



The Seven Within the Die

God is not dead, I tell myself. God is the conversation that humans carry on with the universe, or vice versa: the conversation that the universe carries on with humans, in order to become conscious of itself.

I have to imagine (human that I am) that the universe wants to know something about itself.

I have to imagine that the chemistry of the universe has somehow stumbled onto itself and has singled out biology as a specific area for experiments, ones that include human consciousness. It's in this provisional biosphere that we walk around as the universe's guinea pigs. We know what we know, and to us it's priceless and vitally important, but I have to believe that ultimately it doesn't matter one iota, and that what this is really about is the chemistry of the universe actualizing itself as human consciousness in order to "know" itself.

I have to imagine that the universe is such a multifarious process that it couldn't avoid having blind, random chance draft the vision that's called humanity.

This humanity—its people and its societies, all expressed as biology—nevertheless seems to differ from biology, or nature, by gathering its many efforts and offerings and trying to put them all into play at once. As if we know that we'll only be in existence for a few seconds in the timescale of life's evolution over billions of years.

I have a calendar with an astonishing teaching tool, where four billion years of the planet's history are compressed into one calendar year. If the earth's crust hardens on January 1, then it's not

until March 15 that the earliest stirrings of life begin slowly becoming bacteria and blue-green algae, and we have to get all the way to November 21 before animals emerge on land as mites and millipedes. On December 14 pterosaurs appear, and around Christmas, the first simians begin to climb trees. Not until the last day of the year, around 4:30 in the afternoon, do hominids of our own species begin fighting with other hominids. It's almost a quarter to midnight when we appear; it's five minutes to midnight when we create the first cave paintings, and it's one minute to midnight when we domesticate cattle. In this time frame, it's been forty seconds since Chinese pictograms were invented. Twelve seconds since beech trees first appeared in Denmark. Three seconds since we started wiping out other species.

It's inconceivable that this is happening, and it's inconceivable that we know this is happening. For me there's something enormously uplifting in the interplay between these two things that seem to mirror each other infinitely over a finite course of time.

It's the tension between what's inevitable and what's random, the juxtaposition of what I know and don't know—what I call thought—that decides my concept of reality. This, I imagine, is what allows the world to see what it's imagining.

It's these spiraling conclusions, and the way they never conclude, that make me think what I ultimately want to express is this: human beings have no choice but to imagine something more or less indefinite, as an expression of something definite that they can't imagine.

When I'm tossing a die that alternately rolls and stops, coming up as 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 in random order, I amuse myself by imagining the certainty that the die would never stop. Not on 1 or 6, or 2 or 5, or 3 or 4 . . . I imagine it eternally rolling those opposing numbers around their impossible conjunction, deep within the center of the die, a three-dimensional seven in perpetual flux.

Why do I imagine things like that? Why do I keep playing with the thought that what's impossible must be possible? That the inconceivable should be conceivable? That random chance could be

caught in its own trap? It has to do with being a tiny part of a humanity that has desperately denied its own randomness. Denied its own randomness to such a degree that it has tirelessly built up enormous, all-inclusive traps, calling them god, where it has held fast and preserved the restive prey of random chance, without wanting to understand that the prey is humanity itself.

No creature, no condition, no god can be held fast without dissolving. No consciousness, maybe no humanity, without being overtaken by other parts of the inconceivable process that keeps moving—not back and forth, but maybe in a kind of pulsation, corresponding to the interwoven, osmotic story the universe is telling itself in human beings' consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty writes so tenderly about the indescribable movements that must make up the dizzying underpinnings of what we, with growing hesitancy in recent centuries, have continued to call god, because "we have to conceive of a labyrinth of spontaneous steps which revive one another, sometimes cut across one another, and sometimes confirm one another—but across how many detours, and what tides of disorder!—and conceive of the whole undertaking as resting upon itself."

I can't help imagining labyrinths and more labyrinths within that very large and constantly moving labyrinth. A labyrinth for music, for instance. And a special little labyrinth-labyrinth for mathematics. And language as a labyrinth whose passages keep collapsing because words construct them only in passing, on their endless way toward the things whose shadows are buried somewhere behind them in the collapsed passageways. And that all these labyrinths breathe, open and close, turn and reflect themselves and each other, and allow all reflections to seep in and out, through each other, as the breath of the gestalt.

It's a story being told. About the simultaneity of everything in a discrete second. As when Novalis writes that "natural history must no longer be treated in discrete chapters for each subject—it must

be (a continuum) a *story*, an organic growth—a tree—or an animal—or a human.”

We have been removing things from their contexts for so long, and have altered nature’s individual segments into arbitrary sequences, and are currently altering so many segments each day, that we have finally started to see that what we’re altering is the whole.

We have finally started to see. Can we also understand and change and maybe learn to love our efforts again?

Can we borrow the optimism of Novalis, who writes, “We shall understand the world when we understand ourselves, because we and it are integral *halves*. We are God’s children, divine seeds. One day we shall be what our Father is.” Or, as he elaborates farther on, “God wants there to be gods.”

Not everything is allowed, I tell myself. But if god didn’t exist, then everything would, in principle, be allowed. The only exceptions would be the things that human society jointly agreed not to allow. But these things or laws are limited in advance by the workings of humanity. We mustn’t kill each other—except during wars. We mustn’t steal from each other—unless it’s joy that we steal, or our fellow humans’ self-worth.

If we pay people a wage that might seem high, for slaving like animals in slaughterhouses or other industries involving piecework, it’s true that we’re paying them for their efforts, replacing with money the time they have spent, but simultaneously we’re stealing something irreplaceable, priceless: the quality of their working life, which is half of their entire self-concept as human beings.

If god existed, that kind of thing wouldn’t be allowed. Not god as in religion, but god as in human tenderness toward all living things, including the air, the oceans, and the earth. Because all living creatures become earth and water and air when they die, so that the next living creatures can breathe and have enough food and water to form themselves into new life, maybe even new and better life.

A tenderness that applies not only to humans, but also to all the substances that humans are made of.

A tenderness that prohibits us from creating substances that threaten the substances humans are made of.

A tenderness that we can’t afford to negate, not with money and not with arguments.

A tenderness that applies to everything, from the smallest things to the largest, and to all the parts’ inconceivable, self-contained interconnections and balance.

Here humans are neither the smallest nor the largest, the best nor the most important; in the furthest reaching sense, they distinguish themselves from the rest of nature only by their ability to use the word *god*. By letting nature’s many forms, including human forms of understanding, keep moving toward their shared incomprehensibility.

Living entities can be defined as things that come with projects, activities they want to carry out, because the activities want to be carried out in them.

In this way humans are creatures of myriad interpretations; it could be said that they come out in predetermined editions that remain unreadable along the way because they’re not written until they’ve already been interpreted by consciousness.

This does not mean that humans can blindly follow their urges, their feelings, and their passions, and then excuse their actions by calling them fate.

Knowing something leaves us responsible for what we don’t know. Making our lives readable leaves us responsible for what is in principle unreadable. Understanding certain parts of existence and of the world leaves us responsible for the myriad interpretations of the whole.

To me, these myriad interpretations are as crucial as they are difficult to live with. Almost every day, as I walk along the street, on the firm earth holding still beneath my feet, I have to convince myself, my whole body, that the earth is spinning.

When I board a train for somewhere far away, I often dream of an endless journey. I know I’m riding a train that runs on time, and

I'll arrive at my destination as scheduled, but I still indulge in the feeling of an ongoing endlessness, interrupted only when the train stops at, say, a station in a small town somewhere in Europe, where the fence is being painted as the stationmaster's wife putters in her rose garden, and I think that it could be me puttering there in the sunshine and warmth amid the fiery colors. Or I could be standing in an old coat in pouring rain, digging potatoes in a vegetable patch somewhere in Germany. Or sitting for hours in a railway station restaurant, while my consciousness continued its interrupted journey into another endlessness.

Somewhere Beckett writes, "Then I went back into the house and wrote: 'It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows.' It was not midnight. It was not raining."

It's that simple to describe the first steps toward a life of dualities, the starting point for a life of myriad interpretations.

The problem is how to hold fast to a life of myriad interpretations inaccessible to our human systems, even though we're the most willing creators of systems in the world.

For the most part, we creep away from these myriad interpretations and their accompanying anxieties, creep into a more or less authoritative religion, a more or less obscure astrology, or a naive fascism, or else we put on superhero suits and try to plan things that have already happened, and call it politics.

Maybe that's the best we can do, when the facts we can convey to each other stay within the limited range of religious metaphors, or fascist advertising, or the equivocating language of political ideologies. To say nothing of the self-serving jargon of the sciences.

When we read declarations of human rights and similarly encouraging global agreements, they're good, and right, and hopeful, but one keeps wondering whether anything will come of them until we have the resources for them, given that most of the facts we exchange have to do with money and with control over specific materials (which actually belong to themselves and to the intrinsic balance).

Where will the energy and strength come from to create not happy

conditions, but humane or natural ones on earth? Financing, wisdom, and justice are necessary components. They can bring about provisional progress in certain areas, they can be available for spontaneous revolutions and improvements in the balance of power, but they'll never be able to reveal that these improvements are a farce, because the ability to bring forth concepts of another kind of power lies beyond the scope of the language of financing, wisdom, and justice. We can't even bring ourselves to say that it's not humans who hold the power. Who would dare to say that for millennia now we've been fighting for a better distribution of power we don't even have?

I have to imagine that it's the earth that holds the power. I have to imagine that it brought its physical and chemical underpinnings into balance before it started creating what it continues to create, namely products that reproduce what has produced them, such as chestnut trees or human beings.

I have to imagine that humanity tends toward a shared imagery for expressing this power and its natural balances. That the individual person, left undisturbed, is a reflection of the condition of the earth, and that **humans as a group are a chemical poem in praise of the earth and its sun.**

We're becoming frightened now, when we see how nature is being ruined. But nature can still manage to heal our dreams; it will give us images and inspiration and lend joy and style to our love and our work.

We have not been sentenced to freedom, I tell myself. It's said we have been, because we haven't created ourselves and haven't had any part in deciding whether or not we're here; and it's said that we're sentenced to freedom because we alone, without god, bear responsibility for all our actions.

In keeping with this imagery, I experience us more as a group that has been reprieved, and that, through various lifetimes, moves about within an unmanageable prison.

Given our knowledge of the universe's chemical and electrical workings, it's a wonder that I'm not a stone, and it's pure chance

that I'm not a mackerel having to reproduce somewhere beneath an oil-drilling platform in the North Sea.

In the circle game called "I Wonder," I'm "it." There I sit, like a little child, saying, "I'm a stone," or "I'm a fish swimming side by side with thousands of other fish." Even though everyone can see that I look like a human, am a human. But everything can be "I." That's our primary characteristic.

We can gather knowledge of stones, of fish, of ourselves. And we can make use of that knowledge.

With that knowledge we can actually deepen the sovereign knowledge we already have when we say "I'm a stone." "I'm a fish." "I'm a human."

I don't experience this "I" as something created. What I experience is the world, second by second, undertaking a division of its expressions, with the specific expression we humans call "the population of the earth" characterized by its millions of ways of saying "I," all with their foundations in a single way to say "god."

I don't experience this "I" as something whose presence I haven't had any part in deciding or defining. I don't experience myself as either definite or indefinite.

What I experience is that all that counts, by nature's reckoning, is whether we reproduce in the same way as jellyfish and ospreys and all the other phenomena that come slipping out of everything that already exists, grow, and become more numerous, and keep each other company for a while before we slip back again into everything that already exists.

What I experience is that the question of meaning and deciding can't be posed about existence. Existence is its own meaning. It's beyond discussion, because it is what is posing the question.

It poses the question by letting a part of its reproduction plan fit into the specific mental state called "I." It asks consciousness if it's possible, with the perpetually changing structures that have developed it (which human beings call "brains"), to achieve a complete reflection of the meaning that's already there.

I don't experience this "I" as something flung into freedom with an accompanying, enormous responsibility.

What I experience is that we have degrees of freedom of movement, expressed via style. In forms, also forms of relationship, where consciousness describes itself or its own structure.

I instinctively gravitate toward those forms. Like a bird building a nest in its natural environment. It's the beauty and truth in these forms that lets me feel responsible for my actions.

While chance does reign supreme, and I might just as easily have been a stone, a fish, or something else, what I can't escape is ultimately the something else that I might just as easily have been. It's not about freedom; it's about broadening our understanding of our connection to the other, to the other human or humans in the world. Its ultimate consequence has to do with broadening our responsibility to what seems an absurdity: that each and every one of us personally bears responsibility for every wrong action, even if it is committed by someone completely unknown to us.

This kind of thing is neither theory nor practice. It's magic. Or, to use a less loaded term, it's style. It has something to do with the following: Because humans use the word *god* (or have used it in the past), god exists (is still in existence) as the concept that corresponds to our sense of interrelatedness among all the atoms in the universe. (And so it's quite possible that *god* is a loaded word.)

I feel that what we call *style* is the closest we come to expressing that inconceivable concept. Style, with all its shifts in tempo, its areas of emphasis and its always surprising quantum ambiguities, which we find in music, for example, or in our social forms and their architectures.

The more or less overarching systems we build, which we call social order or universal order, have come into being as shields against the chaos that we believe is raging beyond what we've been able to organize and manage. Because we're afraid of death, of silence, and of darkness, yet also afraid of storms, volcanoes, and all sorts of earthly disturbances, we transfer our fear to our image of

nature as a whole and place it in opposition to the human longing for order, cultivation, mastery, and development.

As a species we invariably adopt an arrogant attitude in our conversation with nature. The order we've imposed is the best, simply because it's our own, when in reality it's so poor that it can be maintained only because we ourselves have set up the caricature we're conversing with. But nature, the conversant whose expressible language is incorporated into us (as if we could play chess with ourselves without going insane), nature, which encompasses us and which we simultaneously encompass, is wholly an expression of the freedom that actually reigns supreme. Nature in itself bears no resemblance to the distortion resulting from what we, misguided by our fear and trembling, are trying to control.

Birds sing, springtime overwhelms us, hyenas devour carcasses, and the stars move along as if there were nothing to change. Star time is so enormously slow and has such extremes of tempo that there will have to be many more humanities before we comprehend the working processes of the universe as music. Bird space, especially songbird space, is so short and deep and inaccessibly lovely that we're delighted, but our pure delight, which I think relates to the electrochemical modulations of our biology, is drowned in our internal metronome, the heartbeat that binds our experience of tempo, weight, and value. Hyena space, which is close to the places where worms whisper and rustle about our bodies, spreads its near-inaudibilities, as if the haze over the savannas could be picked up as widespread sound, or as if the deepest processes of transformation, the processes of decay that await us, could be felt as carpets of sound, woven from time, spreading and vanishing.

Humans do not invent humans, I tell myself.

I do not believe that a particular freedom applies to humans. That's something we deceive ourselves about because we generally look at our lives as a series of private states of consciousness.

If I limit my view to the time that has passed in my life up to now,

and, with my pulse rate as a fear meter, see death coming nearer, then I have to conceive of my life as an isolated travesty.

But if I experience, feel, my life as an example of something that stays alive no matter what, something that occasionally attains expression in me as in others, then I experience life as an anonymous drawing in which only the human characteristics shift.

If my child presses me, in all possible ways, to demonstrate my love and care, even though I may already be flooding him or her with love and care, then I take it primarily not as the child's desire to be in control and gain power, but rather as a need to confirm the reality of love in the world, from long before we met. Ego and love combined, because what is being expressed is a state of belonging, an interdependency in the world.

A world where it's not possible to invent oneself as a human, free and self-sufficient and pulled from thin air; it's possible only to follow and in that way illustrate the traces of humanness that we're drawn toward, in the truth that we're born into.

It's the same with what I've written here. To myself, as much as to anyone else. I write in the certainty that this has already been written before, in all possible ways, and that all its wild self-contradictions are a part of that reassuring form. It should have been a lullaby, like the one that waves write on water:

Humans are not abandoned and alone, it tells itself.

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