have trained us to view and deal with our situation. Within our technologically evolved and highly complex human communities, endless different roles place different expectations on whoever fills those roles, at the same time as living outside *the resulting social structures* has been rendered all but impossible.

The apparently very varied motives of today's humans can nonetheless be seen as not so different from those of other species inasmuch as they seek to protect themselves within a society that appears to offer a degree of such protection in exchange for playing accepted social roles. The ostensibly *animal* means of establishing social position within *the herd* are arguably just as prominent within human societies – if indeed the two paradigms are considered much different once the veneer of modern and highly convoluted human civilization is lifted. Social position in both situations is effectively about knowing where one fits within the hierarchy and generally behaving accordingly – even if human culture has progressively complicated the means by which hierarchical structures are constructed and operate.

Basic questions regarding human thought and motives can nonetheless be somewhat explained by reference to the behavior of other species, despite their lacking our developed form of thought. For example, although opting for a specific job or career obviously creates specific expectations in terms of fulfilling that particular role, social behavior in general remains a matter of pursuing social standing by conforming to group expectations in the constant knowledge that non-conformity risks social ostracizing. In this respect the politician, the physicist and the archaeologist are not so different from one another – and

maybe far more like the dog, horse or bird than they might care to realize.

It appears that, much as the evolution of abstract thought might have had a massively visible impact on the physical world and how we humans conduct ourselves within that world, our underlying motives and instincts are little changed. Is this any surprise given we are still organic beings trying to secure our survival amidst a precarious world?

The particular *tales of reality* each human espouses only look so different by virtue of the differences in individuals' assumed societal roles and identities. The resulting illusion of separation is nonetheless convincing. Even just within the world of politics, reality itself is consciously understood by many different and widely varying narratives and ideologies – all the way from the survival-of-the-fittest thinking hijacked by proponents of *capitalism*, to the class-war ideas of *anti-capitalists* – not forgetting the *unthinking thinking* of nationalism, the many framings of intersectional feminism, or the various end-of-the-world perspectives found everywhere from theistic absolutism to anthropocentric fatalism. And this of course is hardly a complete list.

Given this principle extends into many other societal areas, it becomes obvious that however poorly it may be recognized, any vision of human knowledge as some sort of grand singular edifice in which the building blocks all fit snugly together is actually nonsense. Instead, the sum of our supposed *knowledge* is truly a collection of *tales of reality* that are more or less disconnected from one another, but that nonetheless manage to somehow coalesce – presumably because there is limited interest in confronting all the underlying confusion. It is even arguable that one of the great disservices of the *objective* or *scientific* outlook has been to obscure this reality by effectively rejecting everything that fails to achieve consensus or otherwise becomes accepted as *objectively true*. But on closer inspection, not even conventional objectivity's carefully policed form of knowledge turns out to be a tidy arrangement.

While clashes within politics and religion are highly visible inasmuch as people's emotions and daily lives can be impacted, a great number of more philosophical disconnects are lost within a sort of tunnel-vision created by the multiple specialisms of modern *science*. The physiologist, nutritionist, sociologist, psychologist, psychiatrist, economist, statistician and others, can all examine human behavior through different lenses, observe different aspects of humanity, and supposedly *explain* whatever peculiarities they observe through their different perspectives. But does this really look like a coherent approach – not to mention that theologians and politicians also have their two cents to throw in? In terms of motives and how human thinking operates, this situation perhaps tells us more about the *professional* individual's interest in conforming with the social expectations of his peer group than it does about any supposed joined-up-thinking as regards our heaving mountains of factual but ultimately disconnected and often contradictory knowledge. It is in fact arguable that without common biological goals that keep us all pulling in basically the same direction, the underlying confusion of modern human culture and its ideas would only render life impossible.

Can the human condition really be understood amidst an explosion of diverse forms of abstraction across multiple more or less independent disciplines? Or is the current proliferation of so many fragmented *tales of reality* within varied scientific and cultural spheres not bound to engender battles when trying to make sense of matters *as a whole*? The situation is in any case that most science is technically over the heads of most people, whilst political and religious beliefs only invoke intransigence in proportion to the conviction with which those beliefs are held.

Consequently, we generally ignore others who think differently, or reflexively argue with them and thereby kill any opportunity to understand the logically bizarre fact that we see things so differently when we are actually fellow humans living within one and the same world. If our abstract knowledge really renders us the smartest species on the planet, it is arguably only because we top a class in which we are in fact the only pupil to develop the related cognitive skills. However, by the same reasoning, we are also the class dunce.

Nothing of this evolutionary aberration is a surprise considering the endless delusions naturally resulting from *objective* thinking being so widespread within what actually could be a *non-objective* reality. From such a perspective, all these apparently profound differences in outlooks, ideologies, worldly-explanations and scientific theories, reduce to nothing more than abstract constructs that different minds embrace to meet different social ends. Within a threatening world, safely fitting into some corner of society remains more appealing than raking over the confusion within that world or trying to resolve what appear to be otherwise intractable points of disagreement. The theist and the atheist for example, are arguably both too wrapped up in their own preferred perspectives to realize that they are exactly that: too wrapped up in their own perspectives to understand why they differ. Does either of them really know if a god exists or not? Moreover, have they even agreed about whatever the god that they argue about might be – regardless of issues of existence? Or are they too busy promoting and reaffirming some inflexible idea of who they are, who they think they are, or who they want others to believe them to be? Not so dissimilarly, the scientific mind rarely questions the validity of the core scientific doctrine it follows, and it is also far less inclined to question the social credibility thereby afforded.

However, unlike religion and politics, there is an eerie absence of voices challenging anything within the cultural ascendancy of the scientific outlook. So saturated are modern cultures in the apparent value and technological powers of science that there is effectively no meaningful discussion evaluating the monstrous global enterprise it now represents, or whether it is really in our best long-term interests as a species.

Probably more than any other field of human thought, science in its many incarnations relies on the continued conceptualization of more and more abstract *things*. From the *subatomic* to the *subconscious*, it is obvious that the *objective* or *scientific* approach to knowledge leads the mind yet further away from any wholesome, *non-objective* or *subjective* vision of reality – an inevitability given that all science ultimately reduces to nothing more than yet more *tales of reality* populated by whatever its story-tellers invent.

INTERLUDE: The Deities Diaries

Tonight's episode – Capitalist Cunts On High - Leftist Loonies On Low - featuring:

- His Ungodly Greedy Highness (model OBZO with micro-soul) - aka *Hugh The Bozo* or *Shuggy*
- Big Omnipotent Arrogant Bastard - aka *Mental Boab* or *Zobo*
- Special guest: Her Bountiful Excellency Rhamnusia The Apparitional - aka *Big Bertha*, who does not actually appear in this episode
- Also not appearing: a guy called *Charley* – some stupid fucker with an education

Way back in the days of black and white...

Shuggy: So, run this by me again.

Zobo: Yeah, it's about this guy called Charley; creating quite a stir he is - way down on that Earth place. He's got the workers all fired up. Wrote some big fancy texts telling them they were all being ripped off or something.

Shuggy: And they're listening?

Zobo: Sure. That's the problem. Basically, he's on to us.

Shuggy: Oh, fuck off. You're winding me up. He's just a human. They're all stupid fuckers.

Zobo: Maybe. But he's a smart stupid fucker. Talks all sorts of philosophical pish. You know the kind: a head full of so much intellectual shite that no one dares admit they don't have a clue what the hell he's on about. Himself included. How do you argue with someone like that? You know, a stupid fucker with an education.

Shuggy: So, what about our own men down there? Can't they just make a fool of his ideas?

Zobo: No. It's not really about ideas. More that, for once the workers have a posh-sounding intellectual fart-bag on their side. It lets them take on our guys and look serious.

Shuggy: So, what exactly is he saying?

Zobo: Basically, the blunt truth: that the workers are getting ripped off.

Shuggy: Bastard! We've looked after his class for ages and this is how he pays us back? Who the hell gave him the right to be honest?

Zobo: Oh, he thinks people have a right to the truth.

Shuggy: Fuck me!

Zobo: He's also telling them that everyone should be *equal* – whatever that means.

Shuggy: Oh dear. This will never do.

Zobo: Something about women's rights too. No differences between them and the men.

Shuggy: What? Is he daft? We don't even have women in employment yet – at least, I don't think. What time zone are we in? Let me check... No – I didn't think so. At this stage, the women are just at home breeding more workers for us. What's is he on about?

Zobo: Beats me. I got the news from Big Bertha.

Shuggy: Ah – you've been seeing her again? You don't want to believe everything she

says. She's always looking for attention. And always from men! I'd keep my distance from her if I were you.

Zobo: But it's true anyway. I checked it out on that little Earth place myself.

Shuggy: Mmmm... But I'll bet that Bertha set a spell up or something. I tell you; anything to please the men. No doubt she'll be working inside the head of this poor Charley guy. That'll be why his head is so full of shite and he's babbling on about supporting the workers. Figure it out! They're all men! You know some women; one track minds and all. Anything to please the men. Fucks men's brains out.

Zobo: Leave her alone. Anyway, like I said, this Charley guy is actually babbling on about *equality of the sexes*, whatever that means.

Shuggy: Right. So how in the name of Almighty Money would *that* work?

Zobo: Could it be Bertha again? You don't think she's maybe gone AC/DC? Got an eye for the ladies maybe? Oh fuck off! Mind you... Two at a time... Could be interesting...

Shuggy: Nah... I think I've figured it out. There's only one way this shit stacks up. I could probably have written the script for this Charley dude myself. Imagine this – I can already hear it. Oh wow! Best keep my voice down.

“Workers of the world: you are all - every last one of you - being ripped off. Those who control the wealth of this nation and all nations have made you slaves to money. Think about it: every day you drag your tired bodies to these factories and perform back-breaking work for greedy bosses who sit at their desks and get fat on your sweat. This is insane, unjust and must be stopped. Look at your lady folk and reflect a little. Do they have to come to these factories day in, day out? Do they have to toil under a boss keeping check on them all day? Are they expected to singlehandedly bring home all the family income? Are they likely to be killed when a mine collapses, or a girder falls off a chain, or in any of a hundred other things that go wrong in the workplace? Will they die before their time because their bodies are plain exhausted from a lifetime of overwork? No! Not at all! They have privilege. They can stop for a break anytime they like. They don't have a boss continually inspecting their performance. No one makes them work at all. Listen men – for all you know they are so bored in your absence that they're 'round the back of the pig sheds with the farm boys right now. So, I say to you: now is the time of revolution. Now is the time to demand equality for men and women alike! This persecution of our sex must end! Justice for all. Let us all live as our women live. If they want the farm boy, you men should be at home enjoying some slap and tickle with the cowgirl. Isn't that what equality looks like? Equality for men is equality with women! What is not to like about such a future? Abandon these factories and their useless machinery filling and destroying our world. What do we need but the water that falls from the sky, the air that blows from the four compass points, and the food that grows in the meadow? These companies and their bosses who treat us as wage-slaves have tricked us into all this factory work for too long. Take back the land! Take back the world! These things belong to all of us. Demand equality with the womenfolk. There is nothing a woman enjoys that a man should not also enjoy. End this injustice! Stop oppressing men now! Go home and reclaim your lives”.

Zobo: You should go into acting.

Shuggy: Well I do know how these educated idiots work.

Zobo: Why am I not surprised. Just one problem with your idea though.

Shuggy: Yeah?

Zobo: That Earth place has been on a Monetarist Turbodriven conversion for thousands of years. Goes way back to long before they wrote chapter one of that holy thingy attacking our money-lender guys. Some dude with a beard already tried to object to all that, but only got himself promptly crucified: *nails of reality*, I guess. Okay - he did make a big name for himself in chapter two of their holy scribbles, but so what? We're still runnin' the show for sure! And the bottom line is nothing functions without money, and there ain't no one gonna alter that down there. Totally bombproof solution!

Shuggy: Yeah but suppose this Charley and his men don't know that. Suppose they really think they can chuck our guys out of power and ditch all the money systems too. Suppose the men really do abandon paid labor and claim this *sexual equality* thing with the women.

Zobo: You know nothing. Like I said, the fix is in good and proper. Trying to stand in the way of money down there is an absolute suicide mission. That Earth place is also on our new WringEmDry 3.4 system. That system is now installed on 496 planets and not a single one has ever found a way out in what is - let me see here - 84,000 Earth years.

Shuggy: Wow. That is impressive. But it would cost us badly just the same if they bought into all this Charley equality shite, and all those workers went home – even just for a while.

Zobo: Leave that to me. Even if we have trouble, I have a plan.

Shuggy: You do?

Zobo: Bertha! That heavenly witch can fix anything. Ain't nothin' she can't do. Wind time backward and forward. Change history after it has happened.

Shuggy: I thought *all* females could do that: change history, alter reality, and stuff like that?

Zobo: Yeah – but not like her. I tell you she's a goddess and a she-devil all in one. Totally lethal.

Shuggy: So, what you gonna do with her?

Zobo: That's none of your fuckin' business. Just a few minutes ago you told me to stay away from her.

Shuggy: Come on! Do me a favor.

Zobo: A favor? A favor! What the fuck? You think I'm one of those all-loving deities about to shower you with divine blessings? You're fucking hilarious.

Shuggy: Please...

Zobo: Please? Ooooh! S'il vous plait. Por favor. Listen matey: Yo capitalisto. Yo no comprendo your *por favor* or *pleaso* wordos. You no givo me no dinero, I no tello you fuckin' nuthin'. Ass-a-hollo stupido!

Shuggy: What's *dinero*?

Zobo: Dear Money gimme strength! Look: okay – gimme 10,000 of those new light-year travel vouchers, and I'll let you have the lowdown. Deal? I mean, I know you have them, and I sure could use them to get away for a bit; mother-in-law's comin' down sometime next millennium.

Shuggy: Well right now I don't have them on me.

Zobo: An IOU then – plus greed-indexed interest.

Shuggy: You're a robber!

Zobo: Correct. But please do skip the obsequious compliments before I vomit.

Shuggy: I'm not being obsequiousness. You really are greedy and mean-minded.

Zobo: Yeah, with an A+ honors in both, as it so happens. And your job qualifications would be exactly what ...?

Shuggy: Look I believe in sometimes being a bit reasonable.

Zobo: For fuck's sake! Keep your voice down or you'll get us all the sack. And don't even think of mentioning the word *reasonable* in front of the boss. Right! Now, what were we talking about?

Shuggy: Sorry. Your plan with Bertha.

Zobo: So, you're good for 10,000 light-year travel vouchers plus interest?

Shuggy: You really are a total cunt!

Zobo: Indeed. I'll take that as a *yes*. Now look: if this *equality* thing starts to get tricky at all, Bertha can screw about with the time dials, and retrofit the thing up so that this Charley idiot tells everyone that the equality idea is not all about the guys going home, but actually about the women going out to work just like the guys do. And that way he will actually be doing us one huge favor. Not only will we have no trouble with the guys, but we'll have the women working as wage-slaves too. Come to think of it, why even bother waiting to see what happens; I'll just get Bertha to set it up straight away. It sounds like their *civilization* – as they quaintly like to think of it – is probably ripe for the full two-sex screw-over.

Shuggy: Okay, that sure sounds like a plan the boss would like – a sort of win-win for us, and a total lose-lose for those little Earthling people. But come on! Those people would be getting thoroughly shafted from all angles. Surely we can't pull *that* off. I mean, would you fall for it?

Zobo: Maybe just for once you have a point. I suppose if those humanoid things down there have got any sort of brain at all, then even *they* might not fall for such a broad daylight scam.

Shuggy: But then, you said yourself: they're already on that WringEmDry system thingy.

Zobo: Sure. That completely clogs up common sense anywhere in the universe where it could be a threat to us up here. Reduces all beings to obedient sheep. That Charley guy must already be affected by the system to have come up with so much shite. I mean, it's not really shite. It's almost like he's actually working for us already.

Shuggy: Right. Bertha's already been doing stuff with him, I reckon.

Zobo: Fuck off! She told me she only likes other men from a distance.

Shuggy: Sure. That's what they all say.

Zobo: Anyway. Once those silly little Earthlings have their brains fried, and Bertha on top of them, I suppose they really are screwed over good and proper.

Shuggy: Well – you would know. Still – all this is not quite right. I mean, at least the guys on Earth are used to being treated like wage-slaves, but all those women are gonna get one helluva shock if they have to go to work.

Zobo: Oh, don't start! Next, you'll be telling me you have some sort of *feelings* or *principles*. How did you ever get employed here? Look you idiot: Bertha will take care of it all. I bet before you know what's happened she'll have all those women fighting the guys to get at the work. I can hear it already: *Rights for women in the workplace! Equality with*

men!

Shuggy: Oh, give over! In any case, all the work would get done too soon. With men and women working, there would never be enough work to go around.

Zobo: Holy Money in the Bank! You are one unsustainable drain on my equity! For fuck's sake, I tell you Bertha will fix it. For example, I could have her set up one of those Consumer Robot Addictive Psychology thingies. Plug that CRAP into the mix and quickly you'll find nobody can work hard enough or get enough money because all they want is endless shit that no amount of money could ever buy.

Shuggy: Still all sounds a bit ambitious to me. Suppose I bet you on the outcome and we meet back here in a couple of hundred Earth years to check the result.

Zobo: Sounds fine to me; just as long as the mother-in-law's not in town.

Shuggy: So, what exactly are you saying? That no women will be doing the household stuff anymore? Men and women will be fighting over getting screwed in the workplace?

Zobo: Well... one or two women might still be working around the house, but even they will likely be working for businesses – not like the Earth women of today who remain outside our control.

Shuggy: Well I still don't believe it can be done.

Zobo: You just wait. Those women will actually end up screaming about men trying to keep them out of the workplace. Bertha will likely swing it 'round to something like *Women's Liberation: stop female oppression!* Before you know what's happened it will be impossible for anyone to live without a job and their own personal income.

Shuggy: You really think this CRAP thing will be enough to sway entire populations into a relentless search for more money to buy stupid shit they don't need in the first place?

Zobo: Sure.

Shuggy: And Bertha won't choose instead that all her beloved men get to go home and live happily with their womenfolk?

Zobo: Never. Unlike you, she's not stupid. Prioritizing anything at all over money means instant dismissal up here. Didn't you read your contract? That rule came in when they started hiring the female deities. The guys just caved in and accepted it in return for more time off, which they never got.

Shuggy: But wait a minute. For anyone who really wants time off, why not just get fired and then have the time off?

Zobo: That's prioritizing free time over money! You'll get yourself fired for that kinda talk.

Shuggy: But what if that's what I actually want? To get fired?

Zobo: Great! I'll call the boss right away. But you do realize you'll have no money? How you gonna live?

Shuggy: I don't know. Get a job somewhere, I suppose. One with less pressure maybe.

Zobo: Hah! So much for time off. Mind you, that's just given me a good idea. What about creating a new system that pays all workers a real pittance, and then makes them pay it all back for any time they take off! *Brilliant!* I can smell a departmental promotion here. So, let me see: what inhabited planets are further down the road than that backward little Earth place? Now that's no surprise. No planets are quite as backward as Earth – anywhere!

Who would have guessed? So, there you go: even a smart idiot like you couldn't help them if you tried. So, about this bet... I bet you all the money in the galaxy!

Shuggy: How you gonna pay me out if you lose?

Zobo: Well, I've got the same question if you lose. The difference is I know when to speculate to accumulate.

Shuggy: Oh yeah? When is that then?

Zobo: When you're dealing with complete morons.

Shuggy: Do you mean me, or those Earthlings?

Zobo: The Earthlings – you complete moron!

Shuggy: Then don't call me a complete moron.

Zobo: Okay. So you're an *incomplete* moron!

Shuggy: You know, you really are a mean-spirited, insulting and particularly nasty cunt of a deity.

Zobo: Thanks. Now fuck off you sycophantic piece of shit before I start being pleasant back.

Shuggy: So I'll see you in 200 Earth years then...

Zobo: Hah! Only if Bertha hasn't taken your job.

7 – Science And Other Religions

With the word *science* being used broadly to refer to an extensive variety of ideas and activities, it is helpful to clarify how the concept is used in any given context. As a body of accepted facts, science is a key element in a widening cultural mindset arguing that both *science* itself and *facts* are beyond dispute. Many minds even regard science as the highest form of *truth* – there being no shortage of institutions around the globe promoting this idea throughout the discipline’s growing number of fields. But science is also the pursuit of knowledge based on certain assumptions about the world and how it is to be understood.

Not only is the *science* concept promoted in many fields and at just about every level of education, but it also drives countless research activities and umpteen manufacturing industries. Meanwhile, cultural credibility comes from *being scientific* – the word often being found in numerous areas that actually appear quite distant from the original fields in which science took hold. Hence, we now have *political science* and *economic science*, as well as various *social sciences* that appear dubiously remote from the so-called *hard sciences*, and which have a distinctly argumentative rather than objective feel to them.

The origin and etymology of the word *science* is essentially concerned with ideas of *knowledge*, but interestingly has nothing directly to do with the much-acclaimed *scientific method*. That method is simply a later add-on that in effect curtails the means by which any knowledge becomes accepted within today’s science-mad culture. Hence, for better or worse, the advent of the scientific method, to the extent that it has become highly respected, represents a narrowing of what passes for knowledge. Simply *knowing something* does not qualify it as *science*, and therefore the value of such knowledge is culturally downgraded. Before anything becomes *accepted science* it normally has to be *peer-reviewed* or otherwise approved by those acting as culturally appointed judges of what passes or fails. Thus, knowledge itself is arguably incidental to a scientific mindset in which even *accepted science* can be subsequently rejected for supposedly *better science*.

In this respect, the world of science has largely exchanged mankind’s original and unfettered interest in *knowledge*, for an authoritarian approach that arbitrates what is accepted legitimate by virtue of *being good science*. Hence, the increasingly common practice of equating *science* with *knowledge* operates more through subliminal indoctrination into the ideals of *scientism* than through any critical thinking regarding science’s cultural evolution. And almost no consideration exists for any other possible paths to knowledge.

Prior to the advent of science, accepted ideas of what constituted *knowledge* no doubt embodied a wider outlook, even if other authoritarian controls existed in most cultures as regards what could be expressed openly as *knowledge*. In particular, religions functioned as *guardians of truth* and were extensively used to either brainwash minds or at least suppress challenges to ruling doctrines – both being enduring means of social control throughout many cultures to this day. However, the idea that someone could simply come to know something and share it with others was never as highly policed as it is in today’s age of science. Previously, it appears that speculative attempts to understand the world and our place within it were largely ungoverned matters – provided dominant ideas were not threatened, and those in control were not openly ridiculed. Hence, whatever the exact history, the development of factual knowledge and technology prior to the advent of modern science likely proceeded mostly through accident or ad hoc experimentation at best.

But with growing industrialization, the means of developing new technologies obviously evolved from a fairly impromptu pursuit to a dedicated industry. In this sense, science can

be seen as just the *technology of technology*: an organized and dedicated endeavor to study the world with a view to exploiting it, as opposed to just gaining an understanding of matters in a more or less haphazard manner. Much as we nowadays tend to think that technology flows from science, this is only true in terms of specific modern technologies; technology itself vastly predates organized science. If language and cognitive abstraction be regarded as core technologies, the growing number of *creative technologies* that have followed in the wake are the distinguishing hallmark of homo sapiens over many thousands of years.

Against such a background, modern science, given its ability to deliver apparent miracles in the here-and-now, was obviously a potential problem to the socially powerful of yesteryear; their religions could only offer promises based on invisible heavens to be relished after death. The ability to wield control over others by means of religious and monarchical doctrines was obviously threatened by the more immediate power of science and its increasingly clever technologies. But as with anything formidable, science itself also offered new opportunities for social control.

The modern explosion of science was in any case rather inevitable once human civilization had reached a certain development. Progressing from the early origins of tool-making and weaponry, the species had eventually reached a technological sophistication where the control of conditions, measurements, substances and processes enabled the organized investigation of all things material for the apparent betterment of all. Minds envisaged wonderful new horizons, plus the means of reaching them and even transcending them. Combining existing knowledge with systematic experimentation put the processes of discovery and invention on an industrialized scale that promised new riches and hitherto unseen possibilities to be realized by an increasingly empowered species. God, as both creator and destroyer, had serious competition. Consequently, the belief in a materialist ideal of *human progress* is more alive today than ever – even as many talk openly of our impending doom as one possible result.

The cultural history of how this played out to create today's *technology-obsessed* societies is more than involved, but the impact on what passes for *knowledge* is less obscure. Inasmuch as today's organization of science is largely dedicated to the creation or development of technologies, there is an obvious baseline need to verify that any would-be scientific knowledge is sound inasmuch as specified procedures produce predictable and repeatable results. And although knowledge thereby derived is often incomplete and indifferent as to whether its technological use is actually in the common interest, its basic model of simply detailing in a limited manner *what happens* is solid. But unfortunately, today's world of science is not quite so simple. The idea that *knowledge is power* perhaps accounts for a lot of what might be generalized as the human abuse and perversion of science.

As regards the range of subjects laying claim to *being science*, physics – sometimes seen as *king of the sciences* – is perhaps the field that appears most amenable to the scientific method in terms of following a supposedly clinical approach and formulating laws that appear close to universal. *Economic science*, as an example at the opposite extreme, appears as a fake science, inferring from its name that money – a human invention of changeable social role and value – is somehow governed by discernible *laws of science*.

If *science* really was a suitable paradigm for economic studies, the relevant laws would be revealed by scientific experimentation. But the idea that anyone is willing to seriously undertake such experimentation stretches the thinking person's credibility. Unsurprisingly, there seems to be no recognized institution dedicated to such *experimentation*. The financial impact of failures would presumably prove unacceptably costly – common intuition suggesting that those with money are too interested in specific outcomes to do anything in a

suitably clinical manner. Although economists and the wealthy no doubt perform certain after-the-fact analyses on the results of their actions, we are surely not to believe that anyone plays with large chunks of money purely to discover the consequences of uncertain experimentation. In general, money simply wields far too great an influence on the human mind for it to be viewed with the impartiality scientific procedure demands.

Such an observation is informative as regards the comparative true values modern culture places on money, science and academic integrity. Notably, in the absence of any true economic *laws of science*, we actually have extensive *civil laws* that enforce economic control and can of course be altered simply through human volition. Therefore, given humans cannot similarly change the laws of physics by mere volition, the term *science* is obviously being used very casually and for very different things. Why? Perhaps the motivations of some to cloak the world's monstrous economic imbalances within an air of scientific law and inevitability might help explain why the attendant lack of academic integrity escapes serious criticism.

What is to be gleaned from social power and society in general being so heavily organized around money that almost every individual believes in monetary value and that human behavior therefore exhibits powerful norms around everything to do with money? Regardless of any answers, such mere observations render economics no more a *science* than acknowledging a religious doctrine to control human behavior makes the relevant religion a science. The deceptive naming of certain ideas as a supposed *science of economics* constitutes a travesty of the scientific paradigm, but nonetheless finds parallels in other would-be *sciences*.

For example, as regards so-called *political science*, could activity based around speechifying, habitually quarreling, and juggling with laws as befits fleeting human interests be any less suited to scientific investigation? Given any would-be laws of this supposed *science* are literally *just made up* to suit human agendas, it is obvious how eager certain minds can be to imbue their own interests with an air of scientific authority.

Social sciences are little different in this respect. As regards psychology, it is obviously possible to herd people into *human laboratories* and attempt methodologically controlled experiments, but the fact that the subject matter is the living person rather ridicules the deterministic idea of *scientific laws* – just as it also does within economics and politics. In fact, it is debatable if the word *science* can legitimately be used for any study that involves the general behavior of complex living organisms. Although it is obviously possible to study behavior in an organized and quasi-scientific manner, the mere acknowledgment that beings do not appear wholly governed in a deterministic manner suggests that findings will exhibit loose trends at best, within paradigms where few reliable laws can be established. Moreover, even where convincing results from strict lab conditions may appear, these are of dubious value when the reality of the societies in which we live is one of unlimited and uncontrolled complexity: a situation completely at odds with clinical laboratory conditions.

Just why are such fundamental issues so consistently glossed over within so-called *social sciences*? The answer to this question perhaps has more to do with academia being seen to *do science* than in any would-be sincere efforts to understand real people and human society. In any case, the simple fact that the specific momentary behavior of individuals so thoroughly eludes both simplistic and complex theories actually suggests that conventional science is far from an optimal approach for such matters.

Meanwhile, science's goal of *being objective* includes a deep suspicion and sometimes a complete dismissal of the subjective experience that nonetheless permeates every moment of

our lives. This amounts to a generalized assertion that all valid knowledge necessarily has to be approved by the gate-keeping processes of *scientific proof*. As such, it also amounts to a privatization by the scientific community of knowledge itself – or at least an insistence on a highly policed set of rules and procedures governing the production and control of culturally accepted facts.

The general view of this – which is also the proffered *excuse* for this policing of knowledge – is that any ideas about how our world behaves must be thoroughly tested and verified, as well as framed in terms that are as universally applicable as possible. Therefore, so the reasoning goes, it is necessary to check candidate knowledge by offering it up for the approval of *peers* or *experts* who are familiar with the relevant field of knowledge and judged competent to endorse or reject whatever theories or supposed facts are laid out.

In terms of basic logic, this is obviously perfectly sound in the same way that a basic theory of gravity can be tested by letting go of heavy objects and observing how they consistently fall to Earth. However, there are numerous issues with scaling this thinking up to the truly monstrous scale on which scientific work now operates.

Anyone can check that heavy objects fall towards Earth by direct experimentation – without theorizing or examining any *tales of reality* told by others who seek to *explain* matters or approve ideas. But the argument would then be made that most science is far more complicated and eludes such personal experimentation – an argument that notably diminishes the value of direct experience in favor of scientific *tales of reality*.

However, the fact that some scientific work is highly involved is not a logical argument against the individual using his own mind for work falling within his capabilities. And in any case, there is no law stating that all knowledge needs scientific verification; do we use scientists to verify our apparent hunger or thirst? What about the essential truths of other key needs such as shelter, clothing, and protection from danger? In fact, anyone stepping outside the current cultural obsession with scientifically derived knowledge might question just why we seemingly need all this science in the first place. Who really cares what happens inside atoms or in the depths of space?

Although scientific investigation can obviously be highly involved and require coordinated teamwork, such a requirement should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the *objectivity* science pursues in fact equates to an inherent, blanket and irrational distrust of all subjective knowledge and perspectives. But if asked how this can be an intelligent approach given all human experience is arguably nothing but subjective, conventional thinking would respond that science is inherently a *truthful* pursuit and that, whereas individuals are corruptible and occasionally dishonest, groups of scientists avoid this by pursuing a consensus.

But what is the basis for this thinking, and what is it to be *truthful*? The scientific model of *truth* – if one exists – appears rooted in the idea of factual knowledge. This in turn relies on the subliminal faith humans hold in abstract thought, which in turn relies on the equally subliminal notion that reality should be conceptually broken down into *things*, analyzed in terms of those *things*, and then understood in terms of what those *things* are, and how they relate to one another.

But however any of this is framed, the whole scientific endeavor would be pointless if not that through technology it provides control over the environment: the main goal of science and technology as abundantly manifested in today's world. So, as with knowledge in general, it should be noted that science is not primarily driven by a quest for factual knowledge *of itself*; it is largely driven by the desire to use that knowledge as an element within a wider process – to the benefit of an individual, group, or both.

In any case, the idea of *the scientist* as an independent researcher or pure *truth-seeker* is a myth. Scientists in the real world are ordinary people pursuing wage-earning careers and thereby making themselves answerable to the demands of whichever corporations or academic bodies fund them and direct their activities. In short, scientific activity is primarily driven by financial and institutional agendas with *truth* being only somewhat incidental. In contrast, the scientist who compromises his safe career, assured income and peer-group respect in the interests of ruthlessly pursuing truth wherever it leads him is a very rare exception.

More generally, and even if *true facts* are the ostensible goal of most scientific activity, research often provides an effective façade that helps obscure less noble agendas – facts and knowledge understandably enjoying a certain cultural high-ground not so readily granted to the pursuit of money and political power.

Hence, the public is served up a falsely sanitized version of science as some great humanitarian endeavor to improve human existence through knowledge and invention – typically within the wider ideal of *human progress* by which the world’s entire population will one day be fully emancipated. This is a naturally credible view given a historical development of our species in which factual knowledge, technology and science have unequivocally underpinned apparently beneficial change. It is also a view through which individuals can flatter themselves with *cleverness* and the acquiring of scientific knowledge and facts as a means of seemingly *explaining reality*. For many, the superstitions and wild imaginings of religions and other traditional ideas are at last being pushed aside in the name of pragmatic and objective *truth*. Primitive delusions are to be burned in their own ignorance as science probes every corner of reality and reveals how humans can become masters of their own fate.

But however appealing and superficially credible such a perspective might appear, a different reality lurks behind the façade of scientific activity. The fact is, scientific research and discovery have often peaked in times of war, precisely because technological developments – far from emancipating all concerned – were often a means of one faction outsmarting the other in terms of killing efficiency. Through sophisticated and more lethal guns, bombs, missiles, rockets, planes, tanks, warships, and drones, science has moved us into a world where technology is demonstrating in ever-more-deadly manners that minds have not yet moved beyond the might-is-right mentality. Far from science being some sort of inherently beneficial pursuit, human conflict actually appears as one of its key drivers – there being no barriers at all to harnessing any and all scientific discoveries for the subjugation and murder of our fellow beings. Even in apparent peacetime, industrialized nations can be seen enthusiastically developing new weaponry to consolidate their dominance through tacit militaristic threats, or by selling such weaponry to other nations and even private armies – profit being revealed as an underlying motive behind superficially *scientific* activity.

Of course, science did not invent human aggression – such a drive being evident throughout human history as well as in other species. However, it is quite clear that science has done little or nothing to manage such instinctive forces whilst simultaneously enabling the means by which humans are by some margin the deadliest species on the planet. It is also notable in this respect that the supposed *sciences* of the *humanities* exhibit a stunning failure in terms of developing any would-be *social technologies* that might meaningfully help the species simply cohabit without slaying one another.

But what other outcomes should we expect from a world-view that by negating the value of subjectivity tacitly blanks all issues of self-examination, ethics, spirituality, and even common self-respect? Concepts such as *spirituality* may have a vagueness about them that

invites charlatans, but they at least consider looking beyond the surface appearance of the physical world. In contrast, the world according to science is an impersonal place of deterministic activity: a set of rules ostensibly to be comprehended in the name of a type of *knowledge* considered inherently beneficial – even if some real-world science is very obviously pursued for far less lofty reasons. And while human suffering is obviously not the direct goal of much science, many other more or less nefarious goals of exploitation hide within its shadows – notably the ruthless quest for excessive wealth and social control, as currently enabled via the runaway materialism of a narcissistic consumer society.

Science's heaven

Given much social control is achieved through what is in effect a generalized indoctrination to consumerist values, any sincere and unbiased *social sciences* would surely focus on this. But therein lies a dilemma for the would-be radically honest researcher of social reality: the hard truth about how human societies operate is inescapably critical of both those who hold power and the means by which they do so. Such issues are unavoidably political and, depending on the regime, anything from academic shaming to life in a gulag or death itself might be the cost of detailing them in their raw state, simply because otherwise hidden truths might be revealed in all their political awkwardness.

Meanwhile, the goals underlying the pursuit of *industrial science* are even easier to understand given today's commodity-driven world. Scientifically developing new technological gadgetry and products in conjunction with business interests assures that the consumer society's ideal of *having everything* is pursued with great zeal, but never actually attained. Instead, it is arguable that people are deliberately and permanently enslaved by their indoctrinated *needs* for the latest products.

Of course, unless this *propensity* to instrumentalize consumerism as a means of exploiting people is framed as a very nebulous, diffuse and mostly subliminal phenomenon, it readily sounds like a too-tall conspiracy theory. Nonetheless, any quick glance at today's saturation levels of publicity reveals just how extensive efforts have become to fuel endless public desires for more and more of whatever industry has just dreamed up to sell them – all of which is integral to a wider political and economic rhetoric of *growth* as somehow desirable and necessary. Those promoting all these goals tend to call the shots to the extent that they convince people of consumerism's *tales of reality*, and thereby profit from the resulting frenzy of trade and industry. Given their obvious greed, they can even be seen as having fallen victim to their own propaganda.

Meanwhile, within the business-to-business world where directly persuading *the consumer* is not necessary and the raw profit motive is more overt, science is pursued very much as just another means of furthering the overall money-making hysteria. Anything that might increase the bottom line is worthy of investigation, whether it be shortening the lifespan of a product to increase subsequent repurchases, or developing automation to lay off workers. Criticisms of the role science plays in all this need not concern science *itself* or science as a form of knowledge; the cultural impunity with which the scientific community reflexively prostitutes itself to business interests suffices to put its integrity in question.

Just as very little we humans do occurs in a social vacuum, very little we do should be considered innocent of its recognizable consequences in the wider world. Even the science of nuclear weaponry could be considered harmless were it limited to ideas that only existed as abstract knowledge. But both experience and common sense would indicate that scientific activity never exists without an underlying motive – even if the motive is only to bolster the personal prestige of the scientist.

One great hypocrisy within the scientific outlook lies in its pretensions of being some puritanical form of knowledge that rides sanctimoniously above other human objectives. This ridiculous stance is nonetheless adopted by many who happily mock religious positions, not just for their lack of proof, but also for the same sort of human abuses as science has enabled on an even grander scale. Traditional religions may furnish the dogma ostensibly fueling certain human conflicts, but the technological means of inflicting large-scale death and destruction are invariably rooted in scientific developments – even in the absence of any such religious dogmas.

In an attempt to offset such criticisms, the many medical *miracles* enabled by science are defensively cited to imply that any criticizing of science is the criticizing of life-saving treatments. But this is often a cheap emotional ploy that subliminally seeks to equate the dedication and kindness of people who work as medics with the scientifically derived treatments they deploy. Hence, keeping a balanced mind within this emotionally charged area entails looking at medical technology *in itself*, as well as understanding that the criticism here is not that *science is bad*, but more that scientific knowledge should be seen as neutral at best, at the same time as certain motives behind its use appear nefarious.

No doubt the vast majority of medics act primarily in what most would consider *good faith*. Why think otherwise? Some may be consciously motivated primarily by money, but that is true of many people in many professions. However, many medical interventions – probably most – have some sort of negative effect on well-being, and this is something too easily glossed over. The wounds involved in surgery and the so-called *side-effects* of drugs do tangible damage, and both are frequently present within the same medical procedures. Hospital-borne infections are another health problem associated directly with *health-care*.

Thus, a question naturally arises as regards the extent to which any treatment is beneficial as opposed to detrimental. For example, almost all commercially available painkillers damage the body in physiologically recognized manners, creating a situation in which such detrimental consequences can be weighed against the believed benefits of the pain relieved. But even the removal of pain in many situations can be argued to be undesirable, given that pain is often the body's message that the source of the pain should be handled with care until it has healed. The suppression of pain within the healing process is therefore of questionable merit.

Of course, other arguments will claim extreme pain is psychologically damaging and that pain removal is a humanitarian act – especially understandable in terminal conditions. However, the administration of painkillers is not generally framed within this sort of pro-and-cons debate. It is in fact common for patients to be given these drugs in abundance without any discussion whatsoever – and sometimes without even checking that there is any pain in the first place. This sort of routine dispensing of treatments that have dubious and sometimes detrimental net effects for conditions that might not even be present is arguably the drug industry and the medical profession taking advantage of the ordinary person's good faith and lack of knowledge. Ulterior motives combined with an absence of public understanding regarding the underlying science can allow certain medical treatments to be enacted despite the fact that they offer no benefit at all and are actually known to be injurious to health.

How does such counterproductive so-called *healthcare* activity come about? Could the answer have something to do with the fact that the relevant research scientists are paid by pharmaceutical corporations whose main objective is profits, at the same time as both they and the medical profession have a certain interest in being seen to offer a beneficial service? More generally, does anyone or any business get far in a monetary and materialistic society

by being straight and honest about the downsides of whatever they are about? The real issue here has nothing in particular to do with healthcare; it is about the truth of human motivations and how they can be masked by *acting scientifically*.

What needs debunking on a general level is the prevalent idea that scientific pursuits, or the technologies they create, are harmless at worst. The idea is clearly nonsense given that all such technologies are deployed by humans within a world where monetary gain is so often a prime motive – the same world in which the design and manufacture of weapons are among the most profitable industries. Is it not profoundly silly to imagine that the same species that excels in efficient ways of technologically exacting genocide is somehow incapable of looking the other way as regards other less dramatic but nonetheless harmful effects of its technologies? And yet, science and technology enjoy a kind of cultural immunity when it comes to critically assessing their overall impact.

A curious aspect of the *religion of science* is how minds will use double-standards to jump to science's defense – somewhat similar to the way gods can be glorified despite any horrors going on within the churches that worship them. Within this sort of blinkered perspective, the horrors of weaponry are seen as independent of science and put down to *human failings* – all whilst the many *wonders of science* are painted as excellent reasons for its glorification. The faith seems to frame righteousness as scientific progress, and *sin* as anything untoward which must then be laid at humanity's door. Basically, science is good, but man can be bad: a curious position from which, even if accepted, one might wonder if man is to be trusted with science at all.

Widespread subliminal indoctrination into *scientism* ironically mirrors the mind-control symptoms certain science aficionados enthusiastically mock in the religious world. It constitutes a generalized set of supposedly logical arguments favoring *belief in science* – but is a position that nonetheless reacts emotionally and reflexively to any criticisms before properly examining them. Notably, levels of conviction are often in proportion to the role of science in the individual's career – rather like the clergyman's belief in god.

However, there are also plenty in the congregation who hold steadfastly to the belief for other reasons – crowd conviction being a powerful intoxicant. Hence, any challenges that for example science and technology are instrumental in environmental problems, are likely to be met reflexively with arguments for yet more science and technology – rather like supporting a murderous sect by framing their evil acts as proof that they need to further strengthen their faith in order to transcend the need for those acts.

The broadest church

Meanwhile, as a rather cunning but mostly reflexive strategy of mass recruitment, formal scientific culture generally adopts a *no-comment* approach as regards religious views – the result being that no one is overlooked as a potential follower of science, however incongruous their mind's overall cocktail of metaphysics might become as a result. In this all-comers-welcome respect, science is the religion to end all religions, whilst its increasing planetary impact suggests that ending all religions including itself may ironically be its ultimate result.

There are of course plenty of distinguishing features within scientific culture that set it apart from traditional theistic religions. Notably, it is divided into countless specialist areas that, unlike the major churches of conventional religions, do not really compete or overtly contradict one another, despite espousing very different *tales of reality*. An unspoken code of conduct seems to operate in which competing ideas are to be discussed with academic civility, lest the unshakable shared faith in the overall *scientific venture* be diminished.

Hence, as just one example of the intellectual spaghetti that results, human behavior is *explained* very differently within the many different sciences of psychology, neuroscience, sociology and so forth, at the same time as all these are judged more or less valid within a sort of multi-verse-thinking where anything badged-up as *science* is uncritically welcome.

Defense of this *anything-scientific-goes* approach is framed within a so-called *unity of science* concept: an idea that seems to consist of little more than a faith-based argument that sciences must all concur by virtue of all being sciences, plus the notion that *objectivity* must never entertain contradictory beliefs. But upon inspection, this is little more sophisticated than the common religious idea that god must have created everything because *we believe in god the creator*.

The underlying desire for a globally coherent set of ideas is primarily an emotion-based stance that leaves the mind reluctant to question its core doctrine or admit that its foundational assumptions are indeed just assumptions and may therefore be poorly grounded. Building even the most bizarre belief systems that are nonetheless coherent is in fact disarmingly simple; sci-fi and fantasy novelists demonstrate how this works – notably within the world of fiction. But the appeal of the coherence principle in science is likely just herd instinct combined with a subliminal awareness that consensus and coherence render ideas more resilient in the face of cultural attacks. Such herd instinct also explains why many people in the religious world are so intransigently locked into factional belief systems that exist in complete contradiction to one another: a potential recruiting problem the *religion of science* has cleverly circumvented through the dubiously universal ideals of *objectivity*.

Through the same desire to avoid intellectual conflict over science's implicitly causal model of the world, it has nonetheless become accepted that any event is explicable by any number of different causes, depending on whichever scientific lens examines that event. To see this in action, simply ask a sociologist, a psychiatrist and a physiologist to explain separately the inebriated state of a given individual. Three different explanations will likely result, all of which might well be at odds with a fourth explanation from the individual concerned.

Any simultaneous accommodation of such competing explanations rather obviously does not constitute any *unity of science*; it in fact appears only able to persist through a learned code of conduct by which the scientific mind sidesteps the philosophical anomalies inherent in using multiple perspectives to supposedly explain *the same thing*. One might well ask on this basis why the competing religious ideas of different churches are not to be regarded as somehow forming some *unity of religion*. It would seem all differences are different – except for certain scientific ones that are somehow the same.

The overall philosophical minefield that is science's pick-n-mix causal model is effectively ignored within the greater scientific outlook – all explanations of events and phenomena simply being seen as *scientific* and therefore intrinsically credible. There seems almost nothing within the so-called *philosophy of science* astute enough to consider that what are in fact philosophically contradictory answers to the same question might result from the machinery of abstract thought – as opposed to having anything to do with the outside world. Such a blinkered view appears even more irrational given that science's beloved *objectivity* is heavily based on the idea of a *singular reality*; seeing the mind's activity as a potentially distorting lens would at least help explain the presence of competing ideas within such a singular reality. Even from a more basic angle, the failure to critically examine the role of the mind in the formulation of scientific ideas is quite inexcusable given that science, like all conceptualized bodies of thought, would be literally *unthinkable* without the human mind.

For the time being, and amidst an almost total dearth of incisive critiques of these matters, the

scientific world's stratagem of drawing in more and more minds via unquestioning faith has proven hugely successful – many now placing trust in anything at all branded as *science* – even before they are told the first thing about whatever scientific work or findings are involved. Calling anything a *scientific fact* can invoke a level of truth on a par with the ecclesiastical concept of *gospel* – completely devoid of any awareness of how such a fact was derived, and certainly regardless of any issues over the framing of reality within abstract thought.

Challenging the sacrosanct status of the scientific outlook is not for those bothered by social ridicule. So thorough is its cultural saturation that it effectively faces no challenge at all. As the all-time supreme religion bar none, it has reached a level of cultural adoption that figureheads of religions could never have dreamed of: global acceptance with hardly a word uttered in dissent.

To understand the etiology of all this, it is only necessary to consider how science's unique substantiation differs considerably from other forms of mass hypnosis, such as beliefs in monarchies, nations or gods. Whereas *royal families*, *my nation* or a *merciful god*, are highly abstract ideas needing continual reinforcement, *scientific fact* appears much less abstract in that it encodes quite tangible matters such as the movements of the Moon and their effects on Earth's tides. Such apparent proof of its validity is there for all to see. Short of deep incisive philosophical examination, the scientific outlook appeals as something readily substantiated by recourse to everyday worldly phenomena. And in addition to more reflexive forms of support found throughout industry and societal institutions, science also benefits from entertainment-oriented media support – completing a general level of cultural endorsement exceeding anything ever enjoyed by any other world-view.

However, another view of science sees it as just the latest and most conspicuous incarnation of abstract thought's knowledge acquisition process – something that was likely birthed more or less contemporaneously with the appearance of language itself. From this perspective, the long-lost roots of *pure* scientific thinking can be seen as likely predating all theistic religions – albeit no one could have known the eventual result would be the highly formalized scientific endeavor we see today. Hence, although there was until recent times no out-and-out promotion of anything under the name *science*, it's current maturation actually benefits from the entirety of mankind's inquisitiveness regarding himself and his environment. And inasmuch as *pure science* might be seen as just the raw search for knowledge by any means, it should not really be divorced from philosophy in the manner culture has progressively allowed. But such a separation was arguably necessary in order that, just as was the goal for many religions, fewer questions would be asked.

In simple terms, science *works* – and for many minds, the matter stops there. Why ask questions about something that appears effective and helpful? Such a position appears to be the general mindset fueling the global cultural and industrial explosion of science; if science achieves desired results, why listen to the invented problems of philosophers? Shouldn't we just believe in something that actually delivers what we want?

We are all naturally attracted to whatever proves useful or gives us comfort, but how many in today's world can honestly say they have thought through the faith they place in science, or the results of a world increasingly fashioned by its outlook? How many have thought impartially about what science truly represents in relation to the growing global problems we face? Is an unbiased appraisal of the scientific endeavor even possible within a culture drenched in an effectively universal faith in countless supposed *wonders of science*? Can a church impartially appraise its own religious ideology?

How many simply latch on to science through its blanket popularity, its inescapable presence throughout technology, its ability to provide lucrative careers, its constant promotion as a form of *progress*, the reflexive credibility engendered within the *science* concept, or the generalized hubris that deems *not being scientific* as inherently foolish? Science – or more exactly, its overarching cultural presence – can intimidate even more subtly than religion. Freedom, as regards one's ideas about gods and heavens, is of course widely respected and even enshrined in some nations' laws, but science has so thoroughly saturated human consciousness that it does not even need such protection. To question it is inherently absurd, as everyone *just knows*. The supposed reasons are not even seen as meriting any cultural expression.

Whereas the colorful universes of political and religious ideologies are not short of minds aggressively contesting the very fundamentals, within the world of science it seems not so much that no one dare raise questions, but more that no one has even thought what the relevant questions might be – never mind considering that they might urgently merit asking. Just as science presents no overtly contentious belief systems matching the highly specific *tales of reality* of political or metaphysical doctrines, it also presents no governmental regimes or power-based churches to be exposed as corrupt. At least, this is the case provided one detaches the funding and commercialization of science from the factual knowledge thereby produced – a separation in fact so blurred within modern culture it is all but invisible. But whereas the contentious issues of religions and political ideologies are writ large for all to debate, science's blanket credibility effectively eludes all controversy.

Superficially, everything about science looks as clinical as its supposed method, and so it's no surprise that scientific knowledge enjoys such unchallenged acclaim. The general view of science is that it produces some ultimate form of *truth* that prevails despite human failings – a nonetheless silly view considering science remains an utterly and uniquely human pursuit. The related idea that scientific knowledge has some significance independent of its practical utilization is also silly. Texts, findings, theories, laws and the other paraphernalia of scientific knowledge do nothing of themselves. We would still be in the caves were it not that we manufacture knowledge precisely because we can use that knowledge within subsequent acts. Hence, not only can truly clinical science be philosophically reasoned to be an impossibility, if it did exist it could also be reasoned to be supremely useless, given it has no direct practical result.

Meanwhile, the *beauty of science* in terms of persuading minds is that its ideas and *world vision* are tacitly framed as *the-best-so-far*, and always ready to be reworked whenever necessary or convenient – thereby assuring any disproof of current ideas is never an attack on science itself. From this observation, science can be seen as both a malleable and an addictive belief system in that, even when its ideas are shown to be misguided, its core ideology of factual knowledge, far from coming under threat, actually claims to have been enriched.

Nonetheless, a greater number of prominent ideas have probably been debunked within science than in most religions. And when cosmology alone likely includes more directly contradictory ideas than all popular religions combined, it is obvious that even wild speculation is fine provided it is *scientific speculation* – whatever that might mean. But none of this seems to faze the faithful, some of whom enjoy a pastime of mocking the *nonsense of religion*, whilst apparently blinding themselves to any ideas of nonsense within science.

But amidst all its apparent ingenuity and rampant global activity within our modern age, science's true position – assuming one exists – is strangely close-to-invisible. What might it be?

To view science as the *technology of technology* is to hint at the fervor with which science is pursued – it being the methodical writing of objectivity’s grand *tale of reality* according to human ideas and observations, and typically for the birthing of new technologies. Hence science, even if commonly viewed as *knowledge*, mostly reduces to a pursuit of human technology, with its form of knowledge being simply a conduit to that goal. And although science is rarely seen as a doctrinal position, the implicit doctrine behind it appears to be the unspoken notion that technological knowledge is somehow *good* and generally desirable.

But does such a position have any substance other than as a ubiquitous everyday subliminal presumption? It is notable that for most of human history such a question might have been awkward, had it not actually been irrelevant. Human technology, whilst operating on a limited scale, was naturally assumed to be beneficial – but only provided one was not the target of its weaponry and was instead enjoying its supposed benefits. However, the recent arrival of ecological problems on a planetary scale really ought to be seen as one huge wake-up call in terms of age-old ideas that deploying technology is intrinsically beneficial, and only harmful when directed against perceived enemies.

However poorly recognized, however awkward and uncomfortable, and however heavily suppressed, honest appraisal of multiple changes in the biosphere leaves little doubt that, in simple terms, the current widespread deployment of human technology is potentially to our serious long-term detriment. And the fact that this realization perhaps appears more inconvenient than it would have at any time in the past does not in the slightest diminish the threat it represents. In fact, in psychological terms, it perhaps makes matters even worse, as we collectively balk at growing evidence suggesting we need to dramatically change our ideas regarding our growing mountains of scientific knowledge and the technological exploitation such knowledge enables.

Science and its objective model of reality appear to have thrust us even faster on a collision course with our own evolution. More exactly – viewing science as the *technology of technology* – it is humankind’s zealous approach to deploying technology without limits or restraints that appears at the heart of this matter. If *science* is seen as simply the modern religion through which today’s materialistic technologies are pursued, the real roots of the problem can be seen as lying in the now-distant and nebulous birth of human technology itself, with science being just the currently unquestioned conviction that technological progress is inherently beneficial.

It is no surprise that, faced with the unwelcome realization that such a conviction is flawed to the point that it might in fact usher in a mass extinction event – as scientists themselves are currently warning – the general response is woefully lackluster in terms of actually embracing revisions to human ideas and behaviors. How does a species deal with the realization that its technological prowess on a fragile planet is successful to the point of being inadvertently suicidal? More pertinently, does it have the courage to persevere with this line of questioning, or is it doomed by short-term thinking and primitive instincts that cause it to simply look the other way?

8 – Mind Games

Faltering steps are now trying to address the worst excesses of the rather reckless ways in which we humans exploit both the environment and one another. Whether we consider the damage done to the surface of the planet, or the millions murdered with our advanced killing systems, there has long been an acknowledgment that such activities would ideally be reined in – if only to mitigate the fears they perpetuate.

In terms of causality, ideas about how to address such matters often seem to mistake symptoms for causes. For example, the idea that new so-called *green* technologies can stop our species from ruining the planet is arguably just naïve wishful thinking that overlooks how and why we got here in the first place. Although it may be possible to modify technological activity whilst simultaneously reducing the consequential damage to the biosphere, such dubiously named *sustainable development* fails to address the real issue by ignoring the wider evolutionary perspective. Consequently, culture neither understands nor addresses how dangerously powerful the modern human mind has become, nor how blind it can be as regards the full ramifications of such power. The rapacious human demand for energy to power our modern glut of industries is arguably just one effect of a runaway obsession with the underlying power of abstract thought. If seen as such, the real challenge is surely not just to feed that obsession in less harmful manners.

In overlooking such issues, we only perpetuate a distracting and deceptive externalization of matters. Everything from capitalism to carbon dioxide, or from population growth to propaganda is blamed, whilst people generally accept little or no direct personal responsibility. This position is doomed to hold us back by effectively denying the need to self-examine and recognize that it is ultimately our own real-world actions that create whatever fixable problems we face. Truly meaningful change in all such matters can be seen as logically impossible without personal change, whereas continually externalizing matters is arguably just being disingenuous about this awkward truth.

Addressing the real issues must address the mind's hitherto failure to understand that abstract knowledge, in terms of our overall evolution, is a frighteningly sharp and double-edged knife. For better or worse, we have developed tremendously lethal powers over many aspects of a world that otherwise sustains us.

Merely preventing ecological disaster alone serves no meaningful long-term purpose if future development continues its predatory mindset of technologically enforced dominion over the less able, the disenfranchised, and the wider environment. How can voracious greed coexist with an ecologically sane outlook? Any pretension that this is possible could surely only exist within some even bigger and more ugly state of the oppressive hypocrisy that already mars so much human history. Absent some real behavior-changing awareness of our own role in creating environmental problems, we seem doomed to perpetuate them until such times as global warfare or some other technological folly makes matters even worse – or leaves us extinct. The huge irony of a species simultaneously imagining it is *saving the planet* whilst actively destroying it and arming itself for its own global destruction is as comical as it is tragic. One could even believe evolution to have a black sense of humor.

The recent cultural awakening to the ecological damage we wreak is nonetheless a potential turning point. The collapsing biosphere appears an inevitable outcome of a sort of collective techno-industrial madness that must be surpassed if it is not to destroy us in huge numbers. Toxic environments have already started a deleterious process for many species – humans included. Hence, our unique form of environmental exploitation seems likely to prove

increasingly self-defeating in the absence of some readjustment regarding how we view ourselves in the overall scheme of things. We can now reason why consuming resources as if there is no tomorrow is exactly the means by which we ensure there will indeed be no tomorrow. But such reasoning is not yet wired up to any generalized cultural realization.

Can any philosophical, social or political doctrines be taken seriously if they ignore that our house is on fire and we are actively fueling the growing inferno? Can faith be put in ideas that fail to address why such logically-obvious madness appears so intractable within human affairs? Oddly, the answer to these questions appears to be *yes* for the time being – arguably a sign of just how divorced from certain aspects of reality human culture has become. Amidst a near total failure to reflect critically on the evolutionary curiosities underlying human technological development, many continue to align themselves with metaphysical and political doctrines consisting mostly of power-seeking dogmas designed to create a false idea that things are somehow under control – even as they so evidently are not.

The situation seems to be that we either address matters urgently from within new thought paradigms, or we unwittingly demonstrate that the significant evolutionary phenomenon of human technology ultimately amounts to nothing more than a spectacular slow-motion jump off an existential cliff.

If we are effectively a species in denial, this is only to be expected given we barely recognize that which we deny. Arguably, we refuse to even contemplate the obvious – exactly because it is so monstrous. Deployed technology, in spite of all its harmful global fallout, is regarded as so central to some beneficial human trajectory that it is culturally cocooned against any generalized interrogation of its net value – especially its downsides. Hence, ecological problems are framed as being mere *side-effects* of specific technologies within the supposedly beneficial process of *progress*. There is no body of thought imagining that just maybe, as the only species actively pushing technological development – and pushing it flat out – we might be doing something far less innocuous than we generally imagine.

Based on crude cause-and-effect thinking, the accepted view seems to be that ecological damage is an *effect*, and therefore one or more *causes* need to be identified and addressed such that problems be resolved. The prominent example of this is of course the idea that climate change is at least partly *caused* by burning fossil fuels, and so not burning fossil fuels should help sort climate change. But on close examination, this turns out to be a rather banal if not stupid approach on a few fronts – regardless of one's position on so-called *greenhouse gases* being responsible for climate change.

Fossil fuels do not burn themselves; human intent is required. Therefore, a tacit denial of the role played by human intent in this matter exists in framing the situation as simply *the burning of fossil fuels*. And this is not mere semantic pedantry; if such human intent can unwittingly create problems believed by many to threaten our very existence, is it not glib in the extreme to gloss over it? Dare we ask just how much havoc human intent unknowingly invites or is already causing, plus what might be involved in properly addressing its reckless lack of foresight? Or are we to continue with an unquestioning faith in the religion of *science* as our solution-provider? Are we to roll out yet more technology as if merely acknowledging yesterday's mistakes somehow makes today's impossible? Logic would in fact say that if human intent *caused* yesterday's mistakes and remains unaddressed, more mistakes are only to be expected.

Faith, stupidity and self-interest

Considering science has been heavily involved in many technologies directly responsible for a plethora of environmental problems – many of which were never foreseen by the science

involved – is it not a bit rich to be told that, for example, genetically modified organisms are safe and beneficial, before they even have a meaningful track record? Their supposed benefits have nonetheless been heavily promoted, even though they are already associated with significant and unforeseen biological, social and even economic problems.

Is there not a common factor in the cultural promotion of such new technologies and the general down-playing of problems associated with existing ones? Once recognized, the link is perfectly explicable.

Most new technologies embody major commercial opportunities, whilst existing technologies represent well-established money-earners – typically deployed with little or no concern over potentially impoverishing or damaging the natural world. The fact that negative side-effects of new technologies tend to be dismissively brushed aside until they eventually manifest themselves – often in unavoidably problematic ways – reflects an inherent commercial bias against impartial appraisal of such matters. Businesses, after all, are about making money.

Of course, some negative side-effects can manifest themselves in wholly unexpected manners, and others may exist but go wholly undetected for decades – or remain obscure indefinitely. There is in any case nothing surprising about a proliferation of such problems confronting the first species to toy so extensively with technology; logic dictates that messing about with the environment disrupts the biological conditions for which the evolution of existing species is optimized. It is therefore in our best interests that we at least deploy technology with far more caution than has been seen to date.

However, there appears no intellectual acknowledgment that all industrial technology can be so easily reasoned to be more or less environmentally damaging and that more technology therefore equates to more environmental damage. It can even be argued in this respect that the idea of *business-as-usual* actively cultivates a negative form of human intellect. Such apparent learned stupidity can be seen as a corruption of impartiality – a dishonesty nurtured through self-interest and indifference regarding broader consequences.

As regards the role of human intent within all this, is it not obvious that the relevant parameters for understanding many such situations are in fact the pursuit of profit margins and performance bonuses, the furthering of careers, and other forms of self-interest? The continuing environmental damage of technological industries can in fact be seen as just a symptom of these more selfish goals. Hence, the endless debates over strictly technological issues only detract from a more fundamental debate about greed and human psychology underlying such problems. As ever, it suits certain parties that problems are framed in terms of the external world, rather than risking a close examination of the motives and actions of those directly involved.

A pernicious aspect of modern scientific culture is its stupidity regarding the utterly central role motivation plays in many of humanity's troublesome activities. This blindness to our inner drives generally hides behind the supposed need to exclusively follow an *objective* approach, and to *be scientific* – even within areas such as psychology: a discipline seriously hobbled by its own refusal to fully and directly address the subjective dimension each one of us experiences minute-by-minute. Thus, it is the politicization of thought itself via an insistence on objectivity that prevents us from taking a deeper look at each other and better understanding our collective predicament.

In this sense, science, if not viewed with due circumspection as a modern constraint on certain forms of knowledge, can stupefy the mind into believing the acquisition of knowledge is only possible via the external world – as opposed to being somewhat attainable through lucid subjective reflection. As a consequence, just the mere suggestion that objectivity might

be limited or flawed, and that other forms of knowledge acquisition involving more introspective processes do exist, seems incomprehensible to many. And this is so, even when it is obviously our own minds that internally vet all ideas – regardless of whether they are considered objective or subjective.

Such stupefaction further fuels the unquestioning faith in *objectivity*, thereby empowering its influence even more within the scientific community and culture in general: something ironically revealed by the vehemence with which so many will deny the blanketing effect it already exerts on their minds. The resultant benefits for charlatans seeking to hide their scheming thoughts are obvious: the overall cultural focus generally fails to examine the subjective machinery by which disingenuous humans enact their duplicity, subterfuge, trickery and deceit.

Throughout history, elitist intellectual positions, whatever their nature and however they were propagated, have been tools for enabling power over the gullible – but only for as long as they could carry an air of justification and fend off critical attacks. Science, with its insistence on objectivity, is no different, other than as regards the sheer extent to which it is culturally beyond question.

In making sense of this idea it should be considered that, more than at any point in history, homo sapiens are both *animals-with-technology*, and globally-dominant – all whilst individually remaining primarily self-interested within a competitive and threatening world. This is a unique mix unseen anywhere else in nature and therefore requires that we look rather exclusively to ourselves for answers. In so doing, the modern idealization of our unique form of knowledge becomes quite understandable.

With our seemingly all-important technology being encoded in abstract knowledge, one way to gain social advantage is to present oneself as a guardian of such knowledge, whilst simultaneously presenting a world-view wherein the individual is basically an empty vessel: a child in need of being brought into *the system*. This is the model of social reality tacitly pervading all educational institutions; knowledge is something to be had from others *in-the-know*, as opposed to derived through one's own experience. The motivations for such a stance are rather obvious: regardless of the content or quality of any supposed *knowledge* thereby dispensed, those in the education system can further their careers whilst catering to the expectations of those higher up in society's overall hierarchy.

Of course, stated so simplistically, such an idea appears crude. Career scientists and academics do not waken in the morning plotting how to trick, deceive and exploit those less well versed in their specialist fields. However, like so many in paid employment, they are well aware of their societal situation in which financial remuneration depends on fulfilling the expectations of their roles. And those roles exist within hierarchically arranged social structures in which directives from above often consist of rating the conformity of those below against accepted procedures, standards and ideas. Thus, such structures effectively control and monitor what becomes accepted as *knowledge*, even if this is heavily veiled by a façade of formal respectability and the resultant intellectual broad consensus: hard evidence of just how successful the controlling mechanism really is.

The survival of academia within the overall social hierarchy is logically linked to its ability to serve those who wield power. This is very arguably why objectivity and science have become so dominant in our modern world: science as a form of pragmatic knowledge proves tangibly superior to the generally speculative metaphysical ideas of most religions, whilst objectivity's *externalization* of all issues creates a highly materialistic vision of the world, such that culture becomes conveniently blind or indifferent to the manner in which

calculating minds prey on the naïvety and innocence of others. As the most expedient means of manipulating the external world, objectivity, when taken to extremes, also provides opportunities for manipulating the minds of others.

Postulating a global propensity for all hierarchical structures to gently and almost invisibly enforce their preferred form of conformity can help better understand the current situation in manners no simple cause-and-effect thinking ever could. It is in fact arguable that rigid causal objectivity is so vehemently enforced throughout academia – even in subjects where its usefulness is close to zero – largely because it prevents other forms of more expansive thinking from gaining a foothold. And none of this should be viewed as conspiracy-theory thinking as it does not rely on the participants openly colluding; on the contrary, it details just how diffuse and subtle is the practice of *stealth coercion* within hierarchical structures.

As part of the overall propensity for power to pull the strings, the cultural presentation of science becomes one in which much scientific knowledge is somewhat esoteric, privatized and commodified, at the same time as anything resembling *self-discovery* or *personal awakening* is generally portrayed as rather laughable and fanciful. No obvious social power or commercial gain is to be had from promoting the idea that life itself is the real university, and that the individual might therefore choose to stand his own ground in the face of those who would otherwise exploit, belittle or trick his mind. Such an idea is a positive threat to institutional power, whereas the simple cultural absence of such alternative perspectives tempts the mind to unthinkingly assimilate various conventional and well-respected lies.

Surely it is naïve to think differently – to imagine in light of the dramatic extent to which abstract knowledge has allowed humans to exploit their environment that there has not also been a huge temptation and tendency to exploit one another via the same cognitive skills. We may be social animals, but herds generally display forms of internal competition in which gaining advantage over other herd members serves to keep the group organized around strength. However, the cultural distortion of such power games is only to be expected for a species that has extended such competition into the domain of exploitative *mind games*. The intent to exploit others naturally includes the intent to disguise itself as anything other than what it is, and ideally as something actually beneficial to the party being exploited – given no one would knowingly volunteer for their own exploitation.

Using others for one's own purposes – via anything from political support to *marrying into money* – is in fact generally regarded as highly respectable, provided it is done within accepted social norms. And the many institutions and hierarchical structures that embody such normalization are of course often seen as the very fabric of society. Moreover, this ought to be understood within the general view that socially presenting oneself in the best light – even to the point of being highly disingenuous – can not only appear advantageous but is also championed as a key social skill within today's culture. Successfully branding the self is now a boom industry within so-called *developed* societies, and the incitements to hypocrisy and deception are as obvious as their realizations are extensive to anyone daring a frank appraisal of modern civilization. But in order to fully see this in terms of how it can marshal large numbers into conformity and obedience, the individual may need to overcome the learned and self-flattering naïvety that often conceals all this behind conservative ideologies and superficially respectable conventions.

More generally, the natural target for all non-violent subliminal exploitation of the individual is the conscious mind – the seat of abstract thought itself. Once the mind is colonized, there are few impediments to fuller forms of exploitation – as demonstrated by the huge numbers brought to heel through nationalist, religious and political dogmas, plus countless other *tales of reality*, including the overall ethos of science and objectivity.

9 – Fooling Ourselves

The mind's failure to consciously recognize how comprehensively it can be fooled by others as well as by itself has distorting consequences for its view of social reality. We are both creators and victims of cultures that are riddled with illusions, and this is not always easy to see – precisely because our many stratagems in this area are so effective.

In part, the overall phenomenon appears rooted in our tendency to *believe our own publicity* – that is, to be personally taken in by all the beliefs, ideas and acts we adopt as navigation aids for our own particular path within our own small corner of social reality. Basically, we come to believe in our identity, its persona, and the often-reflexive acts that defend and protect us against a potentially hostile world.

The psychological usefulness of whatever is thereby espoused lies in the resultant ability to persuade others – both as regards whatever roles we enact, and of some legitimacy behind our intentions. And as maximizing the social effectiveness of all this involves the presentation of a deep conviction in whatever we go about, we too easily forget or ignore that we are in fact only acting. Our true motivations remain rather self-centered in manners that we ourselves too easily overlook.

But much as a solid conviction in some image of the self may prove personally useful and minimize each individual's internal conflict, such advantages are arguably socially disruptive on a more general level. Given people are generally taken in by what is in truth just a façade designed to extract social benefit, the unfortunate result within the bigger picture is a society of an inherently illusory and somewhat deceptive character. Unless one is very astute at unmasking people, they can appear other than they really are.

If acting is basically about creating a somewhat false impression, the mix of ideas each mind has amassed regarding others and society in general is liable to be somewhat askew. Whereas the conventional idea regarding the adoption of personal views is that we simply think things through and arrive at our own opinions, common sense and frankness regarding social reality would suggest the individual's specific culture and community must be far more influential than such a view allows. This is easily seen by simply observing the tendency for prominent religious and political ideas to persist from one generation to the next within any given population, group or family.

More generally, it can be considered that adopted ideas and beliefs are best understood as social tools and skills, as opposed to rationally-derived convictions. In addition to the apparent social advantages of embracing whatever is popular within the individual's community, more specific ideas justifying one's personal profession and lifestyle also serve to cement social standing with whoever is taken in. Hence, just about everyone appears to have ready-made arguments to rebuke whatever criticisms might target them on a personal front. But the other side of this self-defensive mentality is that few people can honestly claim their life choices to be based on independent thinking. Similarly, few can deny that their natural fear of not *fitting in* steers many of their actions.

That we habitually wear masks is revealed on the odd occasion when raw emotions such as extreme anger sweep the *normal* state of consciousness aside and appear to take direct control of both physiological and mental states – typically evidenced by rather impetuous and *uncontrolled* reactions to others. Notably, this is a condition culture teaches us to frown upon within the idea that the relevant individual has *lost self-control*. However, such emotional outbursts only suggest our habitual attachment to *good behavior* and *acceptable ideas* is merely a civilized veneer hiding more visceral instincts and motives – the very idea

of a self *in control of itself* being logically dubious in any case. Loss of such supposed *self-control* becomes likely when others ignore the normal protocols of maintaining a certain *polite* social distance and avoiding blunt conversation. At such times, the resultant internal panic and uncertainty can manifest itself as some retaliatory outburst that breaks normal taboos and reveals the conventional idea of a self in control of itself to be a flawed perspective.

Within the process of *maturing*, we are tacitly encouraged to ignore the fact that adult social conduct is largely about acting on a social stage and is therefore centered on thinking, planning, expressing ideas and conducting oneself in the pursuit of personal outcomes, rather than seeking a useful understanding of our true place within the grander scheme of things. *Success* is invariably framed in personal terms, with the social reality in which such success is pursued being seen as just a given. But even if believing in oneself may appear socially useful on a personal level, we obviously cannot expect anything other than a troubled society if we all fall for each other's façades whilst also pursuing our own ability to dupe others. The current schismatic nature of society is the evidence.

The multitude of resultant delusions haunting our social reality is arguably tragic in terms of how extensively we misunderstand one another. Problems in this area seem centered on some inability, fear or other unwillingness to look beyond superficial social presentation and see our fellow humans behind the masks they wear. Given the duplicity and rather impersonal nature of all our otherwise respectable social acts, modern civilized humans may in fact be losing deeper connections that are otherwise natural and socially important to herd members of the same species. We certainly objectify each other in terms of profession, religious and political orientation, level of wealth, nationality and other parameters unseen in other species. With minds overly fixated on all such aspects of personal identity whilst also pursuing their own individualistic goals, attention is too easily focused on what are inconsequential and rather meaningless issues in relation to transcending the social problems all this creates.

The result is arguably a lack of genuine insight into both ourselves and others, if not a subliminal fear that we might discover social reality to be significantly different from what we imagine. But such a significant difference may ironically be that we are in fact incredibly similar to one another at a deeper level, and not the terribly unique people we imagine when carving out our personal niches in today's dehumanizing societies. If the desire to appear as an interesting and unique individual is at odds with the primitive instinct to fit in with the herd, it's little wonder that properly accepting our common humanity eludes us.

How we divide

The general blindness to how much we have in common with our fellow beings becomes obvious where for example, members of a given church are discussed as if the doctrines of that church correctly and fully define them – usually in manners that separate them off from non-members. More specifically, supposedly intelligent people can be found debating the belief system of the church without any apparent awareness that their own interpretations of that belief system are something at best tenuously linked to the reality of the church members. The supposed *wisdom* is often framed within apparently informed statements regarding *what these people really believe*, but almost never considers that self-identifying as a member of any group can actually be a very trivial matter within the entirety of a person's ideas, opinions and overall relationship with the wider world. The foolishness of this approach is further compounded by the fact that many religious texts and beliefs remain open to subjective interpretation – even to the point that some actively encourage personal quests, with doctrine playing no more than a catalytic role.

The pigeonholing of huge numbers of people within simplistic definitions by which both the totality of each person and their uniqueness are all but erased is a philosophically idiotic and socially careless act with divisive consequences. The mind no longer views people thus deprived of shared human strengths and vulnerabilities as brothers and sisters of the same species; they are instead grouped as a subset of humanity that effectively thinks with all the prejudices the mind chooses to attach to them. And they are easily painted as *the enemy* for no better reason than that some mix of fear and stupidity sees them as *different*.

When the brain is often regarded as the most complex entity known – or more correctly, *not known* – to mankind, just how stupid is it to imagine that others can be understood by simply examining some book or doctrine to which they occasionally express allegiance? Do we imagine the complex labyrinth of child psychology to be revealed by studying whatever fairy tales a particular child happens to prefer? Are culture's serious attitudes towards religious *tales of reality* not just reflexive social norms regarding all metaphysical beliefs, as opposed to tools for gaining real insights regarding whoever claims to hold such beliefs? Careful observation actually reveals that no matter how unshakable anyone's ideological utterances on anything might sound, their own idea of their true and complete conviction in such matters is somewhat an act of self-deception – their real-world behavior often contradicting whatever doctrine they profess to follow. It can even seem that their outward show of conviction exists exactly because it helps mask and suppress their inner doubt.

So, should the stance of some who would comprehensively mock religious texts whilst simultaneously insisting that others are wholly taken in by those same texts, be seen as a genuine attempt to highlight the true nature of religious belief? Or does such a stance demonstrate their own failure to recognize the powerful human motivation to align with anything at all that proves socially supportive within each individual's cultural space? If such minds better understood their own lack of critical thinking, they might better understand the same lack in others.

From buddhism to fascism, many individuals have shaped a life for themselves by banging one ideological drum or another – be the goal offered to whoever is taken in anything from personal *enlightenment* to ruling a people or exploiting others via ideas of certain sacrifices to be paid in return for a better tomorrow or a heaven in some hereafter. Preaching doctrine has been a massively powerful and manipulative stratagem throughout all recorded history. And regardless of the exact nature of any doctrine's promised rewards, any idea the gullible individual would turn his back on those rewards is every bit as illogical as the idea he might choose not to breathe. Hence, behind all the superficial differences of our complex cultures and civilizations, perhaps we are all both preachers and followers of one thing or another to greater or lesser degrees. Different as our many *tales of reality* may be, we are all members of the same story-telling species.

The scientist in his quasi-atheism is not so very different from the pious *man-of-god*, who is not so different from the ruthless financier, who in turn shares something with the wandering hobo. All of them rise in the morning with the lot that is their personal existence, plus their learned relationship to the world around them and the skills they have amassed to navigate their specific situation within a threatening world. We are the people fate has made us, and we mostly seek out optimal conditions for who we are – highly subliminal as the process of doing so may be. We therefore continue wearing more or less the same persona from day to day. The fact that modern societies provide a plethora of different scripts and stages to apparently choose from does not change our evolutionary impulse to *make our home* wherever our acting skills will be most appreciated and therefore offer us some livable form of security.

Hence, the anger expressed by the *anti-capitalist* becomes as valid or pointless as the frustration of the business chief who sees nothing but obstructions on the road to his maximized profits. Similarly, judging the criminal drug-dealer, the murderer, or even the genocidal dictator as somehow *worse* than for example, the voluntary charity worker or the *conscientious dropout*, can be seen as nothing more profound than the grooming and championing of one's personal value system. We may be – as most of us appear to be – attached to those value systems at a very deep level, but it is notable how those who live smugly in the comfort zone of seeming moral rectitude are the quickest to voice such judgmental self-righteousness. Others simply do not indulge themselves in claims of moral supremacy – their instinctive drives perhaps caring little for the pretentious art of ideological self-aggrandizement amid life's sometimes-ruthless struggle for mere survival. Evolution only recognizes survivors in any case. In this sense at least, the murderous drug baron who survives effectively wins out over all the pious martyrs of seemingly lofty causes.

The practice of judging others according to one's own moral scorecard appears peculiarly human and believably originates in the use of basic doctrinal ideas of *good* and *evil* to control minds. Rules of conduct supposedly handed down from some all-powerful deity have proven only too handy to many ruling minorities who thereby claimed authority-by-proxy. Such a stratagem fosters a mentality in which laws are deemed beyond any human interrogation, whilst the individual must be his own policeman – or risk untoward consequences such as literally *going to hell*. Hence, even where religion has since declined, ideas of supposed moral rectitude are still viable as a means of enforcing obedience to authority. However, in the absence of any divine guidance, who can authoritatively claim to define the relevant concepts of *good* and *evil*?

In a world often appearing inherently competitive – both in terms of human society and as regards mere biological survival – is the supposed *good* of some not necessarily pursued at the cost of others? Nobody ever had to worry about the heavens and hells reaching standing-room-only capacity, but within this material world it is glaringly obvious that resources are limited and that an abundance for some easily translates into a shortage for others. Winning, it can appear, requires losers.

Ecological blindness

The biological resources of the planet function by constant recycling – death appearing an inherent precondition for new life, with both living and decaying organic materials of each life form becoming the sustenance of others. In terms of looking after this planet as our home, failure to accommodate this truth within any plans for human cohabitation is simply eating the food off the table whilst disregarding that nature needs to replenish it.

This profound interdependence of lifeforms renders the biosphere susceptible to a general collapse of life in the face of any sustained onslaught on the planet's biology – something now a manifest symptom of human environmental interference. Given life naturally evolves for existing conditions, any drastic change in those conditions is disruptive at the very least and has the potential to trigger chain-reactions of death and extinction.

As regards living resources, the situation should be seen as one in which continued availability is primarily managed by nature: certainly not by man's technologies. None of our agricultural strategies – so-called *organic farming* included – do anything more constructive in this area than tune already-existing natural processes. But more generally, all our activity that focuses on maximizing human-preferred resource availability is proving increasingly disruptive to the overall renewal processes within nature, and thereby progressively diminishing total lifeform resource availability. From this perspective, all rhetoric such as *good for business* or *bad for industry* is therefore foolish if not uttered within

a wider debate recognizing how human life itself evolved long before business or modern industry were even thought about. Neither business nor industry are essential to human life, whereas non-human lifeforms are utterly indispensable.

For as long as such perspectives remain culturally suppressed such that minds generally ignore them, key truths regarding the challenges faced by human development will also remain suppressed. The business or industry spokesperson typically plays up one set of values and ignores others in the knowledge that many minds will fail to join the dots in such matters. Threats of unemployment, loss of wealth, or economic collapse serve to intimidate compromised minds into accepting human activities otherwise seen as direct threats to the entire species – whether through ecological destruction or even as vectors of war. The deceptive social cultures mankind has evolved easily exploit natural self-preservation instincts to leave most minds narrowly fixated on their own immediate needs. Truly global issues ultimately impacting all of us thus come to be seen as *someone else's problem*: a position which in terms of them being properly addressed effectively neglects them as nobody's problem at all.

How this ominous lack of collective responsibility comes to be scarcely acknowledged anywhere within mainstream culture demands another *tale of reality*. But once again the all-important backdrop is the manipulation of mind via the presentation of certain perspectives and narrative alongside the negation of others.

The promotion of determinism implicit in the modern scientific and *objective* view can be seen politically as just an extension of previous religious doctrines, in that all such worldviews undermine the individual's sense of autonomy by convincing him he is basically at the mercy of forces beyond his control. Invoking powerful external and limiting realities that curtail the scope of individual action has obvious political benefits for all who seek to exploit others. And although as individuals we obviously are indeed subject to limitations the universe imposes on us, there is no justifiable need to emphasize any such truly intractable realities as they simply cannot be transgressed by any means at all. Hence, the very fact that other limitations have to be *preached* marks them off as nothing more than inventions of human minds, rather than true limitations of the human condition.

By examining how such artificial limitations and constraints are stressed within specific cultures as religious *commandments* or civil laws, authority can be seen seeking to restrict behavior of which people are in fact perfectly capable. Hence, the degree to which any given doctrine might succeed in convincing an individual he cannot do what is in fact perfectly doable is a measure of how easily he succumbs to such outside pressure and intimidation – even if, for obvious reasons, all this is poorly acknowledged by all concerned. The common use of legal sanctions to enforce such behavioral constraints only further emphasizes them to be nothing more than human efforts to curtail the freedom of others by intimidation. It is one thing to deliberately refrain from acting in certain manners, but only through indoctrination does the mind fool itself into a belief that it cannot do what it actually can – even if such foolishness proves more self-flattering than an admission one is in fact socially intimidated.

Control of human behavior in the religious domain is similarly easy to see in terms of behavioral prohibitions – complete with sanctions that might be exacted in the hereafter, or even in this life by some blade-swinging *keeper of the faith*. Either way, fear is deployed as a weapon to subdue the spirit and gain social power through coercion – ironically in the name of *spiritual* pursuits that often postulate ultimate power as essentially outside the human realm.

The same basic ruse is even more subtle and effective in the case of the modern secular *objective* outlook – the deployment of fear being both more diffuse and more subliminal. The world is presented as a set of immutable realities but – somewhat different from the situation with civil law and religion – it is a world actually devoid of untoward consequences for trying to break the constraints of those realities, given they are in fact unbreakable *laws of nature*. However, the political trick lies in extensively stretching this principle of immutable and deterministic laws to cover all cultural areas – simultaneously negating by omission any meaningful ideas of subjective understanding or real personal agency. Consequently, the objective perspective, together with its monolithic model of *factual knowledge* and causal inevitability, enjoys almost total dominion over all key areas of authority and cultural dialog – the individual being effectively discredited as soon as any thoughts he entertains or ideas he voices are deemed *not objectively true*.

INTERLUDE: A Simple Question

Inquisitor: Do you believe in god?

Philosopher: If you want to.

Inquisitor: No – I mean do *you* believe in god?

Philosopher: Well then the answer would be if *I* want to.

Inquisitor: But do you?

Philosopher: When or if I want to!

Inquisitor: No, you don't understand the question. The answer is *yes* or *no*.

Philosopher: Surely not. Such a simple answer is too vague to address all the issues.

Inquisitor: Oh – stop messing about! Gimme an answer!

Philosopher: I'm only trying to be logical.

Inquisitor: You philosophers just confuse the rest of us.

Philosopher: People confuse themselves! Most don't even know how to ask questions, never mind understand answers.

Inquisitor: Forget *understanding* stuff! I just want an answer!

Philosopher: ... the question being? And do please be precise.

Inquisitor: Fine! Do you, Mr. Clever Arsehole, personally believe in god?

Philosopher: Ah! My mistake. I originally thought you were asking about *one* believing in god – as in, *not particularly me*.

Inquisitor: I *did* ask about *one believing in god*. One you! Or are there two or three of you in there? Oh, don't answer that. You sure know how to complicate a simple question!

Philosopher: You find questions about god *simple*? Maybe you should go into philosophy!

Inquisitor: How very clever! But you don't get out of it that easily. I still need an answer.

Philosopher: Well can you be just a little more precise? Can you please define what you mean by god? For example, is existence one of his attributes? Generally speaking, we philosophers tend to believe in things that exist, and not in things that don't... although it is not a hard and fast rule. Because what does it mean to *believe* in anything? To believe merely that the thing exists, or to believe that it is a force for good, for example? Or even for evil? And then there is the Tooth Fairy, you know. Some people think she is a force for good even though she does not exist. At least, we presume she doesn't, but you cannot prove nonexistence – just as you cannot find an absence. Or at least we presume you can't.

Inquisitor: Look, I told you. Stop messing about!

Philosopher: I'm not. These are serious issues. An answer is pointless unless we properly define the question.

Inquisitor: Sod all that! Gimme the answer – you moron!

Philosopher: *The* answer? What answer would you like?

Inquisitor: The truth! Plain and simple! Yes or no!

Philosopher: Yes or no?

Inquisitor: Yes!

Philosopher: So you mean *not no*?

Inquisitor: No! Just tell me the fuckin' truth! It's either fuckin' *yes* or it's fuckin' *no*.

Philosopher: Let's see. Either *yes* or *no*... I'll assume the *fuckin'* element to be superfluous. Can I have a clue?

Inquisitor: No! I mean, I don't mean the answer is *no* – I mean, no, you can't have a clue. Only you can know! How could *I* give you a clue? If *I* knew the answer why would I be asking?

Philosopher: Mmm... You do realize you just gave me a clue after refusing to do so?

Inquisitor: I did?

Philosopher: You told me I was the only one who can know.

Inquisitor: That's my point! How the hell would *I* be able to give you a clue?

Philosopher: Good point! But you gave me a clue by accident.

Inquisitor: That's impossible. I'd need to know the facts to be able to give you a clue – whether deliberately or by accident. So let me assure you: you really do not have a clue. And certainly not one I gave you. Call yourself a philosopher? Well get this, wooden-top: I absolutely could not know if you believe in god or not, and that's exactly why I am asking!

Philosopher: You mean that even if I knew and I told you, you could somehow still not know?

Inquisitor: No, you total madman! I am asking, because I need to know.

Philosopher: But then you are wasting your time; you just told me that even I do not have a clue.

Inquisitor: You don't know if you believe in god?

Philosopher: Philosophically speaking, it is certainly possible that I do know but, if I do, I am unaware of it. Like I said, you need to define the question fully before I can respond reliably. What exactly *is god*?

Inquisitor: Stop wasting time with this *what exactly* type stuff! It's simple. God is something you either believe in or you don't and, depending on how you answer this question, your life will be spared, or you shall be put to death – here and now, as an infidel. And as a particularly annoying specimen.

Philosopher: Mmm... Death. What a trivial affair! Inevitable for all of us in a manner that makes the how, why, where and when mere details. But I take it you do realize that by making death threats you risk introducing bias into how some people respond? Generally, I find people more likely to respond impartially in the absence of such threats.

Inquisitor: Fuck you! Which is it? *Yes* or *no*!

Philosopher: Do you really mean that if I give a certain response you are going to kill me?

Inquisitor: Oh, we're not so stupid really... are we?

Philosopher: Well, as regards you, I am not so sure on that point. Previously you stated that god was something that I either believed in or did not, but now you are insisting that I have a firm position as regards something that you yourself do not seem so sure about. Why ask me? You seem to have all the information in relation to this matter – what little there is of it.

You even said I was the only one who could know the answer, even though you also insisted that I tell you so that you could know – wholly contrary to your definition of the situation in which your knowledge of the answer was, by your own words, impossible. So even if I knew how to respond in terms of *yes* or *no* – and let me remind you that I do not have a clue in any case – it would be pointless as you could never come to know the answer... again, all according to you.

Inquisitor: You're too bloody smart to make any fuckin' sense at all. How could I not know the answer if you told me! My ears work! Speak!

Philosopher: What is the point in me telling you anything about a subject on which I don't have a clue? But on a more positive note, I had presumed your ears were in working order when I started talking. Normally I don't see any justification in using sound as a communication medium with deaf people. In any case, I have met your demand that I speak by doing as I am doing right now. Would you like me to carry on? I have some interesting ideas on the subject of human understanding. They will likely keep your mind occupied until such times as you feel like a little nap. You're obviously stressed and might benefit from a short sleep. The human attention span can be quite limited, you know.

Inquisitor: Fuck off!

Philosopher: Oh dear. Well – have it your way.

Inquisitor: Is it *yes* or *no*?

Philosopher: That is the question! Ever thought of becoming a playwright?

Inquisitor: No! Gimme the fuckin' answer!

Philosopher: Mmm... maybe not.

Inquisitor: That's not an answer! *Maybe* doesn't work! *Yes* or *no*!

Philosopher: Okay. Definitely not. Do *not* become a playwright!

Inquisitor: What?

Philosopher: Do not become a playwright.

Inquisitor: I heard what you said.

Philosopher: Well why did you ask me then?

Inquisitor: I mean, what do you mean, *do not become a playwright*?

Philosopher: It's a pretty explicit phrase designed to convey my advice that you do not allocate energy pursuing a career as a playwright. What do you not understand about that? Mmm... fascinating. Maybe I should take notes here...

Inquisitor: I mean, why did you even mention it: this playwright crap?

Philosopher: Ah! *The Great Why*! The beauty of mystery. The essence of philosophy and life itself. Why anything? Why everything? Why not nothing? Why, why, why...

Inquisitor: Yeah – why can't you just answer a fuckin' simple question?

Philosopher: Excellent question! Why indeed?

Inquisitor: No, I really mean, why in hell can you not answer a simple fuckin' question?

Philosopher: Maybe because if I did it would contradict your premise that I can't. Let's experiment! Try asking me why I *can* answer a *simple* question.

Inquisitor: Huh? Why *can* you answer a simple question?

Philosopher: Because a simple question has a simple answer! There we go. I could be wrong, but it's my best guess.

Inquisitor: Well now what?

Philosopher: I don't know. Let's marvel at the mystery of it all?

Inquisitor: Right. But I still need an answer.

Philosopher: Quite a persistent little chap, aren't you? Is it still all that god, belief, and yes-or-no stuff?

Inquisitor: Yip. So, which is it?

Philosopher: Who could ever know, when all is a mystery?

Inquisitor: Me! Is it a yes-mystery or a no-mystery?

Philosopher: That too is a mystery, as evidenced by your asking the question.

Inquisitor: Yes, but the mystery could be cleared up with just one little word.

Philosopher: Be my guest!

Inquisitor: You do not really want me to make the decision for you, do you?

Philosopher: Why not?

Inquisitor: Well I can get this over with very quickly by just deciding you are another disbelieving infidel and see that you are put to death. Is that what you want?

Philosopher: If your everyday sense of intuition was working I suspect you would not have asked that question. Some things are rather obvious.

Inquisitor: Right. So, you do *not* want to die!

Philosopher: Not so stupid... are we? Sorry – just teasing.

Inquisitor: You seem to think this is some sort of joke. Don't you realize you could die here?

Philosopher: Another intuition failure!

Inquisitor: Sod your smart ideas. You *deserve* to die!

Philosopher: Not so quick! You were sent to kill me if I did not believe in god – not if your emotions got the better of you. May I ask if *you* believe in god?

Inquisitor: Of course I believe in god! What a stupid question! That's why I kill people who don't! How do you think I got the job?

Philosopher: Okay. Tell me more about this god. What are his main attributes?

Inquisitor: Everyone knows that stuff! You know, he can see everything that happens, he fights evil, he's all-powerful... stuff like that.

Philosopher: So he is watching us right now?

Inquisitor: Suppose so.

Philosopher: And he fights evil?

Inquisitor: Yeah. Sure. Look, where's all this going?

Philosopher: So he might punish you if you did anything evil like kill someone who it turned out actually wasn't an infidel?

Inquisitor: Suppose so.

Philosopher: What punishment?

Inquisitor: Dunno. Death maybe.

Philosopher: Just death?

Inquisitor: Isn't that bad enough?

Philosopher: I don't know. I've heard speak of eternity in burning hell-fires of infinite pain.

Inquisitor: You're trying to frighten me!

Philosopher: No I'm not.

Inquisitor: Of course you are. Do you think I'm stupid?

Philosopher: Yes! It's not me that's going to mete out that punishment – it's your god! So, who's frightening who?

Inquisitor: Well okay then. All the more reason why we need to get the right answer from you!

Philosopher: Indeed.

Inquisitor: So? *Yes* or *no*?

Philosopher: I'm thinking...

Inquisitor: Oh, god gimme strength!

Philosopher: Maybe you should ask him to stop frightening you first.

Inquisitor: Look how about, since you are so damned smart, you just say *yes*. That way you get to live, and I can get on with my day. I mean, I've got much better people to kill than you.

Philosopher: It's not so simple.

Inquisitor: Nothing ever is with you.

Philosopher: In a world in which your god exists but I am dishonest about my disbelief, and you encourage me to be dishonest, we might both end up burning in hell.

Inquisitor: Ah, so! We have an answer at last. If you said *yes*, you would be being dishonest... which means your honest answer is *no*. So, there we have it, Mr. Clever-Clogs-Now-Prepare-To-Die. Congratulations! You've won the jackpot. Exposed beyond doubt as a true infidel, you shall be righteously put to death by god's good servants! You know, some of you customers can be damned awkward! Anyway, I am contractually obliged to ask if you have any last requests?

Philosopher: Perhaps. But whether they turn out to be last requests or not is dependent on whether you are merely *extremely* stupid or are *absolutely* so. I shall voice them in any case. I request that you reflect on the fact that my previous statements regarding a possible world in which I was dishonest regarding some disbelief in god, reflected nothing more than a mere hypothesis. As such, they were not intended to reflect in any way the true state of affairs in which we currently find ourselves. Therefore, I have no responsibility for any and all assumptions, correct or otherwise, you may make based on those statements, as well as any consequences that may ensue from said assumptions. Furthermore, I request you to note

that, as I am through ignorance of the matter still unable to determine my true state as regards any belief or disbelief in a god, and also as I speak under the duress of a fate potentially worse than death, I have a material interest in being scrupulously correct in all these statements. Finally, I request that you consider that any failure on your part to fully understand the onerous implications of all these matters and the uncertainties to which they pertain, may, in the event of god's existence, condemn you to spend eternity in hell.

Inquisitor: You should be a lawyer!

Philosopher: I don't charge enough money.

Inquisitor: I've got some very good business contacts.

Philosopher: Why am I not surprised? Tell me! What is god's punishment for failing to kill an infidel?

Inquisitor: Eh... never thought about it.

Philosopher: So, is the punishment for not killing a hundred infidels a hundred times worse than for not killing one?

Inquisitor: Sounds logical.

Philosopher: ...and worth checking out in your line of business, I would think. How many infidels have you not killed?

Inquisitor: I haven't not killed any! I kill 'em all!

Philosopher: You mean all the ones you find.

Inquisitor: Well of course! How the hell do you not kill infidels that you don't even find?

Philosopher: Quite easily. I've not killed every single Martian that I've never found. Effortlessly. But I don't see any justification for believing in a god that promises eternity in hell for not killing Martians that one has not found. So anyway, would your god's punishment be based only on found infidels that one fails to kill, or is it based on both found and non-found, non-killed infidels? And does the number of found and killed infidels act in some mitigating way? And what about non-found but nonetheless would-have-been-killed infidels? On the other hand, what about non-found but nonetheless would-have-been-killed-by-mistake believers? All very complicated!

Inquisitor: You mean I could be punished for not killing people that I have not even met?

Philosopher: Anything is possible. You might even be punished for potentially – although not actually – killing the wrong people that you only did not kill because you did not actually meet them – if you see what I mean. But note that the word *might* does indicate that this is only a possibility – but a possibility *nonetheless*. And also, *none-the-more* to be exact. Or *nearly exact*, to be both exact and *nearly exact*. Philosophy is all about questions that don't have easy answers, you know.

Inquisitor: Well, I'll be damned!

Philosopher: Some might say you're tempting fate there. Anyway, let's just tackle one basic question before we get into the deeper stuff..

Inquisitor: You people should carry psychiatric health warnings.

Philosopher: What people *should do* too easily veers off into political advocacy; let's keep it simple. If god rewards you for good but punishes you for bad, what happens if you are a mix of both? I mean, suppose you are a really good inquisitor killing tens of thousands of

infidels, but a little bit bad because you don't kill every last one, maybe as mentioned – because you can't find them... What then?

Inquisitor: Dunno.

Philosopher: This is a major problem for anyone in your situation as it seems there is a chance you could suffer terribly if it is not properly and fully addressed.

Inquisitor: Well if you think that, then you must believe in god. An answer at last! Now – let me get the fuck out of here before you mess my head up any more.

Philosopher: Not so quick. We have still to clarify whether you should kill me or not. I only said there was a *chance* you *could* suffer. So just as I did not previously state that I did not believe in god, neither did I just state that I do believe in him.

Inquisitor: You're so bloody smart that you really do not have the slightest clue what you believe, do you?

Philosopher: Well I'm inclined to neither believe nor disbelieve in a god... certainly not until such times as it is clarified what is denoted by the concept of god – including matters such as existence being a possible attribute. More accurately, I know, or at least *I think*, that I don't know what I believe, if you know what I mean.

Inquisitor: And just supposing I don't?

Philosopher: Well you could try this... *I don't believe I know what I believe*. It's nearly the same difference, although difference implies a paradigm wherein sameness is notable by its absence.

Inquisitor: Do you mean you don't know what you know? Wow – that sounds illogical. Do you also know what you don't know?

Philosopher: I don't know.

Inquisitor: Can't you make this any easier?

Philosopher: You find it easy?

Inquisitor: No! That's why I'm asking!

Philosopher: Then you mean, can't I make it any less difficult?

Inquisitor: Evidently not... to answer your version of my question.

Philosopher: Well done. But let me try again.

Inquisitor: Must you? I'm beyond caring whether I kill you or not.

Philosopher: Why... I had never realized that you cared at all.

Inquisitor: Look – do me a favor. Please. For the love of god – whether you believe in him or not – just tell me if I should kill you or not. Is that asking too much?

Philosopher: Not at all. I'm simply trying to get to the bottom of this complex matter of my position as regards a belief in god so that we are absolutely sure that my advice as regards you killing me is the best possible I can offer under the circumstances.

Inquisitor: I can't take any more of this! The stress is too much. God can go to hell.

Philosopher: Well of course he can if he is all-powerful, but why would he want to do that?

Inquisitor: It's just a statement of exasperation. Of course he can do anything. But who gives a damn anyway?

Philosopher: I'll assume that final question was a rhetorical one. Anyway, frustration is the enemy of rationality. Calm down and proceed slowly.

Inquisitor: That's it! I'm gonna kill you.

Philosopher: Fine. You did explain that your way of caring did not include whether I lived or died. But first we need to be sure that I am an infidel, and then, all going well, you can certainly kill me... but I do in any case suggest proceeding slowly to keep your stress under control.

Inquisitor: No! We don't need to be sure of this infidel crap! We don't need to be sure of anything! If I just kill you, you're gonna be dead and that's that. Sod god! Sod infidels! Sod believers! Sod this stress! No questions. No problems.

Philosopher: Okay. But you do realize it would technically be less effort to not kill me?

Inquisitor: Yeah, but it would be far more fun to just go ahead and do it!

Philosopher: So, are you sure that the fun would justify the effort and stress involved?

Inquisitor: Abso-fuckin-lutely. More so with every passing second.

Philosopher: And it's all worth the risk of those eternal burning fires?

Inquisitor: Listen smarty-pants... we cannot establish if you are an infidel or not so, the way I see it, that side of things is an even bet either way.

Philosopher: Not really. If you kill me, that's final – whereas if you do not kill me today, I could come back tomorrow, giving you more time to think about the pros and cons of it... time to sleep on it, if you like.

Inquisitor: You know what your trouble is? The more nonsense you talk the more you annoy people, and the more sense you talk, the more you still manage to annoy people. Sleep on it? Sleep on it! How can anyone sleep when there are nutcases like you in the world? You deserve to die even if you *are* a believer!

Philosopher: You're confused again.

Inquisitor: Confused? Confused! I'll confuse you, you fuckin'... you fuckin'... you.. you

Philosopher: What's wrong?

Inquisitor: Uh... it's my heart. The doc told me I absolutely had to take it easy.

Philosopher: Then you should have listened, you silly boy! Life's not all about killing people, you know. I suggest you lie down... uh... I didn't mean fall down.

Inquisitor: Sod you, you... you...

Philosopher: I'm a philosopher.

Inquisitor: Not the word I had in mind!

Philosopher: No... But then, you're not well.

Inquisitor: Gosh, I hadn't noticed. It's nothing fuckin' serious you know... I'm only dying! This is it. Thanks a lot!

Philosopher: Well at least you won't need to worry about killing me or not killing me. Even I was finding that puzzle quite a challenge. What a shame we can't resolve it. Well you can't have everything.

Inquisitor: Please, god! Stick another five minutes on the end. Just five minutes.

Philosopher: Wow! You talk to your god? But sorry – I'm not sure I'd be able to resolve all the issues in only five minutes.

Inquisitor: I sure would!

Philosopher: Would that be with god's help?

Inquisitor: Look you imbecile! I'm dying right here and now. What the hell does any of this matter to you?

Philosopher: Just curious.

Inquisitor: Oh... I can feel consciousness fading. You know... for what it is worth... I did sometimes doubt all that god stuff. But the wife said we needed the income.

Philosopher: Really? Even though you killed all those people for him, you thought he maybe did not exist? Did he never repay your kindness? I mean, just to let you know he was real.

Inquisitor: You insensitive bastard!

Philosopher: Is that you talking to god or to me?

Inquisitor: Oh! This is it! The end!

Philosopher: Can you still hear me? Is your god there?

Inquisitor: Uhhhhh..... God almighty!

Philosopher: Tell me what he says!

Inquisitor: Fuck off and die!

Philosopher: Charming! He might at least have put you out your misery by telling you if I believe in him or not... So much for omniscience! Oh well. Back to the drawing board I guess...

10 – The Case For Transcendence

Assuming no one consciously does anything without a motive, it is arguable that the weaker the social relationship between people, the less likely are their actions to be mutually beneficial. Without a sense of shared social goals, we are naturally more inclined to center on our own personal interests than on those of others. And although we may sometimes be moved to intervene and lend assistance in the case of strangers in our immediate presence, we are understandably not so giving as regards the billions of other strangers comprising the rest of humanity. Unsurprisingly, it would appear we are emotionally disposed to building social bonds within our immediate surroundings, whereas out-of-sight not only means out-of-mind but also too remote for any truly meaningful relationship – even if social media seeks to tell a different story.

By this reckoning, the entire notion that formalized social power structures have our real interests at heart becomes less credible in relation to the size and consequential *internal remoteness* of such structures. The statesman proclaiming his heartfelt interest in every citizen's welfare is therefore a hypocrite who demeans the value of true human bonds – albeit he may be too immersed in his own propaganda to realize this. His claim of concern for millions defies any intelligent insight into what constitutes a real interest in others and the nature of constructive social interaction.

Hierarchical structures such as the nation-state nonetheless remain culturally central to almost every human society, even as their façade of unity only masks endemic internal alienation. And it is certainly not just within the political structures of nations that hierarchical frameworks are so culturally ingrained as to be effectively beyond question. Almost the entire spread of our species across the planet is coordinated – such as it is – through a presumption we must assume identities and play distinct roles within the many organizations, institutions, businesses, churches and so forth that regiment human affairs into hierarchies.

Such extensive formalization is clearly distinct from anything seen in the animal kingdom and is also something increasingly dragging both the individual and his experience of communal living away from evolutionary-normal conditions towards levels of artificiality previously unseen and therefore of unknown consequences. Meanwhile, the replacement of natural social cooperation with the highly individualistic and often-ruthless pursuit of money as a universal means of procuring almost anything does little to help preserve whatever untainted sociability remains in place.

Humans nonetheless appear resilient and able to adapt to changed social conditions – which is not to say that the resultant social reality is beneficial in the manners its supposed architects might claim. In any case, whatever criticisms may be hurled at the current world order, it generally enjoys knee-jerk defenses from those in key positions – almost as if, despite all the changes humans have already wreaked on this world, further changes would be inherently undesirable. This is obviously illogical, but whether such reflexive conservatism is simply rooted in the fear of change or results from a more rational justification of the status quo, those deemed to be *in power* appear little interested in anything beyond power itself.

Perhaps this is why amidst a plethora of competing ideas and commentary from a gazillion angles, we actually have little real agreement on most societal issues; power trumps understanding. As a result, it seems that, much as our *great social thinkers* might have never admitted it, the real and complex machinations of society's evolution ultimately remain poorly framed by any of their great ideas and supposedly deep insights. Instead, social change appears intricately entwined in the changing and often obscure motives of countless

social groups ultimately populated by unique individuals. Simplistic ideas populating mainstream culture may prove useful for the telling of convincing *tales of reality*, but reality itself is much more than a mere collection of tales.

Manufactured indifference and submission

Beyond superficially legitimizing one's social persona, the fact is most people probably care very little about their government's policies or about actively furthering any political ideologies. As long as their immediate life appears tolerable, they are likely too preoccupied with their daily routines to waste time speculating about how or why things are as they are, or about some hypothetical change that they generally expect will never happen.

For better or worse, this thinking suggests that social stability is simply a *state* in which people are generally persuaded that, despite any obvious inequalities or other problems, their own lot is acceptable to a point where serious objection or rebellion is not worth the effort. But notably, such a state does not depend on any demonstrable fairness, social justice, or even personal contentment; its key attribute is complacency, indifference or some other personal reluctance to act in the face of limited discontent.

Hence, although social stability in relatively egalitarian cultures can look reasonably functional in terms of large populations cohabiting without major problems, nothing can guarantee against the progressive erosion of such egalitarianism or the erection of barriers to dissent and protest. The only functional requirement for apparent stability is that public protest remains minimal or somehow muted. Furthermore, it can be reasoned that since those who gain power are by definition disposed to pursuing such power, they invariably hold a natural tendency to enact whatever measures increase their power and suppress whatever challenges it may face.

Other things being equal, this constitutes the ratchet mechanism by which power has a natural propensity to garner more power unto itself whilst never conceding it. This actually constitutes a permanent latency for fascism or other forms of runaway authoritarian zealotry: phenomena that typically manifest themselves through the state's increasing use of its hierarchical structures as tools for propaganda and the suppression of dissent. Consequential increases in public desires to protest the state's actions will likely be met with corresponding increases in efforts to thwart those protests – perhaps by breaking them up, banning them, or even via so-called *false flag* operations: clandestinely infiltrating them with violent elements such that they can then be publicly disgraced.

In such situations, long-standing pretensions that the apparatus of *the state* was ever working primarily in the people's interests progressively unravels, whilst those in power are almost compelled to up the ante at each move given their increasing reliance on force as a means of keeping the public in check. Whatever the outcome, the otherwise believable myth that the nation-state has some inherent worth is revealed as a lie used by those who simply exploit nationalism as a means to procuring power for their own benefit – albeit such a ploy could be argued to include almost every citizen in at least some small way.

In a world where power-in-numbers has often been the deciding factor between which populations survived and which were vanquished, it is understandable that people tend to back the structures of their nations as apparent bastions against the worst. One may know one's *country* to be guilty of various wrongdoings but provided someone else or some other country is on the receiving end of those wrongdoings, the world one knows appears preferable to the world known by others. Knowing the force of violence, the individual easily reasons it better to be on the side of those who perpetrate the violence than those who suffer it – even if such self-interest is rarely voiced openly. In more general terms,

populations will mostly look the other way if their governing elites act out their worst excesses on others. Such indifference is of course actively encouraged through government propaganda and its supposed justifications for all such state-funded violence.

The resulting overall global situation is one of a generalized and subliminal paranoia – both within nations and between them. Conforming to the demands of the nation in terms of obeying its laws and paying taxes generally feels to the individual as somewhere between an annoying obligation and a barely-acceptable price for apparent protection within a dangerous world. Of course, choice in this matter is hard to exercise in any case given that flaunting the state's demands obviously results in state-sanctioned punishments.

However, what could in fact be seen as just a grand and respectable *protection racket* benefits from the human mind's readiness to window-dress its own compliance and subjugation as something loftier than the exploitation of primal instincts it actually is. Those in power use the persuasive influence of flattery to exploit *their citizens* desires to belong. Hence the identity of a nation becomes culturally imbued with notions of inherent *greatness* and is glorified *in itself*, rather than seen as just the pompous façade of a gang-mentality structure – something ultimately built on the constant threat of retribution for non-compliance. But within cultures deploying mass media to daily indoctrinate people to the seeming *normality* of all this, even the gang leaders can come to believe in themselves as people of genuine honor. Within any social analysis, it is only too easy to underestimate the extent to which the manipulation of tribal instincts can fuel mass conformity and robotic group-think; probably no one is wholly exempt from such blanket hypnosis, even if many will completely deny its very existence. Calling out the gang leaders for what they really are has in any case always proven a dangerous game.

The cultural cloaking of social fear as something other than what it really is offers self-esteem to those exploited by such fear and thereby makes the overall ruse even more effective. But in order for this stratagem to succeed there also has to be genuine fear centered on something real, or at least something believable. Hence ruling by covert fear tactics has always required plausible demons: from eternal hells and outright devils to enemy nations or *enemies within* – creations by which ruling elites sought to persuade people that their only salvation lay in compliance with authority. The ploy is actually pretty crude: simply highlight some supposedly evil force or enemy, and then convince the masses that it is only through a unified and obedient approach that such evil can be vanquished. Of course, publicly denouncing anyone unsympathetic or critical of the relevant doctrine as *unpatriotic*, *an infidel*, *a traitor*, or whatever other demonizing jargon befits the ideology in question, keeps many people all the more scared of stepping out of line. Nonetheless, there is always a further recourse to torture for anyone still not hearing the message. Thus did one ruling order supposedly embracing the simple moral edict of *Thou shalt not kill* mete out to its dissidents the utterly depraved torture of being hanged, drawn and quartered.

Given such an overall state of affairs, there are less obvious but wider costs for everyone. For example, conflict and war become culturally understood as permanent fixtures once minds believe reality to be inherently populated by evil forces. And so we see that even in so-called *peacetime*, nations maintain standing armies permanently ready for war, with the continued sight of uniforms and weapons helping ridicule any ambitions of a peaceful world. People come to see peace initiatives as unrealistic, and paradoxically believe that only preparation for war can protect them from the horrors that war entails.

When manipulating the citizen's thinking with the specter of some supposed *enemy*, the statesman's voiced aspirations of peace often amount to nothing more than blame-shifting decoys by which he also tries to legitimize the state's aggressive actions as credible in the

face of external threats. But once one rises above the naïve *tale of reality* that says *my nation* is inherently *good* and other nations are all potentially *evil*, it is obvious that a world of armed factions can only be a world suffused with background paranoia and a constant propensity towards conflict. Even if an armed state has no intentions of making war, how is such a harmless stance to be understood by other nations, given the first tactic of war is to surprise one's opponent? And when no one really knows for sure who will attack who next, the *preemptive strike* can appear as a legitimate means of managing risk – even where no threat otherwise exists. As a consequence, any apparent *peace* within the current order is nothing more than a tense standoff that threatens to collapse at any moment. History provides the proof.

Moreover, periodic war is arguably essential to the current world order. Sustained peace might raise questions about why such huge resources are poured into weaponry and military forces. The truth that many jobs are founded on humans threatening or killing one another might be revealed, and corporate profits from the relevant industries might suffer. Without the ultimate threat of military intervention, global imbalances might begin to even out and the whole geopolitical map of the planet might alter significantly – an unwelcome outcome for nations *strong-arming* their global dominance. Perhaps most importantly, without scenes of horror and bloodshed to grace our screens, people might realize that ordinary human beings are not in fact hell-bent on murdering one another, and that war mentality is promoted primarily to suppress such a realization, and to stave off the really meaningful questions regarding shocking global inequality and ongoing oppression.

From some perspectives, the world as it is runs on wars. Peacetime not only poses commercial problems for what could be described as *the war industries*; it also undermines the otherwise common idea that a highly structured and centralized governing power is key to a stable and supposedly healthy society. Without wars, society as we know it could not exist, given the devils of religion no longer hold quite enough credibility to exact the desired level of fear and subjugation from everyone. There is nothing like the insanity of war to stoke up national sentiment and have people rally behind the very leaders who might otherwise be held responsible for its outbreak in the first place. Propaganda has taught many to unthinkingly see some inherent honor in whoever dies in a blood-soaked uniform – cut down by the very forces of global paranoia their supposedly *great nations* help keep in place.

The cost of obedience

This whole situation is only sustainable by widespread techniques of indoctrination starting in infancy. Obedience to authority, together with the idea that learning necessarily consists of assimilating the ready-made ideas of others is all enshrined in the classroom paradigm – the ritual of remaining silent and attentive whilst someone else informs you about life and how to live it. Much as the initial *educational* stages may focus on the learning of seemingly innocuous basic skills such as language and arithmetic, the principle that life is essentially about conforming and unquestioningly absorbing the knowledge of others is the real lesson. Educational merit is of course issued in proportion to the extent that one knuckles down and avoids questioning core ideas or how they are presented – a reward-and-punishment system that later continues into the workplace and society in general. Hierarchical structures are not built on challenges to their authoritarian frameworks – a truth subtly reinforced at almost every turn from childhood onward.

In general, *the system* expects conformity and rejects criticisms. And to the extent that individuals enjoy its offerings in return for subservience, they can also be seen to police its norms – habitually acting shocked and seeking to ostracize whoever dare undermine its conventions. The cultural renegade should not expect many friends, given every *gang* only

exists by demanding conformity.

The choice for the individual – if it can even be seen as *a choice* – is to keep his head down and accept whatever benefits conventional *gang life* offers, or to reject the general group-think nature of society and see if life makes sense on some other dimension. But this choice is rarely taken consciously, and it is certainly not a black-and-white matter given the complexity of daily *normality* in which we exist. Although we might recognize that absolute and unthinking acceptance of social norms only makes for a gray robotic personality, we also sense how excessive criticism of the social order can threaten our social standing. Life is often about whether it is better to speak up or just remain silent, with every situation presenting unique complications. No set strategy proves reliable; there are simply too many variables at play – not to mention that the idea of the *independent self* as both observer and personal guide can only mislead anyone seeking a wholesome understanding of himself within the wider world. But ultimately everything can nonetheless be reduced to one simple question: *What constitutes a meaningful approach to life?* However, given the open-ended nature of abstract thought, such a question invites an infinitude of answers.

Perhaps ironically, this question also appears more challenging within so-called *first-world* populations. Rather as if the ready availability of life's essentials sapped the natural appetite for daily living, affluent people can be found restlessly searching out some ever-elusive *meaning of life*. By way of contrast, those who have the least in a material sense are often observed to have a down-to-earth contentment with their lot in a manner devoid of such tortuous searching. Does the supposedly great search for *the meaning of life* not just highlight how some have already lost contact with some inherently meaningful aspect of simply living – something that maybe cannot be accessed via any number of plans or thought-out strategies? Maybe what is sought is in truth not so much the *meaning of life*, but simply an end to meaningless ways of living: the rediscovery of our natural *joie de vivre*.

An existence in which most danger is superficially removed – or managed at a higher level such as *the state*, its police or military, and in which conformity is socially expected in return for life's essentials, is surely an existence more lacking in spark and adventure than its many followers would ever admit. Hence, it is no surprise that people turn to all sorts of recreational activities in attempts to replace that spark and adventure. However, every demand in this direction made from within the system becomes only another means by which the individual exposes himself to the system's exploitation.

Consequently, major industries feed off many areas where people seek relief from the monotony of *normality's* daily grind. Media in particular is geared to fake experiences: the serving up of second-hand real and fictional danger and drama – the very elements removed by a controlling social order that seeks to justify its existence by disguising the tedium of conventionality as something desirable. The inevitable removal of primal forms of excitement by a world based on daily routine is arguably a cause of the widespread malaise and restlessness so typical of affluent peoples.

The stark and terribly logical truth is that life without at least the occasional serious challenge is boring. And a serious challenge by necessity includes some risk of failure plus having to deal with failure's consequences. But this is not a reality within media-based entertainment. If your helicopter is destroyed in the video game, or your new lover in the romantic novel fails to appear as expected, there is no real impact on your life – just as there is no real depth to the satisfaction of winning the video game or reading the predictably happy ending to the book. All media content is a distraction, and much of it only serves as a surrogate for a more meaningful life. If this were not true, and if the supposed means of finding fulfillment within modern consumer lifestyles was not in fact just based on a bunch of

lies, we would not see such comprehensive desires to replace what modern life lacks; we would not see the longing to escape its inherent emptiness driving so many to submerge themselves in so much distraction.

Our evolutionary confusion

Conventional science, by its academic and authoritarian formulation, constrains the validity of its inquiry to those aspects of reality that, as it would appear, conform to the deterministic model. Hence, inasmuch as we might want to gain control over such aspects, those conventional approaches prove valid. But it is abundantly evident from the effective failure to derive useful *social sciences* that human behavior does not conform to such a deterministic model – or at the very least, such behavior proves too complex to be meaningfully interpreted by any such model. Therefore, at a time when humans are in fact directly responsible for all the main threats confronting the species, continued faith and investment in conventional approaches is very arguably a distracting waste of mental energy – if not actually a continuation of the dangerously delusional position underlying the awkward evolution of human ideas to date.

For the time being, the intellectual world appears almost entirely unaware of this, as evidenced by the fact that, instead of actually defending itself against criticisms of the abstract thought process on which the scientific position is based, academic culture in effect does not even consider such weaknesses could exist – the complete silence on the matter being deafening. Does such a blinkered outlook in the face of logical problems with abstract thought result from academia being too stupefied by the weight of its own hubris, or is it because the potential for culture-wide seismic shock is subliminally understood as simply unthinkable? Perhaps it is both, and maybe more – ironically all diffused throughout our modern world in manners too nebulous for abstract thought itself to ever grasp; it is a fact that clouds are invisible from their interiors. But regardless of any such speculation, academia and other institutional power structures embody the wide and long-standing human tendency to establish hierarchical power in manners that prevent minds from questioning core ideas.

We are all actors, and far more so than is generally recognized within conventional sociology or psychology. The sociologist and the psychologist are themselves taught to act out a belief in certain simplistic, logical and rational explanations of human behavior which invariably endorse the current social order and its ideas. In general, those ideas see the individual as the focal point for any *problems* – never the social structure itself, and certainly not any *professionals* in the pay of that structure. Viewed from a philosophical perspective, the resulting abstract models dominating the social sciences are conservative and limiting, as well as being both too simple and too complex to grasp the rather visceral drives behind much human behavior. But they also fail to examine the willful and often highly organized deployment of deception and trickery by which human hierarchies sustain themselves – precisely because this would undermine society's overall hierarchy within which the *professional community* itself finds comfort.

For example, the various types of fear that institutions propagate for political ends is never critiqued by the world of mainstream psychology; the understood limit of practicing conventional psychology being to *treat people*, as opposed to asking if seemingly *personal* problems may in fact be symptomatic of *the system* itself.

Meanwhile, although *gut feelings* and emotions might be frowned on by science, they nonetheless play highly instrumental roles in determining human conduct – albeit operating in manners professionals and academics have generally been taught to ignore. In truth, most momentary behavior appears rather independent of whatever constraints formal societal

structures impose; control by laws and regulations can only go so far. Hence, verbally convoluted but nonetheless crude theories of *society* fail to explain behavior that is in fact better understood by immediate fears of not fitting in, reactions to threats, and succumbing to enticements and desires.

Behind the veneer of technological sophistication, we remain very animal-like on emotional and organic levels, and our culture might be less confused if modern civilization did not work so hard to obscure this. If our technological aspect is stripped away, a cursory view of biology or genetics illustrates exactly why humans can be seen as just another animal – almost all our physical technology being external to the organism in any case. But the current situation is that too many respected minds are too locked into the religiosity of *objectivity* and modern science to consider that additional understanding might lie within more introspective forms of observation. This dogmatic refusal to constructively explore the subjective dimension manifests itself in blinkered academic comments such as that emotions remain the most mysterious elements of human psychology and are therefore the next area for *clinical investigation*. But the very reason they will remain mysterious to certain minds now and in the future is that *clinical investigations* can never directly grasp certain *non-objective* matters any more than studying audio signals provides an understanding of the subjective experience of music. Basically, the scientist with his microscope and abstract ideas only blinds himself to the sort of truth alluded to within the common adage that *beauty is in the eye of the beholder*; his method of looking leaves him too preoccupied to spot the very thing to which that method blinds him.

Is it not obvious that something is lacking in a form of knowledge where our emotions – the recognized wellsprings of so many of our actions – are considered mysterious on the basis that any subjective examination of them is by definition *not objective*, and therefore *bad science*? Note here that the concept of *objectivity* has no logical connection to the etymological roots of the word *science*; the marriage of the two is simply an adopted convention.

Abstract thought appears relatively young in evolutionary terms, and we are arguably still too blinded by its sheer power to look at the wider implications of unreservedly deploying it. The species has yet to properly understand and responsibly address the grave risks this all poses – both in terms of potentially destroying the planet, and as regards foisting false perceptions on one another through the psychological trickery abstract thought enables. Kindergarten children are not given matches and fireworks for the simple reason they would be too fascinated by the possibilities to reflect responsibly on the related dangers. Similarly, we homo sapiens might do worse than reflect a little more on the considerable dangers of our unique evolution.

If our environmental dilemma is now somewhat out in the open, the cultural elephant-in-the-room is the manner in which psychological technologies enable the mind to plan and execute the exploitation of other minds. At a time when environmental issues are forcing a realization that exploitative indifference towards the life-support systems of our planet is not viable on the long-term, the mere existence – never mind the extent – of our exploitation of each other's minds remains culturally suppressed. And this is so, even though nuclear warfare resulting from the global scale of our immaturity in this area will possibly spell our demise – even before environmental damage manages to exert its deleterious impact.

In evolutionary terms, ignorance regarding the underlying psychology is the real cancer threatening our continuation. Any honest fool can grasp the basics by which our runaway industrial expansion damages the biosphere, and simply scaling down the most dangerous excesses of that is obviously a straightforward matter – were there only the will to do so.

But while the species drags its heels on that front, it has not even acknowledged the cultural paralysis that comprehensively and reflexively obfuscates widespread psychological abuse – the powers-that-be having for obvious reasons always maintained a deliberate silence on the matter. There is no surprise here: their very perception as *the powers-that-be* rests upon sustaining a mass failure to question the supposed wisdom by which a tiny fraction of humanity bosses the rest.

The apparently different sides of all this human stupidity can ultimately be seen as facets of the same phenomenon: an evolutionarily rogue species that as yet has little meaningful understanding of its true position within the greater scheme of things. Drunk on expanding its technological power, it aspires to a god-like superiority over everything, whilst refusing to understand its own limitations and vulnerability: both its physical dependence on organic life in general and the dangers of recklessly exploiting its embryonic form of cognition.

Details of this grim picture are inevitably complex – especially as no analysis allows matters to be framed other than within some interminable convolution. But that should not be posited as an excuse for intellectual conservatism or what may yet prove to be suicidal forms of apathy. No other species on this planet has experienced this unique form of madness by which some in effect argue quite seriously that the ideal of *progress* necessitates our own destruction. *Real and meaningful progress* might nonetheless be as simple as openly acknowledging our unique technological powers to be married to a unique challenge in terms of understanding that such powers can destroy every bit as efficiently as they can create.

To be clear, technology in all its many forms awaits a cultural awakening to the fact that the extremely powerful evolutionary development it represents includes the potential to wipe most life off the face of the planet – even by accident. Human technology is of no *intrinsically* positive value – at least, not until its uniquely dangerous powers have been culturally acknowledged and mastered, and it is handled with due caution. Not only should an informed approach be wary of it in terms of the physical damage its deployment has already exerted on the planet's life-support systems, but at its core level of abstract thought its potential as a weapon of psychological coercion would ideally be culturally flagged up in order that minds can be detoxified and immunized. Failure to move forward on these matters may spell nothing less than our own technologically-enabled end.

More immediately, the continued and unchecked advancement of technology into all areas of human existence creates a situation in which what most of us consider *normal* is in fact increasingly at odds with the world within which we evolved. In *advanced* societies, both the social and physical environments are unrecognizable from those of just hundreds of years ago. And yet there seems almost no cultural recognition that this in itself might be a source of problems. While we put laboratory animals into alien environments and witness how their behavior is transformed – usually in worrying manners – we seem astonishingly indifferent about doing the same to ourselves on a global scale. And this is so, even when the negative results are everywhere to be seen. Given our widespread indifference to multiple forms of social conflict occurring alongside the trivial bickering endemic to more affluent populations, the supposed benefits of *modernization* are in fact hard to identify once the hypnotic fascination with technology and its consumer lifestyle is put aside.

Paralleling the growth of the herd from local tribes to millions-strong nations, the species has undergone a process of personal alienation in which relationships are inherently strained and others are increasingly held at a distance. Perhaps the unchecked demands for more and more cognitive abstraction in line with increasingly complex technological societies are taking their toll through what is commonly termed *stress*. Devoid of any mainstream cultural ideas within which personal discontent and lack of fulfillment are realistically framed

and possibly transcended, the mind indulges in flailing attempts to address its resultant psychological disorientation. Meanwhile, an often overly satiated and restless body deprived of its natural physical relationship to the surrounding world only increases the individual's general state of unsettled torpor. Hence, today's alienated citizen can lash out in a seemingly spontaneous fashion at otherwise innocuous moments. He might also retreat from *normal* social interaction or be sucked into dogmatic world-views that only point fingers at anything other than the real roots of his troubled state. Blame, escapism and even anger, can too easily crowd-out opportunities for meaningful insights and beneficially lucid reflection.

Any notion there might be a fundamentally challenging issue in the very evolution of our species remains unvoiced amidst endless political groups championing supposed *progress* within yet more miracle doctrines – invariably framed in terms of one social faction needing to overcome another. In truth, probably very few really believe such inherently divisive nonsense, and yet hordes of unhappy souls will always make ever-willing recruits for the next power-hungry self-righteous leader sold on his own propaganda. The obvious and logically self-defeating nature of perpetually forming political gangs that take sides against one another at every level right up to the potentially catastrophic saber rattling of superpowers is largely lost to a species now a stranger unto itself.

There is no meaningful way forward without a fuller grasp of our curious evolution. However, an immediate challenge in terms of going further is to realize we cannot be examined like microbes on a petri dish viewed down the microscope of some independent observer; we are life itself and should not expect to better understand what that means without addressing the full complement of the human experience. And given our unique characteristic remains the technology of abstract thought, surely that should be the focal point in terms of better understanding peculiarly human attributes – not the elaborate *tales of reality* that form the substance of politics, religion or science?

To this end, abstract cognition ought to be examined as thoroughly as possible, and from all angles – notably excluding neither objective nor subjective perspectives. Furthermore, it ought to be remembered that distinguishing between for example, *objective* and *subjective*, or *body* and *mind*, is itself just an abstract operation within the mind – ultimately an illusion based on cognitive and communicative convenience rather than on any true insight. An extremely useful tool as thought may be, it has inherent limits.

Intellectual treacle

The cultural sanctification of knowledge and intellectualism to obscure the manners by which abstract thought establishes power and dominion over the minds of others is nothing abstruse; the real-world visible impacts of this truth are every bit as obvious as is the increasing commercialization of science, technology and academia to further the process. Thus the controlling power of human thought is channeled into the nebulous, culturally-endemic and quasi-religious idea of *progress*: the notion that tomorrow will somehow be an improvement on today if only we can all keep pushing in the same ill-defined direction.

But even leaving aside that the nature of political power is ultimately to obstruct wholly consensual thinking, what might such a direction be? Upon a little reflection, there is no logic in believing the human experience will benefit from yet more unnecessary gadgetry and lifestyle complications – a belief system that in itself appears only culturally sustainable through blanket publicity exploiting people's fears and aspirations. Were the products and services so relentlessly pushed by the consumer society really to people's benefit, why would they need such promotion in the first place? Is the situation not simply that the thought control historically exercised through various religions has partly morphed into one that preaches a newer but already globally-rampant form of consumerist materialism?

Within this money-spinning *religion of progress*, the stark inequalities of human living conditions simultaneously serve as supposed proof that more progress is required, as well as subliminal warnings that not keeping up with the herd has undesirable personal consequences. Not surprisingly, the competitive nature of evolution appears to have thoroughly permeated human thought itself – if it has not in fact always been a key element in the cultural popularization of certain ideas at the expense of others. But how different such a view is from that of the academics who would have us believe that their pursuit of knowledge was some impartial quest for the benefit of all. Just as clerics have so often presented themselves as gatekeepers of peace, blessings and eternities in heaven whilst they and their churches profited handsomely from various unsavory practices, the many institutions of our great new *progress* culture are all thoroughly respectable in their presentation, but notably reaping disproportionate benefits, and certainly not above numerous underhand and nefarious practices.

The analogy with religions can however only go so far, given the extensive global reach of modern materialist culture in all its forms. Whereas the exploitation of the mind via traditional religions tended to be geographically constrained and potentially obvious due to a multitude of competing belief systems, the objective fact-based form of modern materialism transcends almost all human divisions and is to all intents and purposes never critiqued. It stands as the culmination of thousands of years of increasingly sophisticated abstract thinking that has effectively come to regard the power of thought itself as some new improved omnipotent and omniscient god. After all, how could thought itself ever be validly critiqued without such a critique effectively being an indirect re-endorsement of the validity of thought? The very asking of any question at all acts as an indirect validation of thought. In short, thought utterly presumes its own worth.

Instead of framing the current human dilemma as an obsession with *materialism, progress, objectivity, runaway consumerism*, or anything else, perhaps it should be framed more broadly as the result of an unbridled and *unthinking* approach to thought.

Notably, no sooner is this idea postulated than the mind wants to object to the implicit suggestion that its thoughts should somehow be controlled – ironically when its thoughts are already extensively controlled by cultural indoctrination. But the issue is not about thought being controlled by other thought – either internal or external; it is about re-balancing thought by seeing that nothing appears *absolute*, and therefore nothing can be known absolutely. *Objectivity* in particular, appears blind to this truth.

As long as our ideas remain constrained within the confines of such objectivity, we consciously or otherwise accept the fact-based scientific perspective as a control over what can be considered *known* – a position that can certainly generate a truly endless number of facts, but only within an isolated and abstract framework where non-consensual and subjective knowledge is generally dismissed. Given that we all have unique perspectives, characteristics and subjective experiences, and that reality is never static, and also that abstract thought is arguably nothing more than a particular form of neural activity, is it not plain idiotic to imagine that objectivity's more or less static facts of supposedly universal significance are the one and only path to a deeper understanding?

11 – The Knowledge Delusion

In a manner similar to the way physical exploitation of the planet is leaving it crippled as a supporting environment, the exploitation of the human mind is rendering cultural thinking as a spiritual wilderness – both mechanisms leaving barren landscapes in which the odd bright artifact blinds us to the resulting rubble within which the potential for a new evolutionary paradigm is trampled underfoot. The cultural thrust of *objectivity* as the mindset of both our rapacious environmental destruction and the rather clandestine control of minds obscures the link between these two things – arguably fulfilling the political goal of distracting attention from multiple unprecedented existential threats right before our eyes.

Current human culture exhibits an inability or unwillingness to join the various dots and realize that the situation appears quite simple: the evolutionarily embryonic technology of abstract thought is cumulatively incredibly powerful in manners not yet generally acknowledged; it therefore acts somewhat against our better interests in the lack of any counterbalancing cultural critique.

Consequently, whilst minds tinker with philosophical, metaphysical, political or even financial ideas in vain hopes of resolving human dilemmas, there is no realization that such tinkering is itself integral to a more basic problem. Our unsubstantiated and unthinking conviction we can properly understand matters via abstraction and conceptualization leaves us fascinated with cognitive modeling, whilst we overlook the disconnect between the resultant models and the reality they seek to grasp. Any model may be impressively powerful for its ability to aid us in achieving certain ends, but we are only fools if we think no further – if we forget that any model is not the reality, and that reality might therefore exhibit unexpected characteristics as a result of unrecognized weaknesses within the modeling process.

So enthralled has modern man become with the raw power of *objective* thinking, science, and technology, that he has blinded himself to the dangers of what he is about. His newfound power fuels his folly as much as it does his supposed wisdom. For example, thanks in part to what is widely considered *scientific progress*, we now live in a world where an all-out nuclear war could render the entire planet uninhabitable.

Is it not obvious that whatever benefits our unique evolutionary trajectory has delivered, such benefits are not as yet optimized? More bluntly, it could be said the current situation is actually one in which the untamed power of human abstract thought is the number one threat to life on Earth. And this by no means only involves nuclear weapons; environmental devastation worsens daily for reasons not wholly unrelated.

Of course, such a position is not about any direct impacts of human thoughts themselves; it is about thoughts being connected to actions in the physical world. However, given that cognitive deconstruction and reconstruction of reality are implicit processes of abstract modeling, it is reasonable to consider those processes as somewhat instrumental in human problems, and to then examine exactly how the mind forms and processes its ideas about reality. A simple question arises: can the mind understand and allow for its own shortcomings when working with cognitive abstraction?

To address this question, there is no need to immerse oneself in the knots of traditional cognitive psychology; it appears obvious on a more general front that the mind has naturally come to model the world according to whatever proves *immediately expedient*. What else should be expected amidst a threatening world and the struggle for survival? Evolutionary persistence, a controversial subject as it may be, arguably all reduces to nothing other than

expediency.

However, *immediate expediency* has no concern for long-term continuation, and this appears unfortunately evidenced by the dangers of the current human situation. It is unquestionable that our species has spread across the planet in an explosively successful manner – but explosions do damage. Whatever proves beneficial in specific circumstances is not necessarily beneficial over a longer period or on a larger scale. This seems to be a lesson not yet assimilated into human culture.

Before the technology of abstract thought evolved, the ability to do long-term damage to the environment, or to subtly exploit others via mind games simply did not exist – at least not in the forms humans increasingly demonstrate. All beings were essentially at the mercy of external circumstances inasmuch as their abilities to alter those circumstances were limited to rather instinctive behaviors targeting food, shelter, safety and reproduction.

Human abstract thought has proven a real game-changer in this respect, and the proof is all around us. As regards framing the resulting problems, abstract thought itself needs to be as flexible as possible – including circumspection about assuming anything within the mind to be a useful starting point, or to be somehow beyond question. One way of envisaging the origins of human problems is to consider that we may be foolishly habituated to overly simplistic ideas – to assumptions that most matters are relatively easy to understand and therefore relatively easy to resolve. A casual mistake is to see such common and well-accepted ideas as solid truths simply because they have never been properly interrogated. Culture is actually stupefying in this regard; social conformity readily discourages questioning whatever others fail to question.

But can ideas and forms of thought evolved for *immediate expediency* really be up to the job of understanding their own weaknesses as regards addressing longer-term problems? Given the unfathomable complexity of reality, it is arguable that we need to deconstruct thought itself before we can derive a more solid approach to an optimized but inevitably limited understanding. Merely examining our much-changed world, its superficial problems, and the mass of modern ideas that underpin its general direction, is surely not radical enough to do what apparently seems necessary for our continuation: to consciously steer our evolution off its current path and away from the potentially disastrous future we otherwise face.

If the idea that mind might play a serious evolutionary role appears odd, we should remember that so too do all the tangible results of human abstract thought when viewed in comparison to the rest of nature; like it or not, we already are in a very odd situation. But given evolutionary theories are so often based on the study of other species, whilst human formalized power has always suppressed real awareness regarding the true powers of the mind, it is actually quite natural to be surprised by the idea that mind might have real evolutionary significance. Standing things on their head – that is, realizing the human mind to be behind everything that makes humans so unique – leaves it rather ridiculous to imagine that the same mind would not influence our evolutionary trajectory. Has it not already done so to spectacular effect?

At this point, we are forced on heavy philosophical questions about possible manners in which the mind and its modes of thought could influence the longer-term future of the species; how this might happen, and in what sense we might be imagined to be somehow *in control* of the situation. But as ever with abstract thought, even the simplistic framing of these deep questions can hide unrecognized assumptions. For example, who or what is it that asks the questions and is postulated as able to answer them – and to subsequently act in light of any such answers? Any idea that we can do so as entities discrete from the

surrounding world is surely just a habitual and rather casual reflex of cognition. Escaping lifelong mental habits and unthinking ideas is no easy task.

It should be remembered here that cognitive division is the inherent basis of all abstract thought. Synthesis is illogical if not impossible without prior analysis, just as construction or reconstruction is not possible without prior deconstruction or some other means of conceptualizing the world – even if such processes are all highly subliminal and embedded as yet more reflexive acts of the modern mind.

This observation illustrates through simple logic why abstract thought simply cannot understand the whole – not primarily because of the apparent complexity of the whole, but because abstract thought is a paradigm utterly constrained to parts and relationships between those parts. In contrast, the wholeness of reality logically knows no parts, descriptions of parts, or relationships between any such would-be parts. It simply has no parts. It just *is*. Or at the very least there is no solid reason to believe that any component parts it might have correspond to the parts the human mind imagines. The mind can in any case do no better than speculate over such matters, if indeed such speculation itself is not worthless – other than to demonstrate abstract thought's futility in the face of an utterly intractable dilemma of its own making.

Even the idea that reality is complex is merely the mind indirectly acknowledging the impossibility of all its divisive thoughts ever grasping anything more than fleeting ideas regarding tiny snippets of reality. In truth, reality itself actually exhibits no demonstrable complexity outside of the mind's idea that it is complex – a truth widely obscured, precisely because cultures to date have always valued analysis and abstraction, whilst remaining blind to the shortcomings of such an approach.

Thought only invents more problems when it fails to understand its own nature. For example, it appears illogical that a philosophical debate can meaningfully switch from ideas that reality is *unfathomably complex* to a contradictory idea that reality has no demonstrable complexity at all, but both ideas happily coexist once the mind understands itself as malleable in the face of changing circumstances. Conventional thinking struggles to grasp how seemingly incompatible and opposite statements could serve to clarify anything. But the situation is simple once such a perceived conundrum is seen as a direct result of abstract thought itself.

Furthermore, a mind constrained within logical abstraction will use its crude and somewhat illusory concepts to piece together a model of reality that will inevitably be intractably infinite in terms of each supposed answer only posing new questions. Causal thinking makes the point well: what is the original cause of everything – or who created the creator? By way of contrast, a mind disengaged from the process of abstract thought faces no such dilemma. Philosophically speaking, it could be said that the effective treatment of any question involves simply putting it aside, given that any apparent answering of it can only be a relative and circumstantial response; it can never be a final answer that does not indirectly ask subsequent questions.

The reaction to this sort of all-in-the-mind perspective might be to accept it in principle, but to nonetheless reject it as being *of no use*. Ironically, such a reaction proves useful in itself for reminding us that human evolution embraced abstract thought for pragmatic utilitarian goals – not for philosophical purity. But if this is truly the case, and if evolution is about survival as a minimum, the mature mind can reason that abstract thought is indeed simply a useful tool, rather than an inherently good means of deriving some *absolute truth*. Any workman knows that tools serve us badly or even break when we attempt to bend them to

every conceivable problem.

The reflexive position that any valid idea – or physical object, for that matter – ought to *have a use*, reveals a natural impulse to exploit worldly situations amidst an equally natural lack of caution regarding wider consequences. In this respect we remain somewhat like any other species; we focus primarily on the immediate. Hence, despite our many highly developed technologies involving extensive planning, we pay little attention to the overall impact of those technologies; we generally concern ourselves only with whatever immediate goals we have in mind. However, in the case of humans, our instinctive and natural indifference to whatever seems to be of no concern is exaggerated by crude ideas of ourselves as something essentially separate from the surrounding world.

But of course, even a crude overview of biology indicates that physically separating ourselves from the world in the same way that we do cognitively would mean nothing less than immediate death. Hence there is the most profound incongruity between seeing ourselves as basically objects within a world we judge ourselves able to beneficially alter, and the utter dependence we actually have on that world – not to mention our vulnerability should we get things wrong. In seeing ourselves as distinct from the world, the mind adopts a massively one-sided view of the situation. And while it is far less conventional to take the opposing view – to state for example that *we are the world* – both views in their own ways only illustrate how inherently limited the simplicity of abstract thought really is. Even a third position that neither of these black-and-white positions is appropriate only further highlights the flaws of abstract thought; it is a negative stance that in no way clarifies any supposed *true reality* of the situation.

The dilemma all this creates is that, unlike other species, our use of abstract thought and developed technologies in the interests of *immediate expediency* combines partial ignorance with significant impact, and therefore has unknown but potentially deleterious ramifications on the long term. Hence, the underlying technology of human abstract thought demands a new form of responsibility if we are to rise above the hitherto reckless and unmanaged destructiveness typical of our evolutionary uniqueness. Without embracing such a broader and more responsible vision of our frightening capabilities, we will likely be snared in the evolutionary trap of being simply too clever for our own good.

Is there a fix?

If humans are to be successful in the challenges they currently face, they must find the courage to question their otherwise unquestionable faith in abstract knowledge. They must rise above their narrow visions of materialistic progress and socially corrosive forms of mind manipulation and master the lethal power with which evolution has endowed them. They must become as gods in the sense they properly recognize their formidable power, but they must stop pretending to really be almighty and omniscient. They must embrace the essential mystery of existence for the beautiful magic it truly is and forget their delusions that any amount of analytical or theoretical thinking is ever going to explain the inexplicable. They must realize that abstract thought and all its content is by nature divisive thinking, and therefore, in the absence of a complementary awareness of such a limitation, it can only distort a true understanding of reality.

The awkward reality for minds that have unchecked faith in abstract knowledge is that absolutely any idea can be undermined by argument once the pitfalls of abstract thought are understood. As a consequence, all ideas within academic pursuits, all the supposedly great theories of science, all the arguments of politics, all the frameworks for recounting history, and even all the seemingly axiomatic facts of our very existence, reduce to nothing greater than the cognitive products of a process with demonstrable flaws.

Of course, widespread and unchecked faith in abstract thought is such that it is generally not even recognized as a faith at all, being too subliminally ingrained to even be acknowledged as a distinctly human phenomenon – never mind having to answer troublesome philosophical questions. Hence, any idea that thinking the sky to be blue is ultimately just a figment of human imagination is likely to be seen as insane – *imagination* having been culturally separated off from *knowledge*, as if such knowledge was not simply accepted ideas or *culturally endorsed imagination*. Factual knowledge can in any case be seen as nothing more substantial than accepted *tales of reality*, with the religious pursuit of *objectivity* cementing it all in place by insisting on consensus – all as if *true knowledge* was something to be voted into existence.

For some, a supposed empirical basis for *objective truth* separates it off from for example, faith-based beliefs rooted only in metaphysical ideas and handed unquestioningly from one generation to the next. But what is the significance of the distinction between ideas that claim no tangible proof and those that do? Is *empirical proof* anything more than a consensus over how experience is to be interpreted and *proof* established? Can anyone prove beyond argument that a drop of falling water touching the surface of the sea is either rainfall or ocean? It can of course be seen as either, neither or both according to the mind's volition, but this very observation illustrates how our ideas of reality are to some extent based on mental choices: hardly a sound basis for deriving supposedly *objective truth*.

That such a drop of rainfall even exists is only an idea born of a passing phase between – as our minds would conceive it – cloud-born humidity and its submersion in the sea. Notably, none of this has any substance at all once the mind turns its attention elsewhere: once it moves on to its next momentary fixation. In terms of some ultimate *tale of reality* that ideally would be more than just yet another tale, any and every idea and would-be *objective truth* reduces to little more than the fleeting activity of the mind.

The abiding problem abstract thought has never really had to face is that the labels, classifications, categorizations and interpretations of reality inherent to the substance of thought and its supposed provision of *proof* assume divisions within reality that even the deepest science has failed to establish. Not even at the level of the smallest particles has a truly independent state of anything been conclusively demonstrated – not to mention that the entire interpretation of matter as composed of *particles* is sometimes rejected in favor of an alternative *fields-based* approach. At the other extreme, our understanding of the cosmos meets essentially the same issues in that nothing we consider to be an entity appears to exist as a properly discrete one. The suggestion is again that reality is divided by the mind in manners that fail to accommodate even the level of apparent connectedness which the mind itself begins to conceive when closer inspection of matters forces a progressive realization that abstract divisions appear illusory.

Just as human history tells the story of our sun being once understood only in a very primitive manner but now being known in considerable scientific depth, so too the story of abstract knowledge itself is about adding more and more details to construct what humans generally consider as a complete picture of reality. However, there is an associated problem: within this process we have come to assume somewhat unwittingly that devoting our attention to a myriad of ever-finer details is preferable to devoting our attention to the whole.

Modern minds are generally so invested in objectivity that they fail to imagine other choices could exist as regards how to deploy thought. Even when philosophy can reduce the value of objective knowledge to nothing more than something of *immediate expediency*, and even when extensive hard evidence shows current human behavior to be a major problem threatening all life on this planet, nothing has yet shaken the general faith in the cultural

bedrock that sustains all this. For now, it remains acceptable to simply mock the entire idea of philosophy whilst being swept along with all the exploitative madness destroying the biosphere on an ever-greater scale.

Such *faith* in idiocy is of no superior standing than religious faith; it can even be argued to be inferior for being more dangerous. Whatever empirical link to the physical world objectivity might claim as its justification, religious ideas can just as readily claim a link to the mental or spiritual world; it is only indoctrinated convention that would make anyone assume the one is inherently of more value than the other, or even that they constitute truly separate approaches. Very arguably, it is not the excesses of religion that represent our greatest threats; it is the accelerating obsession with technological manufacturing and consumption. Whatever anyone may make of the spiritual devotee spending decades in silent contemplation searching out some nebulous idea of *enlightenment*, or even of the zealot seeking to convert all others to his ideas with bullets and bombs, our most tangible problem is the generalized plundering of the natural world in which we evolved and upon which we remain wholly dependent.

Whatever fantastical *tales of reality* certain religions may embody, and however deviously some religious doctrines are concocted to exploit the mind, mere ideas do not of themselves destroy a planet's natural functioning. Nonsense can always be refuted or rejected in a manner not possible for polluted and denuded environments. But there are of course parallels between these two situations inasmuch as humankind's development – being rooted in the technology of abstract thought – can be seen acting behind the reckless exploitation of the physical and mental worlds alike, with toxic results for both the environment and human culture. However, many religions do at least call on the individual to be reflective and to value whatever is *in his heart*, as well as to commune with some god or ideal of a greater whole. But this is lamentably absent in the frenzy of materialistic acquisitiveness afflicting modern times.

A logical order can even be seen in the unfolding of all these things; if abstract thought is the common factor behind both mental and physical forms of exploitation, it seems only natural that aggressively exploiting the mind would basically predate the aggressive exploitation of the physical world. Individuals have always presented ready-made opportunities to whoever understood the art of psychological manipulation, whereas sophisticated forms of environmental exploitation had to develop step-by-step.

By the same process that abstract thought learned to frame what we now regard as *life's really big questions*, it could also figure out how to gain power over others by pretending to answer them. Hence it could be said to this day that whilst *true spirituality* remains the original and honest quest by which the overall self might best understand what life is all about, formalized religions mostly represent a corruption of that quest. And it is in this same sense that today's tacitly secular *scientism* is revealed as just a godless church: a belief that approaching tomorrow's heavenly utopia requires a rather slavish and unquestioning commitment to the non-god of *objective knowledge* – complete with mass ceremonial worship of whatever material fruits are thereby produced.

This entire course of events can be seen as simply the increasing sophistication and effectiveness with which the human mind has learned to exploit whatever it turns its attention to. The fundamental divisiveness of abstract thought dictates that the species, nation, tribe, self, or anything else for that matter, is seen as something essentially independent of the surrounding world, and we become thereby prone to thinking in manners that fail to balance *immediate expediency* with a wider and non-analytical understanding.

From any holistic perspective, this is all inherently misguided thinking. It may be rooted in our evolutionary development and could even be called *natural*, but we might do well to remind ourselves that we have no reason to regard the evolutionary process as necessarily operating in our best interests. In evolutionary terms, homo sapiens currently looks like a prototype – a novel entity exhibiting the raw power of his newfound thinking abilities, but devoid of any developed wisdom to beneficially manage the dangers such power represents. Hence, we might want to consider that prototypes too often combine spectacular results with self-destructive flaws.

Our dilemma is highly understandable given that, like all other species, we evolved to deal primarily if not exclusively with the here-and-now. Never before has a species had to think that its formidable powers require it to be responsible in terms of learning and demonstrating reasoned respect for the natural order of things. Never before has a cumulative form of knowledge created a situation in which the powers of a species continued to increase from generation to generation over many thousands of years. Never before has a species had to consider that its very continuation might be threatened by its own powers – its unique evolution combining primal instincts and technological knowledge in manners that test its ability to mature before such a cocktail explodes in its face.

Mind as the real frontier

It is from these ideas that mind itself emerges as an evolutionary force. How the mind perceives the human condition influences how we behave, and how we behave will dictate whether or not we manage to transcend the problem of our hitherto unchecked technological capabilities.

Conventional ideas of our evolutionary trajectory focus heavily on the development of the human brain, even if the link between whatever is known about that particular organ and the many external changes resulting from the human mind is rather opaque. In any case, whereas the mind's abstract cognition has added a cumulative aspect to the recording and communication of knowledge – perhaps constituting an entirely new form of knowledge – no such equivalent exists on the purely physical dimension. Being manifested externally, our physical technologies certainly exist on a dramatically expanded scale and often perform tasks impossible for any number of people alone, but none of that would be possible without many thousands of years spent little-by-little adding to the overall mass of abstract knowledge now shared across billions of minds.

From all such perspectives, it is reasonable to consider the unique powers of the human mind as the key driver behind our uniquely human evolution. By way of contrast, if we discount unique aspects of the human mind and brain, and also our accumulated wealth of abstract knowledge, we are physically not significantly different from cavemen or even more primitive hominids. And it is questionable if this does not remain the case even when the human brain is added back into the picture; our brain may be unique and seen as highly-evolved, but it is really the sum total of our recorded knowledge and accumulated technology that paints us as increasingly different from other species. The current technological age is only possible by learned social behaviors that organize knowledge, skills and societal roles to create results well beyond the creative powers of any one individual.

Given our instincts for control and dominion, it is perfectly natural that the evolutionary emergence of abstract thought would be used to explore each and every potentially beneficial avenue – exploitation of others included. Human history even illustrates that failure to maximize the empowering advantages of abstract thought was a dangerous failure in terms of survival. Highly organized and technologically advanced armies always constituted formidable fighting machines and could be confident of victory over any *less evolved*

enemies – a truth often reflected in the smaller details of human history.

The resulting and generalized fear of our own species takes many forms. In smaller tribal situations it is no doubt of a fairly immediate and visceral nature, and basically keeps minds alert and keen to find anything that might give them an edge over potential enemies – occasionally resulting in aggression where the ability to extend power may appeal to tribal leaders. In the modern nation-state where leaders are necessarily remote from citizens, the dynamics are more complex, and the fear more channeled. Everyone knows the nation could be toppled by an external enemy, but statesmen, like tribal leaders, also know they could be toppled by internal revolt. Just as with small tribes, enjoying positions of power generally demands that others have faith in one's actions, or are simply too frightened to object – or live amidst some psychological mix of both. But the individual's direct view of what a leader is about is reduced in proportion to a nation's size, at the same time as the leader's ability to use propaganda and deception increases.

Hence, any leader's fear of potentially being usurped by internal forces is likely to be addressed by crafting public perceptions, and manufacturing fear over consequences of any *unauthorized* social or political change. For example, distracting citizens by convincing them that the presence of enemies necessitates *national unity* is one obvious tactic to stave off a close examination of whatever any leader is really about. But to the extent that the existing structure is seen as conferring power on the leader, the citizen's only remaining influence over the leader is to somehow remind him that such power is not assured – ultimately to make the leader frightened of failing to act in the citizen's interests.

Inasmuch as citizen and leader are formally separated as *the controlled* and *the controller*, ongoing but culturally subliminal struggles rooted in fear pit them against each other, with each trying in their different ways to engineer the other's behavior in their own interests. The resulting imbalance can only survive as an inherently fragile social truce: a common but obfuscated standoff embodying the permanent potential for civil unrest. Thus, in the event power becomes excessive and overly abusive, smashing the entire state apparatus can appeal as a positive move for the citizen.

More generally, all of this is about hijacking the evolutionarily protective function of fear to weaponize it as an exploitative tool within human affairs. Even between two individuals, the presence of a gun can allow one to dominate the other through fear alone, not to mention that calculated words are enough to sow fear in the minds of large groups. And this is perhaps the main reason why *objectivity* has culturally evolved in a manner that devalues the subjective experience; should individuals ever come to realize in great numbers how thoroughly their minds are exploited through fear, and should they then seek to free themselves from such mental enslavement, the entire nature of human habitation on our planet could quickly change in the most dramatic manner. The current seats of power would lose their veneer of credibility as people finally came to understand the extent and true costs of the trickery at play in today's world. Arguably, it is only by the endemic and calculated use of fear that this is held back – all whilst the devaluing of subjective awareness creates personal doubt regarding any ideas by which the individual might figure these things out.

To grapple with such a seemingly dramatic stance, there are a few basics to reconsider.

Firstly, it has to be remembered that human ideas in all their glorious sophistication are in fact only very crude *tales of reality* born primarily of utilitarian goals. Any notion that our *great thinkers* were ever really tackling the essential mystery of existence is probably rooted mostly in human hubris and its intellectual manifestation – potentially masking the truth that more animal-like motivations probably underpinned their acclaimed works. We should not

deny that behind the pomp and formality of lofty ideas couched in sophisticated language we remain primates driven by primal instincts – albeit with an evolutionarily peculiar cognitive development.

Secondly, that same cognitive development and its utilitarian value have only provided power in the rather unthinking manners typical of evolutionary change in general. There is no known plan to evolution; in arriving at whatever ends it produces, it does not as far as we know, operate in any intentionally constructive manner resembling the human mind's pursuit of specific goals. Or more exactly, we could say that abstraction within the human mind appears merely a consequence of evolution – an obviously manifest phenomenon of great impact that may nonetheless reveal itself to be little more than a carcinogenic blight on planetary life. Given our formidable powers, uncritical faith in what we are about may be the very essence of that cancer.

Thirdly, given the dubious relationship of abstract thought to reality, it is perfectly reasonable to suspend all conventional ideas and perspectives within an effort to reappraise exactly what the true human condition might be. If utilitarian goals targeting *immediate expediency* have been the main driving force behind human knowledge, it can be reasoned that such knowledge is simply not attuned to addressing the very different challenge of an entire species having progressively evolved powers that render its collective conduct a global threat. The present-day cultural outlook that champions objectivity in an attempt to thwart subjectivity may have achieved certain limited goals for minds that were concerned almost exclusively with their own lot, but as a species, we are now in need of a more sophisticated management of our otherwise unbridled powers and seemingly unrestrained self-interest. The natural inclusion of subjective experience within the overall picture is the obvious move, given that this does not have to be done in competition with objectivity, but can be seen as adding a complementary dimension to complete a more balanced perspective. Most notably, recognizing the true value of the subjective world would be a great leveler with the potential to redress the excesses of hierarchical social structures. This is in fact exactly why the cultures of modern hierarchically structured societies have evolved a dismissive attitude towards all things subjective; their misguided leaders worry too much about what they might personally lose through generalized human enlightenment for them to consider what could be gained on a broader basis.

Fourthly, from the philosophical perspective that popular worldviews are simply useful conventions of thought, there is in fact no demonstrable or *ultimately true* distinction between the objective and the subjective, between body and mind, or between any of the other dichotomies by which human thought has so confused itself. Given that the seeming validity of such divisions offers only circumstantial utilitarian benefits, they should be regarded as no more than optional tools of thought. By all logic and current science, no truly separate entities corresponding to any of our conceptual divisions of reality have been established. However, thought's delusions in this area are compounded by the fact that group belief in discrete entities is somewhat self-fulfilling – group belief in anything at all invariably proving profoundly persuasive. Hence, although the nation-state can be regarded as a complete illusion in this sense, it proves an incredibly powerful one with extensive influence over the thinking and behavior of many millions who in turn endorse the illusion for each other. The sheer prevalence of all such illusions is certainly one way of envisaging the general evolutionary challenge we face.

In simple terms, it appears we humans do not understand the world remotely as well as we generally like to imagine and pretend. That in itself creates great opportunities for fear to take root once it is deliberately sown. Academia plays a key role with its pretense that

human knowledge is the pursuit of something inherently *good*: some higher goal immune to nefarious agendas. But this position only embeds a respectable form of stupidity throughout all academic subjects, at the same time as the fear of being different from the crowd sustains such stupidity.

More generally, we are collectively dumb enough to act as if the communal fooling of ourselves was smart. If we desire a specific reaction from another, we will often do whatever brings about that reaction with little concern for any knock-on effects, just as we exploit the physical world with a similar lack of concern for other consequences. Unfortunately however, amidst such indifference to the full ramifications of our actions, we habitually presume our disinterest in such things to be unrelated to the problems that inevitably ensue. The predominant view of life is one in which pursuing personal goals by any means possible is an overriding prerogative; negative repercussions are generally regarded as mere annoyances to be suppressed by any means possible, if not simply ignored.

The fact is mainstream human ideas have never seriously assessed the scope of human ignorance or the dangers of viewing it with indifference. This is another take on the challenge we humans now face: to realize that our problems stem from our rather blind faith that conventional forms of knowledge and their use for immediate objectives can afford to look the other way as regards whatever is of no interest or escapes our recognition.

Such faith is demonstrably misplaced; the invention of the nuclear bomb as a supposed means of ending war was immediately hijacked for purposes at odds with both that goal and the ideals of scientists working on the project. As regards seemingly highly knowledgeable individuals, this demonstrates either their ignorance or their indifference regarding just how deceptive human reality can be – an intellectual blindness regarding how their seemingly smart minds were open to exploitation by other minds of duplicitous agendas.

Such ignorance on the part of supposedly clever people no doubt results from a cultural favoritism towards a particular form of knowledge that not only blinds the mind with ideals of objectivity but divides knowledge into rather discrete specialisms. Not only is it respectable, but it is often expected that individuals immerse their minds deeply within one area and make themselves *experts* in that particular area at the expense of gaining a more generalized knowledge of the wider world. This is a means of creating individuals with greatly detailed abstract ideas on one or two specific subjects, but no general sense of themselves, their deeper motivations, or how others might choose to exploit them. For those in power, the value of earnest workers who nonetheless have compromised overall perspectives is obvious.

The championing of objective knowledge and its promised benefits for whoever becomes a *professional* willing to deploy that knowledge within some socially-approved field of *human progress* can create a deeply-embedded sense of entitlement: an expectancy of reward for complying with the demands of hierarchical social structures such as governments and businesses. Throughout our education, we are indirectly informed that whoever puts their head down and works towards *passing exams* – which are in effect just measures of a sort of *dedicated acquiescence* to existing ideas – is a person deserving of extra benefits. This cultural pampering of whoever *plays by the rules* promotes and normalizes forms of unquestioning conservatism. For all who to some extent fall prey to such indoctrination long before they even think to question it, any subsequent re-examination of ideas thus adopted can be a steep climb – especially as it may involve questioning the adult role they play in perpetuating this overall state of affairs.

But to say that this all results from *society's* preferences is arguably to fall for some of the

very conventional ideas that have been thus indoctrinated. *Society*, however the term may be understood, is not the knowable entity that conventional social sciences like to think. Neither is it well understood by dividing it into conventional groups of classes, races, sexes, or any other demographics. Such divides are arguably academically popular only because they play into the divide-and-conquer stratagems of those in power, whilst also creating pseudo-intellectual content for the academics to perform their apparently informed juggling tricks.

Dimensioning society in political terms is of course particularly popular, but this too can be seen as a ruse inasmuch as even in the face of governmental changes real challenges to power can seem impossible – its modern formulation as a financially controlled privatization of resources having rendered political theater as the mere smoke and mirrors by which the public is further duped.

The truly fundamental concept in all such debates is arguably *power* – not left or right-wing factions, and not even money or ownership. Power certainly uses such social machinery to exert its influence, and that is arguably the only reason such things exist, but to see *society* as primarily operating via such elements is to overlook the rather generic nature of power lurking behind and within them all.

But for discussion purposes, social power can be thought of as existing in at least two formats. One is *immediate power* where an individual is circumstantially and informally influential in group interactions – something quite separate from the *formalized power* embodied in social institutions. Immediate power and related power battles can be seen as the primal form of power we share with animals – something acting very much in the here-and-now, and which might concern anything from a local inhabitant being asked to take charge of lost strangers, to two men having a punch-up over a woman. Formalized power, by way of contrast, is rather anonymous and can be seen in the tax demand, the requirement for licenses before carrying out various activities, and the presence of lawmakers, police forces, and legal systems to enforce conformity in all such matters.

Immediate power can be seen as a natural aspect of life – a mixture of fear and desire that helps any being navigate their changing situation – whereas formalized power appears much more as a uniquely human contrivance: in part, the result of thousands of years of psychological trickery clandestinely penetrating human minds to convince virtually everyone that structured control by others is somehow in their best interests.

When thus described, a certain lack of logic appears intrinsic to any submission to external authority, but formalized power in the real world proves more than stunningly convincing given that fear and desire, just as with immediate power, are its real driving forces. Hence, we can be sure that even if presented with the illogicality that being forcibly subjected to the control of others is somehow beneficial, most minds will nonetheless react with reflexive defense – arguing their conservative subservience to power structures and institutions to be somehow in their best interests. How does this work in practice?

Firstly, the fear of being different is closely related to the desire for social acceptance. We instinctively sense social rejection as potentially dangerous, and formalized power exploits this through even the entertainment industry and its supposedly adult conduct of laughing in unison at whoever is merely different. Secondly, there is the related fear of undermining one's social standing. If one is even vaguely invested in *the system* – and very few are not – ridiculing that system is indirectly ridiculing oneself. This is also why formalized power best rewards those who comply fully with its demands; such people are *rewarded* with positions in which they have the most to lose and thereby become the most complicit in

furthering power's goals. Thirdly, indoctrinated fear is sustained by propaganda in which formalized power warns of various social ills if its powers are challenged or diminished. This alone comes in many guises. One is ironically that if dissenting voices are afforded a platform they will indoctrinate the gullible, with disastrous consequences surely ensuing; another is in effect the almost comical idea that formalized power is important for putting down the sort of corruption and oppression endemic to formalized power.

Grasping the superficially unusual aspects of these ideas requires some serious rethinking of common perspectives and long-standing assumptions. From questioning the true nature of social power to highlighting the endemic flaws of conventional knowledge, and from undermining the otherwise unquestionable dominance of *objectivity* to devaluing raw causality, what is required is more about the deconstruction of existing ideas than the construction of new ones. And at all times when addressing what remains an unfathomably connected reality, all ideas should be regarded as loose approximations at best – more *tales of reality* that embody the potential to delude in proportion to whatever seemingly insightful benefits they might offer.

Specifically, as regards social power, all meaningful exercising of such power can in fact be seen as *immediate power* – the general controlling of ideas and behavior in one-to-one exchanges or within structured groups. Formalized power then appears as a contrived tool of hierarchical social structures, a façade that merely consolidates and channels the use of immediate power. For example, we might have no real liking for our boss, but we know how the employment hierarchy works, and so our desire for social acceptance and its rewards forces us to replace our would-be natural responses to the boss with those of disgruntled subservience or some other form of *socially expected hypocrisy*. Our mind, whether it admits it or not, feels trapped.

The immediate power the boss exerts is not primarily enabled by any immediate behavior of either party; it is based on a permanently present acceptance of the formalized worker-boss relationship. Hence, power is institutionally crystallized and allows those of recognized positions to exert structural and formal domination over others by exploiting whoever is deemed *below* them. Clearly, the presentation of this arrangement as somehow beneficial to all is in the perceived interests of those who pursue social power by positioning themselves at the top of the various hierarchical pyramids it creates. The very idea that formalized power structures even exist can thus be seen as merely the outcome of sophisticated multi-dimensional indoctrination evolving over thousands of years to enhance the comprehensive corruption of immediate power. Hence, we now have a situation in which the boss does not even need to be present for the worker to succumb to the rules of the game, given that anyone's acceptance of any position within any hierarchy subtly constitutes a further continuation and promotion of all the related illusions.

Meanwhile, conventional narratives about the inequalities of resulting social arrangements being caused by *class divisions*, *the evils of capitalism*, *corrupt politicians*, or some other bogeyman of popular thinking, remain rather blind to the blanket role of psychological technology in sustaining the power imbalances inherent to all such perspectives. Notably, conventional and fashionable explanations of the status quo typically rely on modern concepts and social theories that simply ignore the long and unique development of human civilizations – the full history dating right back to the misty emergence of abstract thought itself. If it is easy to outline the steady development of physical technology over this time span, it should not be too hard to see a similar development as regards the technologies that engineer the human mind. However, unlike physical technologies, the technology of engineering the human mind has always included engineering the mind's ignorance about the

deployment of that technology.

Here it is important to reintroduce the concept of *propensity* to avoid this particular *tale of reality* appearing too tall. It also helps to consider what might be called *applied manipulative psychology*: something of a darker and more clandestine character than anything recognized within the conservative psychology of academia. Within this concept, various forms of mind manipulation can be framed as the overall outcome of abstract thought combining with a natural propensity to amass power by any means possible: a perspective avoiding any need to explain the covertly powerful net influence of all such psychology via some grand conspiracy. On the contrary, both the learning and execution of such psychological trickery is highly subliminal in manners that make it all the more effective for operating amidst almost complete cultural invisibility.

Just as the modern personal computer quickly evolved to become highly sophisticated and therefore only marginally comprehensible by any single mind, it should be obvious that thousands of years allows civilizations to evolve functional structures that result from many smaller individual goals and techniques, as opposed to some great planning exercise from on high. In fact, just as seen in nature, human history suggests that grand plans are generally far less robust than structures evolved over long periods and thereby benefiting from multiple minor adjustments. Thus, as each generation of power more or less copied the behavior of the previous generation, a wealth of controlling behaviors and doctrines evolved in manners that likely remained largely incomprehensible to even those who exercised such power.

By qualifying such thinking with an awareness that the apparent presence of any structure or system is actually just another illusion of abstract thought, it can be realized that there are in fact no social hierarchies beyond people's indoctrinated convictions in such things. Churches, nations, governments, businesses and so forth are all wholly dependent on peoples' belief in their substance – albeit such beliefs appear inseparable from the self-reinforcing behaviors they drive. Were the belief in any such institution or social entity to be simultaneously removed from everyone's ideas of the world, it would immediately become apparent that such belief never was anything more than mere belief. This can be verified by simply observing for example, the non-existence of a religion in which the planet Neptune is a god expecting a sacrifice of tomatoes on the third Friday of each month. Because there is no credible belief in such ideas, there is no related church tinkering with tomatoes on the relevant days of the year. Or more exactly, was there any true conviction in such ideas, we can be sure that the related activities would be carried out by the relevant believers and their culture would effectively regard such bizarre ideas as facts. Describing as *a government* a small group of formally dressed people who chatter, sign papers and follow silly ceremonies is essentially of the same order. More generally, consciously justified forms of human behavior prove rather inextricable from whatever beliefs sustain them; no mind can demonstrably distinguish some *real reality* from what it truly believes such reality to be.

To deny that the nature of human civilization is deeply entangled with people's beliefs is rather like denying that a journey one undertakes is unrelated to where one hopes to arrive. This is why influencing people's minds by whatever means possible has always been key to amassing and formalizing social power. This is why religions, nationalism, political ideologies and more recently consumerism, have all been exploited as tools of indoctrination by whoever sought power. The alternative would involve people rediscovering life's inherently anarchic state in manners that would encourage self-determination, independent thinking and a sense of true responsibility: everything that hierarchical power structures have historically sought to suppress. Formalized power would be revealed as basically a scam within a world where less twisted forms of power would regain traction: a world in which

applied manipulative psychology would be stripped of its extensively negative effects through widespread cultural recognition of its evolutionarily immature nature.

The philosophical reasoning underpinning all this is that any idea at all can be busted by argument once the pitfalls of abstract thought are understood; our popular form of knowledge simply has an inherent flaw that cannot be corrected without moving outside it. In light of such an understanding, any god, ideal or great cause presented as some hallowed way forward is inherently the creation of a fool or charlatan who for whatever reason overlooks or fails to understand the dynamic and truly mystical nature of our condition as something intractably beyond all abstract ideas. There surely can be no set approach to dealing with all life's issues – no set ideal that provides universal guidance. If there were, it would only reduce the mind to a set program operating within a dumb and robotic being – a mode of not-quite-living that notably parallels the worst aspects of today's already somewhat dehumanized world.

Our challenge can be framed as the need to *rehumanize* that world and reclaim our *immediate power* whilst discarding a failed leaders-and-followers paradigm that has only denied self-determination and freedom for so long. In religious terms, even if we could rid ourselves of opportunities to sin by imposing external constraints on ourselves, nothing could ever be truly *good*. Meaningful life for humans going forward appears as a unique evolutionary challenge to match powers unseen elsewhere in nature with similarly unseen levels of responsibility.

Freedom and its struggles

Freeing oneself from set ideas has potentially life-changing ramifications for anyone who truly breaks the grip of social conditioning. Nothing stated as *knowledge* will ever again be falsely imagined to be entirely correct – whether presented as personal advice or even just as a supposedly *objective* fact. It can be disconcerting to realize that one's whole education and much of whatever was assimilated elsewhere was all framed within a flawed paradigm that allows trickery and thereby exploits gullibility. But any reluctance to let go of cherished ideas is merely hiding behind comfortable cultural barriers erected to block free thinking. In contrast, the freed mind cannot be intimidated – neither by the attempts of others to ridicule it nor by the otherwise fearful immensity and mystery of existence.

Even ostensibly *great insights* and the seemingly most revealing ideas of the human mind are prone to deluding that same mind via their mesmerizing appeal, whereas reality can never fit any abstract framework, given abstraction itself is so insignificant in relation to the reality with which it rather incompetently grapples. Ideas formulated as abstract thoughts resemble photos seeking to capture the essence of a blizzard; such things are not wholly unrelated and of no use at all, but they fail completely to capture certain aspects of the subject, whilst they introduce artifacts of their own. More simply, and in terms of an objective view of reality, they are fundamentally something quite different from the supposed *bits of reality* they attempt to represent. If taken too seriously, they are *tales of reality* told by fools who in effect believe a microscopic representation can somehow encompass and explain matters on the macroscopic level.

All ideas and models of reality can be reasoned to be at least as much products of human abstract thought as they are of supposed reality itself – the nature of our cognitive tools of abstraction being inevitably imprinted on each and every human idea. Similarly, any limitations evolution has imposed on our current ability to *go further* – whatever that might involve – are both invisible and intractable by definition. To the extent that we see ourselves as separate entities within reality seeking to understand matters on a broader footing, we are locked into a false separation that now appears increasingly dangerous in terms of obscuring what is in fact our condition of utter dependency. In short, whatever benefits cognitive

abstraction has conferred on homo sapiens, the hypnotizing effects have blinded us to the responsible attitude our generally beneficial powers now demand.

But even the assumption that those powers are *beneficial* tends to be based on received ideas rather than impartial reflection. In what sense is humankind's civilization with its technological lifestyles to be judged truly beneficial? Does it make people happier or healthier, or does it somehow better secure the future of the species? Not only are such questions rarely asked, they are impossible to answer in any conclusive manner.

Buying the latest gadget or a new wardrobe of clothes may provide a moment of excitement for bored individuals swayed by modern materialist outlooks, but if we follow the apparent logic that happiness lies in *acquiring stuff and playing with it*, we are forced to conclude our forebears must have been thoroughly miserable, and that our happiness in material societies is constantly increasing. But in the face of endless glib publicity promoting some idea of attainable total ecstasy, the materialist consumer world of today quite easily appears as one in which its supposed benefits are little more than fleeting distractions from its growing mass of alienating demands.

Publicity for goods and services and all the supposed happiness thereby on offer is predictably silent about most people's need to subject themselves to boring and mechanical employment in search of the necessary money. It is also silent about how fashion actually exemplifies the rather unthinking conformity by which people sheepishly follow whatever others do. Most species display stunning levels of copycat behavior in pursuit of social acceptance, and much of our motivation to partake in modern society is likely only in pursuit of that end – actually having very little to do with anything material society promises in return. Adverts are easy to see through, as are political promises, but social exclusion remains a fearful prospect that is easily exploited to keep people in line.

If increased happiness within modern civilization is hard to establish, the argument for improved health is perhaps more plausible. Numerous treatments allow otherwise fatal conditions to be managed, and official life-expectancy figures have generally increased. However, other illnesses have shown dramatic increases – often in the most affluent societies – and many have a marked psychological aspect associated with modern lifestyles.

But the true health and welfare of the individual cannot be properly assessed without consideration of the wider world in which he lives, and this also needs to factor in the general security of the species – all of which leads to a larger question regarding the future of humankind. In truth, discussing the life expectancy of any individual is pointlessly wild speculation in the face of threats facing the entire species – especially given we humans face more such global threats than ever.

All of this only illustrates the unquestioning manner by which certain cultural perspectives assume one set of values over another. Are we to pursue our own health and happiness within our own limited lifespan, or is the welfare of all humans the valid priority? Should we strive to find some form of hidden *deep meaning* within life, or simply maximize the sheer numbers of our species come what may? Is it helpful to think within any of these ultimately human-centric perspectives, or ought we to accept that any such thinking foolishly blinds us to a grander picture of a universe in which we can never be more than spectators? It seems the only informative response to such huge questions lies in an observation that there is in fact no general agreement on any of them. Hence, it is painfully obvious that we lack any collective sense of direction.

Countless politicians, religious teachings, and philosophical arguments might have indirectly assumed certain positions and values, and then gone on to advocate how life should be lived

or how society ought to be restructured, but given no other species is seen to confound itself with such intellectual convolution, it is arguable that the very posing of such questions is the creation of the problems we foolishly imagine they might resolve. In this sense, *goal-based philosophy* – that is, any philosophical exercise seeking to provide guidance and advice – could truly be described as a delusional waste of time. Life's big questions have so many possible answers that they effectively have none.

By who-knows-what means our evolution into the most powerful species on the planet actually happened, but it was not by any human plan way back in the sands of time. Short of belief in some yet unidentified force of grand intention, our seemingly superior position in the general order of things appears best understood almost as happenstance. No matter how much we portray our species as *more advanced* or as having enhanced intelligence, none of the credit for any of that belongs to us. Whether one has faith in a god or believes that the universe is simply a grand theater of changing substance, we are simply not the authors of our own existence. Even what happens in terms of our mere continuation is entirely dependent on reproductive equipment that by definition is not of our own invention.

Perhaps we are simply the first species on the planet with the cognitive ability to frame the big and troubling questions – a possibility that notably indicates no ability whatsoever to find answers for any of them. Philosophically, any supposed answering of such questions resembles the idea that traveling a few million light years to a star might actually be possible, plus the delusion that one actually knows how to make it happen. It is terribly easy to pose challenges and speculate on meeting them, but it would probably be easier to travel to such a distant star than to explain anything at all in a fully conclusive manner using pure philosophy.

Whereas the eye might at least spot the star as a distant speck of light, the surrounding darkness, just like unbound philosophy, offers no truly fixed points from which we can reliably map anything. By arguably not even existing, voids are thoroughly inscrutable if they are anything at all, and even less accessible to thought than the marginally less difficult idea of reality being an indivisible whole. It is in any case revealing how the human mind can form seemingly intelligent ideas around even such absolute non-subjects as that of a void. That the mind might somehow imagine itself to understand anything at all about a true void must logically reflect little other than its own delusion.

All answers humans have on any given subject are ultimately only relative answers: *tales of reality* that in effect only ask that other *tales of reality* on which they are founded be excused serious interrogation. But given all our ideas are framed exclusively within the abstraction of such tales, all human ideas are rendered highly unreliable once one questions abstraction itself. Once one realizes the mind of conscious ideas only has one basic currency, and a token one at that, the overall abstract *tale of reality* appears mired in deception – a story in which nothing at all is quite as it seems.

The legitimate role of philosophy amidst all this is other than commonly imagined. It is not to produce certainty by meticulously quizzing everything and thereby removing any possible doubt or flaws within our thoughts; it is to highlight that the whole enterprise of abstract thought is in fact built on shaky foundations and that any appearance of intellectual certainty can therefore only exist in proportion to a general delusion regarding the limited value of such thought. As a consequence, forms of certainty popularly associated with conventional knowledge actually emerge as forms of ignorance: ignorance of the truth that abstract knowledge is at best of a relative nature.

Meanwhile, understanding human evolution as best as possible may involve an examination of changes triggered in human attention and awareness through our increasing reliance on

abstract cognition and knowledge. Abstract thought may be the backbone of our great technological development, but it would be ridiculous to imagine that the resultant massive changes in human living conditions would not impact on our ideas of who we are, how to live, and where our attentions are best placed. When comparing today's urbanite to his cave-dwelling ancestor, the most striking differences surely concern the conduct and beliefs by which the individual integrates and interacts socially, whereas any differences in terms of biological functioning seem comparatively minor. The prime goals may still comprise basic biological needs and desires, but the conscious quest for money is just one example of how entirely new preoccupations have displaced the priorities of our forebears.

Most specifically, focusing attention on the many abstract ideas required to navigate modern society surely diverts the mind's attention away from immediate sensory perception and awareness of the here-and-now, and towards more cognitive and distracting tasks. The dedicated scholar battling with complex theories, memorized facts, and the formal expectations of his professional role has his attention immersed in abstraction at the cost of being fully attentive to both internal and external stimuli. He has lost some immediate awareness amidst a perceived need to prioritize abstract future goals cultivated in the past. Are such forms of preoccupation really beneficial, and how has distraction in general become so widespread in today's world?

The general tendency to accept *things as they are* being so instinctive, minds become regimented through extensive exposure to modern so-called *normality* throughout their formative years. However wild any infant might appear, he is likely to be subjected to at least a decade of lecturing regarding what the world supposedly is, how it works, and how others expect him to behave. By the time adulthood arrives, options to carve out some meaningful level of independence amidst all the surrounding conformity are compromised, if they are even consciously contemplated. He will have been made aware of likely social rejection in the event he fails to fit within the overall social machinery, and his attention has probably been somewhat tuned to satisfying the related external demands put upon him.

And complex and attention-consuming as those demands may be within today's world, they are generally embraced rather enthusiastically as the means to social acceptance – but certainly not because they embody any personal liberation or choices free of social coercion.

If we multiply this idea up for any population, there is no reason to imagine the basic principles are altered; the higher numbers only highlight just how intimidating and coercive social reality can be. And given the fact that seemingly significant variations in the overt manifestation of this through time and across different human cultures can be considered as actually rather superficial, much of sociology can be summed up by just one core observation: people retain a huge propensity for copycat behavior no matter what.

This explains why the current thrust of materialism, after slowly gaining momentum for thousands of years, now has so many adherents frantically pushing it flat out. Even as many criticize its conspicuously disruptive and divisive results, its cultural momentum renders such criticisms all but mute in terms of effecting change. But such herd-like mentality also suggests that real change in human ideas is actually far more viable than generally imagined; once a new direction gains momentum, it can be as unstoppable as whatever it replaces.

In this sense it can be argued that whilst a culture valuing objectivity and causality seeks to convince minds that the future is effectively sealed within a deterministic universe, an alternative approach sees such a position as just a collective form of self-indoctrination hammered home by forces that, for whatever reasons, fear change. Ironically, the widespread belief that the scope for such human cultural change is rather limited can itself be seen as a reflection of copycat mentalities which, when properly understood, actually suggest

cultural change could in fact catch on like wildfire. Notably, we are living in an era where a certain restless impetus for significant change is already in the ascendancy, albeit the nature of what might constitute beneficial change remains highly controversial.

With nothing being guaranteed beyond change invariably being of no properly understood nature, it can nonetheless be asked to what extent we should sit back like helpless spectators, as opposed to getting constructively involved. However, the great paradox within the supposedly objective view of such philosophical questions remains the illogical argument we simply must take certain actions because other human actions are somehow inevitable. Such selective interchanging of free will and deterministic positions is a species-wide intellectual nonsense and embarrassment. After thousands of years of philosophy, this supposedly unresolved issue of whether or not we can act of our own accord as opposed to being puppets of deterministic forces remains a question of seemingly intractable confusion, if not a matter directly flagging up a mass failure to understand the very thought process which produced it. In effect, this fundamental question has been culturally abandoned only because it proved too troubling in comparison to simply faking answers or tackling philosophically less important matters. The convenience to those who abuse thought as a means of stopping others from thinking lucidly is no doubt also instrumental in such grand stupidity.

As long as any mind fails to resolve these matters, its desire for social respectability leaves it trapped within its defensive denial of just how widespread various forms of silliness have become. As regards causality, one can apparently choose to cause events, but one cannot tell if something else actually caused the supposed choice in the first place, or if the seemingly *caused* event was not actually caused at all, having truly resulted from pure choice. In short, the mind has the concepts of *cause*, *effect* and *choice*, but can find no meaningful way to reconcile them.

Given the general desire for beneficial change appears to be growing faster than ever, it is not unreasonable to suggest that finally realizing such silly philosophical dilemmas to be mere artifacts of human cognition would be a much-needed step forward that at least reduced human confusion. Discussing our future when we are already befuddled in the present is a dangerous indulgence of our intellectual ambitions, and obviously lacks mastery of the fundamentals of what thought is and what it is not. Any attempt to understand our troubled state could do worse than consider how and why these deep-seated logical paradoxes are culturally embedded in billions of human mind.

12 – Freedom From Thought

Any attempt to disentangle our expanding world of ideas from our technologies and the civilizations they support can be seen as human cognition struggling to structure more understanding than its limitations could ever manage. We can divide and sub-divide our conceptualizations of reality as much as we like, but the process is arguably one in which more only becomes less in terms of a true and well-rounded understanding.

Although obviously useful for simple matters of everyday life, does abstract thought not become progressively inept as it moves from the mundanities of the here-and-now towards the highly speculative contemplation of life's big questions? If words and thoughts serve any usefulness at all regarding *the meaning of life*, is it not as an ironic illustration of their ultimate uselessness in such domains? Whatever sophisticated abstractions might be heard from gurus, *professional philosophers* or *men of god* on such matters, their output is generally situated somewhere between intellectual entertainment on the one hand, and conveniently unquestionable axioms or forms of *faith* on the other. But could any ruminations in these areas ever produce anything of tangible worth when the relevant questions themselves seem to contain their own circularity? For example, is asking about *the true nature of existence* not inherently stupid, given that the concepts of *nature* and *existence* are mere inventions of the mind?

That our cognitive form of abstraction can even pose such monstrous questions is arguably one of its faults. Or is the problem that our cultural evolution has not yet taken cognizance of abstraction's inherent limitations? Either way, the bigger any question appears, the more we seem out our depth. And given that abstraction knows no constraints on where it might wander, the potential for discrepancies between human imagination and real-world human experience knows no limits – all whilst a mass fixation on fantastical forms of entertainment illustrates a positive appetite for what is actually arrant nonsense. As further highlighted by the many forms of vivid creativity running through our various cultural histories, we compose our many *tales of reality* within a seemingly unbounded universe of ideation. To mention that millions have been born, nurtured, ruled or murdered ostensibly in the name of multiple gods that few now seriously believe ever existed is only to scratch the surface of countless cultural ideas of great impact but little or no verifiable substance.

By its very creative nature, human abstract thought is out of control, and the dangers of ignoring this should be obvious to anyone paying attention. History suggests any fanciful idea at all can be made believable through enough propaganda, brainwashing and coercion. At least, such was the case until science and objectivity with their fairly standardized version of the universe began overruling more parochial ideas. But although that version includes much detail superficially well-grounded within objectivity's presumptions of its own credibility, larger philosophical questions regarding that credibility have actually been silenced or forgotten in the process. Hence, the real-world implications of unchecked technological development remain unacknowledged and thereby unaddressed. These omissions are closely related, if not understandable as two sides of the same issue.

The objective view of the universe, with all its obsessional measuring, quantifying and classifying of whatever it examines, is actually devoid of any standardization regarding its core procedures and ideas – reality exhibiting no inherently sound units or building blocks to which thought can reliably anchor itself. As an ideology, *objectivity* also lacks any clinical, independent, or otherwise verifiably authentic method for differentiating sound ideas from wild imaginings; such a distinction being in effect subliminally decided at the rather visceral level of individual or group choice, with group-think invariably a significant influence. In

particular, no one dare probe the underlying technology of abstract thought for fear objectivity's whole house of cards might fall. Despite its presentational façade of consensus, methodological procedures, peer-group review processes and so forth, objectivity simply cannot get itself outside the human mind and all the fragility that its unquestioning use of abstract thought implies.

Objectivity tacitly assumes the human mind to be some instrument par excellence in terms of potentially understanding each and every area of human life. This is exactly how and why modern culture is worryingly lacking in any idea that the weaknesses of abstract thought might merit examination as possible sources of uniquely human problems.

Given the inherently divisive nature of the thinking process, it can be reasoned from the most basic logic that our ability to understand the seeming connectedness of our universe is inescapably hampered by the very deployment of any thought process. A sheet of paper simply cannot be made from any amount of handiwork with scissors. Not only do we invariably and unavoidably dissect reality by the very act of thinking about anything at all, but we also do so in a manner that lacks any demonstrably sound discipline. And this too is inescapable, given that all the concepts we choose for any discussion are ultimately embedded within the mind, and amidst the absence of any inherent *units of reality*.

The atom, the table, the galaxy, plus everything else we might imagine, are all ideas we have been told about, having previously been invented by the minds of those who went before us – just as anger, hatred and happiness are labels we were once given in other areas. That we reach very good levels of consensus about the suitable use of such labels and concepts is no doubt based on the levels of *success* this human form of *thought technology* has so far delivered, but all such objects, entities and phenomena remain inherently nebulous on closer examination, and can never be demonstrated to reflect any discrete or truly disconnected components of reality. There simply is no such thing as *the universal* atom, table or galaxy. Even by common sense ideas, the opposite is actually true; as far as we understand it, every supposed table is in fact both utterly unique whilst also being inextricably connected to its environment. Logically the same is even true of atoms, unless we believe two or more to be utterly superimposed on one another such that we would never know more than one existed anyway.

Once these issues are understood, it can be seen that thought is simply a tool – and a tool that is in certain respects worse than useless. If one cannot grasp intuitively the hopelessness of a mind attempting to encompass the apparently unfathomable connectedness of our universe, one might at least reflect on the futility of thought trying to think away an empty stomach, the need for water, or a lack of oxygen. In truth, abstract thought is a technology that serves little purpose other than to forward the many other technologies built upon it – including the clandestine and murky world of *applied manipulative psychology*.

As a form of thought itself, philosophy can do little more than reason the limits within which it is confined. Whatever lies beyond those limits must remain mere speculation – at least as far as thought is concerned. But in terms of present-day academic and intellectual culture, even the humble recognition that the thinking mind does indeed have such limitations would be a not-insignificant revolution, given that a current and widespread foolishness is to tacitly but effectively deny abstract thought has any limitations at all.

A greater awareness about thought's nature might clarify where it is most useful, as opposed to being misleading, a waste of energy, or even downright dangerous. Momentary ideas and exchanges aside, how much can we trust thought to deliver beneficial outcomes in complex areas? Popular though they may be, do any of our numerous *tales of reality* in the domains

of politics and religion offer meaningful insights into anything at all, other than as a collective demonstration of just how socially corrosive thoughts on such matters can prove? Given their many contradictions, it should at least be obvious that there is a good degree of nonsense being taken very seriously in such areas. Dare we consider that every last one of these *tales* may in fact be nonsense in light of their shared lack of any decisive and final verification? Moreover, if we are reluctant to abandon them and leave ourselves no faith in anything at all, is that not simply because a beneficial social persona effectively demands embracing beliefs of one sort or another? However bizarre, earnestly believing some subset of mankind's nonsensical and contradictory ideas appears socially preferable to not believing any of them – a situation that emotionally blocks its own transcendence.

A fork in evolution?

Given the focus of conventional science is centered on the raw stuff of matter and energy, ordinary scientific approaches should be recognized as poorly suited to tasks concerning why humans think and behave as they do. Even biology can seem oddly obsessed with the details of cells, molecules and biochemistry as if the myopic view down the microscope could somehow help understand what it truly means to be an individual organism, complete with all the magic that the body-mind complex entails. And notably, *magic* is certainly not too strong or mystical a word with which to describe ourselves and the countless other lifeforms that somehow reproduce in manners remaining beyond meaningful human comprehension.

Even those who choose to believe in the so-called *big bang* theory as somehow *creating* everything in our universe, should never mistake such a crude idea for some sort of knowledge regarding life itself. In addition to the mystery of existence in general, every single one of us is the outcome of a reproductive process that, for all it has been scrutinized in great detail by the human mind, predates the very arrival of abstract thought itself. Indeed, the entirety of human thought can be seen as merely one of its by-products.

However, if there is one overarching reason to put conventional science and objectivity aside when searching for a fuller understanding, it remains the poorly-reasoned dismissal of subjective experience. To dismiss subjectivity may serve the goals of whoever wishes career success as an *objective thinker*, but within a hierarchically arranged society, such goals are rooted in the acquisition of social power, as opposed to any search for truth. In contrast, once an individual pursuing more honest goals is committed to a genuine investigation of their whole life experience, they have direct access to a vast swathe of rich content that science systematically plays down or refuses to entertain as a legitimate field of investigation.

From this perspective, it is no overstatement to brand all conventional science as corrupt in its prioritizing of consensual social goals over authentic and unfettered appraisal of the human condition. Driven by the same desires as many churches to gain power via the manipulation of consciousness and thought, the whole scientific endeavor has long been striving to shut the individual off from what is arguably the deepest parts of his life. The fact that many within the scientific community would vehemently deny such an accusation with genuine horror only stands as evidence of how subliminal, endemic and effective such manipulation of consciousness has become.

Meanwhile, and quite ironically, the sort of *fortress mentality* some people reflexively adopt in the face of such criticisms only highlights a certain usefulness in viewing the individual as the most suitable base unit of reality – perhaps the most valid unit the mind might entertain in its efforts to decipher the human condition. Not only does the individual amass his unique mix of beliefs, personas, and skill-sets to navigate life's challenges in his own peculiar manner, but the full integration of these things within the overall organism provides the rather

autonomous, consistent, habit-ridden and recognizable characters we all are from day to day. Albeit intellectually idiotic to wholly isolate the individual from his environment, it is notable how journeying to a different location typically makes very little change in terms of what is considered one's personality. And although scientism may have split the relevant conventional ideas of all this into separate fields of psychology, physiology, biology and countless sub-sciences, only a fool would allow such divisive academic thinking to obscure the fact that each one of us feels very much like a whole and single entity: a person quite distinct from others. While we may recognize others as members of the same species, from birth to death we all seem confined to living as one and only one example of that species.

If conventional ideas present an increasingly atomized picture of reality, and if the converse – some utterly holistic *cosmic consciousness* – would theoretically leave the mind completely devoid of any concepts to even compose thoughts, the *individual* appears philosophically relevant as a self-contained *thing* of truly astonishing complexity and at least relative independence. Even the etymology of the word *individual* suggests this has long been recognized. Therefore, in terms of simply being alive and attempting to understand the life experience, the endlessly analytic approach of modern science appears rather blind to what seems the most relevant unit of reality thought has yet devised.

Alternatively, if looking at all life in a general sense, nothing outside life appears to have free will or be able to recreate itself in any manner resembling organic reproduction. Seen through the eyes of physics, entire planets, stars and other celestial bodies are just barren wastes of energy and matter when compared to the miracle of the tiniest insect. It becomes arguable that reducing all our thinking to endless analyses of whatever can be observed and measured in a physical manner is blinding ourselves with so much quantifiable detail that we overlook how the truly meaningful inquiry remains about life itself and living units. When the molecular blocks of life are in fact reported to be spread out across interstellar space, the traditional fixation on the simple physics of any situation just looks all the more misplaced.

Working within an exclusively physical perspective whilst ignoring subjective experience is the philosophical equivalent of a physicist examining electrons whilst refusing to look at the nucleus. Whatever justifications anyone proposes for the rejection of subjectivity, it is surely stupid to blank this side of our being – if only because it is the seat of all our positive and negative emotions. Even the most materialist mind must surely accept that any happiness within material possessions or physical engagement with this world is realized through emotions. And given that emotions literally motivate us into action, being a stranger to that side of ourselves constitutes a sort of psychological blindness in which troublesome, chaotic and poorly-understood states are permanently likely outcomes of not fully knowing who we really are.

In transforming our perspective such that it ranks subjectivity alongside objectivity – or perhaps, such that it fails to make any hard distinction between the two – our entire understanding of the world undergoes a simple but dramatic change. Even if we remain within conventional causal thinking, the supposed causes of whatever transpires within the human world must henceforth accommodate the endless thoughts, ideas and plans of every last individual. Notably, this reduces causal thinking to an impossible venture in terms of amassing all the relevant data, never mind processing it. As a consequence of this perspective, not only do mainstream intellectual perspectives of reality suddenly look far less well substantiated than our culture generally likes to consider them, but every last individual emerges as instrumental in the creation of human reality. Of course, going further, there is no reason to separate human reality off from whatever is considered as reality outside human affairs.

However, it is no surprise that those in formalized positions of power reflexively demonstrate disinterest in such expanded perspectives; if such ideas were accepted, conventional political thinking would be revealed as mere *tales of reality* – just as would everything from the most mystical religions to the hardest of sciences. The potential to profoundly rethink all human understanding could hardly be greater, whilst the individual might better understand his own life on his own terms. The *totality of reality* reappears as utterly complex and thereby rather impervious to abstract thought, with the cognitive tidiness of conventional causality appearing as delusional idiocy wherever it is applied to anything other than the most simple and mundane matters.

Hence, albeit common, it is quite misguided to imagine the decisions and acts of *important* individuals and institutions to be the only key factors controlling social reality's evolution. In truth, both so-called *leaders* and their followers are equally instrumental in whatever transpires; the illusion of the leader being in charge only results from the extensive subservience that *followers* contribute to the situation. Consequently, any would-be understanding of the social mechanics tends to be shrouded in illusions at every level – *leaders* typically believing they really do have power beyond the ability to cultivate and exploit their followers' desires to be led. And in terms of any understanding of how society unfolds, there is also the not-insignificant matter of whatever might transpire wholly outside human control but nonetheless impact people in unpredictable manners. The proof of all the wrong-thinking this rather chaotic and misunderstood scenario creates is conspicuous within the multitude of historical situations where the promises and predictions of so many in high places simply never came to pass – even when they gained the support they sought in making those promises and predictions, and genuinely tried to bring them about.

This is another perspective from which the basis of most cultural thinking appears flawed: not only by its philosophically shaky formulation but also by the deceiving narratives of those who understand and exploit human gullibility via cleverly-crafted *tales of reality*. To avoid doubt on this matter it need only be considered that when people will kill their fellow humans in huge numbers for their own perceived advantage, it is ludicrous to imagine much less dramatic measures are not used more extensively for similarly self-centered ends.

Given the much-expanded scope of such thinking, a deliberately vague and wide-reaching concept of *evolution* proves more appropriate for grappling with social change than all the simplistic ideas of would-be specific *causes*. Instead of approaching an intellectually intimidating level of complexity with naïve ideas of eventually discovering simple mechanisms of *what causes what*, it can just be reasoned that whatever combines a realistic possibility with an unimpeded propensity – perhaps the desired outcome of one party or another – is something likely to happen. To pursue some more exact explanation is arguably a fool's errand.

With this more generalized thinking, understanding the making of today's world can mostly dispense with the usual historical details of documented human history. As well as being gross simplifications, such details are likely very selective and distorted in any case, given their normally conservative provenance. They may have produced many *tales of reality* that are widely accepted as *official human history*, but at best they attempt to find circumstantial explanations for circumstantial events. These compartmentalized narratives dubiously put great emphasis on what might otherwise be regarded as *historical trivia*, whilst more generic ideas that might help understand broader facets of the human condition tend to be suspiciously absent.

Hence, although social power is conventionally recognized as residing with tribal leaders, monarchies, aristocracies, churches, government bodies, judiciaries, military forces, political

parties, large corporations, and all other hierarchical social structures, little is heard regarding the common mechanisms binding humans within all such structures. Endless details and ideological nuances only tend to obscure that all those structures are nothing but humans who, from organic survival perspectives, are all pursuing the same basic goals. The obvious inference is that much of the superficial convolution of civilization can be reduced to just so many efforts by each individual to assert their social worth. For what better way is there to secure everything from physical security and sexual fulfillment to enhanced social power, than to have others fall under one's command?

The means of exerting the essentially generic form of social power common to all human hierarchies is too rarely considered within everyday understandings of human history. But how could the history of our species be told without all the hierarchical social structures that created groups from otherwise disconnected individuals? And when the individual organic being is very arguably the most relevant unit for understanding life in general, the convention of interpreting human history as a set of more or less unrelated *events* seems to miss the point. It feels more appropriate to generalize our history as the increasingly dramatic results of an organic species integrating the core technology of abstraction with its more primal drives. The latter view might be rather irrelevant in terms of understanding why a given monarch fought a certain battle in a particular year, but knowing any number of such historical details is extremely irrelevant to any understanding of the greater currents operating throughout all human history – most notably the persistent duping and frightening of the gullible and the vulnerable into servitude within formalized hierarchical structures of many guises.

Although the individual emerges as a useful unit to approach both biological and societal evolution, separating him off from his social integration within groups is a blinkered approach. Likewise, the façades and doctrines of different groups should not be taken seriously at the cost of overlooking more visceral and instinctive aspects of all individuals acting both alone and within such hierarchical structures. Given that existing outside the social group is inherently dangerous, it is only natural that the individual seeks to integrate wherever possible – ideally making himself the power center of the social group. Thus, competition for social position seems almost inevitable and is of course conspicuous across many species.

Meanwhile, the modern idea of *equality* appeals to those who see major imbalances in today's world, even if this is just a predictable reaction to the extreme forms of unchecked power so typical of human civilizations. Although the basic competition to be head of the pack seems fairly widespread throughout nature and can be reasoned to benefit a species as a whole, its current human manifestation looks neither straightforward nor without problems.

It seems that when technology is added to the mix, the resultant ability to formalize and augment power using all the persuasive tricks of ideological thinking goes unchecked in the absence of complementary knowledge about how and why this is done.

This perspective effectively views all supposedly noteworthy human history rather generically as being embroiled in ongoing attempts to create and expand hierarchical groups in manners unseen elsewhere in nature – major empires being the most obvious and notable examples. Very arguably, the evolutionary arrival of technology is the only factor that makes humans significantly different from any other species, even if, given abstract knowledge's cumulative nature, the most visible distinctions between human hierarchies and the herds and flocks of other species are increasingly monstrous.

But when considering much of the machinery of any hierarchy to be based on dogma and

indoctrination – mere *tales of reality* – it is inevitable that the increase in the size of any such hierarchy entails an increase in the scope and deceptive nature of its doctrines. Hence, the apparent size of any empire also represents its propensity to collapse amidst the growing cultural deception and lies it is founded upon – the prime lie being that its leaders and administrative machinery genuinely has the interests of the individual at heart.

Nature equipped us to bond only with those whose sociability provides mutual benefits. But our instincts in this direction are abused when we are told incorrectly that, for example, another nation wishes to destroy our nation, or that failure to meet certain economic targets will inevitably spell all-round destitution. Such lies are told in the interests of those who tell them – not for the benefit of the audiences that may thus be fooled into subservience.

Under countless guises, such forms of deception have been the way of our species for many millennia, but only because we have not yet grown into our evolutionary destiny. The simple proof of this lies in the increasingly widespread recognition that our world order is anything but safe; it is a state in which apocalyptic outcomes of various kinds become more likely by the day.

To speculate about how to fix such a situation is itself a potentially dangerous game. Human history is littered with utopian ideas – all of which have more or less failed, if not proven disastrous. The search for the next great doctrine replete with its erudite leader is simply another mile down the same troubled road that led us here. It is built on a naïvety that fails to understand the limits of conventional thinking. Before it is even formulated, it is by nature another set of human assumptions falsely imagining us to be masters of our fate. As we are inherently incapable of gleaning the fullness of our entanglement with reality, or even of fully understanding one another on a conscious level, we fool with all such matters at our own peril, unless we recognize certain lines marking the edges of our mental abilities. Accordingly, wisdom requires the humbling of human knowledge and ideas – not their expansion. Only the blind fail to see truly intractable limitations.

More specifically, personal development lies in overcoming the false separation of body and mind that conventional *knowledge* and ideas have created. It also lies in transcending the assumption that the divisive thinking central to abstract thought is anything more than a tool of occasional worth. The whole emphasis on objectivity at the cost of knowing one's own situation and momentary disposition is a process by which one succumbs to an exploitative imposition of reduced awareness.

We are sentient beings who do nothing at all at any point that is not somehow relayed through the organism. And so, much as objectivity may have relevance for certain tasks, using it in an exclusive manner is an anathema to learning non-intellectually how one's overall state interacts with the external world and its stimuli.

The key to reclaiming personal control in the face of external human manipulation lies in attentive observation of the overall movement that is one's life – not in filling the mind with yet more abstract thoughts. Life is most definitely not of an abstract nature in any case; it is utterly experiential. It is everything we know plus much that we do not; it is *what we are*, even as we remain ignorant of exactly what that is. It is not some *tale of reality*; it is reality itself. And although it is a reality that appears unique to every last one of us, that is ironically the very truth that could bind us together in common circumstance – should we ever empower ourselves to rise above the rude divisions our troubled history has imposed upon us to date.

The answer is not an answer

From such a perspective it can appear tragically stupid that as a species we still fail to realize

our commonality in less destructive manners than hitherto seen. It would seem possible resolutions of this matter, whether couched in religion, politics, psychology, philosophy or anything else, still elude us as pragmatic steps. But therein lies another aspect of human blindness: hubris coupled to habitually abstract approaches can force an assumption that some magical answer awaits discovery – as opposed to merely disengaging from whatever creates problems in the first place.

If the problems are a world of oppression, cruelty and conflict whilst our future on a damaged planet looks increasingly precarious, we need only refrain from the acts that create and sustain such a world. It is false and hypocritical to believe that fixing such a mess involves something elusive and mysterious *out there* and still evading discovery; the problems are of our own making, and their resolution is therefore about ceasing, transcending or otherwise ending the activities by which they are perpetuated.

Whether or not we are capable of modifying our conduct and ideas accordingly is of course another matter. We will certainly fail to whatever extent we listen to those of deterministic and fatalistic outlooks persuading us the effort is pointless in the face of vague ill-defined forces that predetermine the human trajectory. The stupidity of the conventional scientific outlook in this area is to promise us *progress* in some fields whilst preaching futility as regards tackling more pressing societal matters. But if we believe that what we call *choice* permits us any control over anything at all, it would seem science is not actually the be-all and end-all of human understanding. The tacit determinism underpinning so much science is just a *tale of reality* – one that notably comes unstuck in certain areas of science itself.

Surely we can recognize that any worldview effectively denying our ability to consciously modify our behavior as we see fit is the last thing adapted to the unique evolutionary challenges we now face. If science is about theories seeking to explain observed phenomena, it is high time it embraced a body of theory that seeks earnestly to explain the remarkably parallel emergence of itself and its technologies on the one hand, and a host of increasingly problematic phenomena on the other.

Here we can conflate many seemingly very different matters in terms of their effects on the human mind. Alongside science, we can line up the nation-state, the religious faith, the political ideology, and whatever else the mind has bought into as a *tale of reality* justifying its thoughts and actions. The endless number of ludicrous and often conflicting perspectives that all these belief systems comprise can only be explained by different people's various motivations for embracing particular subsets of them – not by any logical and impartial assessment of their relevance or plausibility. In the sense that we all opt for some mix of ideas that legitimizes our place in the world, we are essentially the same, being divided only by the *same differences*.

The problem of moving beyond this current impasse can be framed as the reluctance of the many beneficiaries and protectors of all these *tales* to admit their true motives as they seek to justify their positions within hierarchically-structured societies. Those who head up institutions by championing supposedly legitimizing dogmas are generally the last to question those dogmas, given that gaining such powerful positions comes at the cost of suppressing doubt and dissent. Such minds typically run on self-indoctrination and practiced self-confidence in which would-be threatening critical thinking is instinctively blanked. Those of lesser positions within their hierarchies may pose some questions but are rewarded by being held at lower levels, or even turfed out if they prove overly critical.

For all concerned, there may be genuine ignorance of their own motives, together with ignorance that such a state results from psychological repression so endemic that its potential

exposure – even on an introspective level – is shrouded with fear. Anyone who carves a social presence for themselves by representing certain ideals and values has already schemed at a deep but possibly-repressed level to gain credibility in the process; subsequently doubting the foundations of those ideals and values is naturally and viscerally felt as wholly counterproductive, if indeed it ever happens.

Hence the conscious pursuit of any distinct social identity is also the construction of one's personal jail. It requires that beliefs and behaviors be accepted in unquestioning manners once they are established as identity markers. And much as anyone might imagine they have good logical arguments behind whatever positions they adopt, the emotional anchoring of such positions can be embedded in the organism at levels far more profound than whatever conscious thoughts are expressed as their supposed justifications. Expressed viewpoints are in any case only part of much larger strategies the individual develops – probably rather unconsciously – to manage his unique place in the world.

Hence, it becomes possible to respect the otherwise *mad ideas* people can embrace in many areas of our world-gone-mad; the apparent madness actually makes sense as a survival strategy. However, madness remains madness, and our collective madness remains dangerous inasmuch as it threatens all concerned.

Two people disputing the best way to cook a dish or punctuate some text may be of little consequence, but disagreements and divides concerning religious, political, national, racial or even sexual matters always have the potential to turn ugly. But not only is it no coincidence that these same dimensions are used to keep the world's populations divided, it is also no coincidence that many in power enthusiastically endorse the supposed *rights* of all parties to believe whatever they like in these areas; no matter how unlikely or fanciful the relevant ideologies may be, they all serve formal seats of power by keeping opposition fragmented and distracted – even if some ideologies openly aim to liberate people by forming new alliances and movements. Formalized power demonstrates amazingly cunning levels of inventiveness as a persistent means of controlling minds, and it will simply jump on whatever new bandwagon furthers that goal.

Consequently, the individual has been cultured to believe rather subliminally in his personal lack of power when faced with humanity as a whole – an ironic position given that humanity actually has no power at all other than the power of its many individuals – however that be channeled. This is the ultimate ruse of formalized power: to successfully convince the individual to rescind his power in a manner that ultimately convinces him he has no ability to ever reclaim it. But much as those in formal positions of power can be seen as con men for pulling off such a stunt, the consenting individual who is unhappy with the result can just as easily be seen as a cowardly hypocrite if he fails to at least consider withdrawing his consent, and instead chooses to merely whine and complain about those he allows to continue exerting control over him.

Authority, duty, formalized power and institutional control are of no inherent *good* and are arguably the tools by which natural respect and immediate forms of *good social power* are subjugated to the conniving manipulation of people's emotions. Contrary to popular opinion, human cooperation and organization are both possible and perfectly viable without much regimentation or formality. But notably, the typical impulse to deny this is reflexive, based on no logic, and has no historical justification. History, as it turns out, is in fact replete with examples of how it was actually blind unthinking submission to authority and a sense of *one's duty* that brought about the most awful atrocities.

Anyone who sees through the generic ploy behind all the supposed legitimization of human

divisions will henceforth struggle to take any of them seriously. The person who sees themselves as essentially human in a manner that pays little attention to the false divisions of culture represents a threat to structured power but is very much the friend of a matured state of human cohabitation in which our species has recognized and neutralized the potentially dangerous capabilities of our evolved minds. He is someone who has seen through the foolishness of conceptually separating himself off from the rest of humanity in manners that only raise fears, and he knows that exploiting others is ultimately exploiting himself. If he spots attempts by others to exploit him, he will defuse those attempts before they become dangerous contagions. He has evolutionarily moved beyond those who know current forms of power but who are basically lost amidst fears of social isolation and narrow-minded desires to exploit whoever looks vulnerable. Above all, he knows he must often act alone from a place of personal responsibility. He knows that no movement, ideology, political manifesto or set philosophical ideas can further either his personal mission or the advancement of the species – such abstract ideas having already done more than enough damage for minds to learn from their many mistakes. His mission is simply to give back to the human mind the freedom it enjoyed before it became entranced and somewhat terrorized by its own amazingness. Above all, he knows at a deep level that the ultimate *tale of reality* is that no tale can ever be anything more than a tale: a tiny drop in the mysterious and unfathomable ocean that is reality.

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