

Approaching Mysticism Through Scepticism

Different people claim to know different things, or truths, some of them contradictory. We need a method to distinguish the true from the false. Here already a paradox is encountered: we cannot choose just any method, for we must be able to know that our method will correctly distinguish the true from the false. So we need a method of knowing how to know, and before that a method to find out how to know how to know, and so on. Of course, we could just invent a method, but then the "knowledge" we obtained from it would be arbitrary. We might pick a different method just for Tuesdays and so have different "knowledge" then.

Careful inspection of the above paradox is itself sufficient to lead to the conclusion that all "knowledge" we might have is a fantasy, that is, its form is determined by an arbitrary element that cannot be justified. But this is not what most of us think most of the time: it is most often thought that there are correct and incorrect methods of searching for knowledge, and we have sophisticated arguments justifying the methods we choose. Contrary to this, my thesis is that the arbitrary element in any system of knowledge is primary and inescapable, and that our most sophisticated methods of searching for knowledge only disguise and conceal this arbitrary factor.

There is a kind of knowledge, deductive knowledge, which has a kind of certainty, and is non-arbitrary. Other methods of knowing pretend to be similar to deductive logic in order to appear to share this certainty. However, upon closer inspection it turns out that deductive logic is certain of "nothing", that is, it is non-arbitrary because it says nothing. Deductive arguments have the form "if", followed by the premises, and "then" followed by the conclusion. The conclusion can say no more than the premises. Clearly, we must arrive at the premises by means in addition to those of deductive logic, since this procedure, starting with nothing, will certainly end with nothing.

Why worry about deduction at all, if it tells us nothing? The point of it is to clarify our thinking. We often don't really know the world described by our premises until we draw some conclusions from them. For example, let us say we know, somehow, both that "I am walking north" and "30 feet to the north is a cliff." Until we associate the two premises we would not see the logical conclusion that "unless I change my direction, I will soon be falling."

Deductive knowledge is a method of maintaining consistency among a system of definitions. $2 + 2 = 4$ only because that is how we define $2 + 2$: $2 + 2$ becomes 5 only when we change the definition. The arbitrary element here is clear: it is we who agree on the definitions.

There are two common senses of "knowing" outside of deduction. One concerns what happens when we encounter something directly, our immediate experience. Something happens, or seems to, or doesn't happen or seem to, but we don't know quite what till we fit it into a context, till we relate it to a map. We use our time/space framework to distinguish real from unreal experiences, to distinguish dreams and hallucinations from true perceptions. Knowledge in the sense of pure experience, direct knowing, before there is any interpretation, is utterly undefinable and thus not knowledge in the sense I wish to discuss.

In the sense I intend to discuss, knowledge is:

1. Anything that allows us to predict future experiences.
2. Anything that allows us to define clearly what our present experiences are: dreams and hallucinations must be distinguished from "reality", illusions from real facts, mistakes from correct inferences, etc.
3. Anything that allows us to distinguish which past experiences were real

and which were not.

All the above are methods of processing, or evaluating, experience. But it is very difficult to fully distinguish methods of processing experience from "pure" experience, since the method of processing an experience, once decided upon, becomes part of the experience. If, for example, I am a passenger in an automobile which is being driven erratically, I will have one experience if I believe the driver to be on drugs, and another if I believe him to be a test driver showing me the performance capabilities of that type of auto. While the direct physical experience is the same, in the former case I am afraid for my life and in the latter case I am a bit nervous, probably, but overall confident.

A better example, perhaps, concerns a conversation I might have with God. I tell a friend, "I'm talking with God." He says, "no you're not, you're having electrical discharges between the right and left sides of your brain." If I believe him there will be little left of my original experience. Of course, I may note that this special brain activity, as I now think of it, lowers my blood pressure, is an escape from the real world that relaxes me, and other such things, but lowering blood pressure and such is a different experience from talking with God. Talking with God is no longer possible within my belief system.

Of course, while my belief system now makes it impossible for me to have an experience of talking to God, one might argue that God, if real, might really talk to me, even though I would misinterpret it as brain discharges. A knowledge or belief system can create experiences, but one can imagine something outside the belief system that may eventually shake it up. If God were real, he (since we are assuming God, we might as well assume a mean, masculine one, as per convention) might get tired of my misinterpretation, and decide to literally pick me up and shake me till I gave up my misinterpretations. Of course, someone, especially someone prone to abnormal brain discharges, might hallucinate that God was picking them up and shaking them. How can one be sure?

Let us evaluate methods of knowing. I will proceed from methods which seem arbitrary to methods that seem, on the surface, less arbitrary.

A.) We might try throwing dice. If it's a 1 then ghosts are real, if it's a 2 then materialism is correct, if it's a 3 then nothing is real, etc. If only one believes the assumption, that the throw of dice indicates reality, then one has an effective method. Of course a heretic might come along and say a 1 means nothing is real, a 2 means we are all dead, etc. This is unacceptable because we want to feel forced to believe something, not just that we are making it up of our own volition. It is also unacceptable since knowledge changes so fast, one minute nuclear war is happening, the next minute it isn't, depending on the fall of the dice.

But let us say someone says they can prove that their dice (or tarot, or I Ching) works. If it's a 1, then it's raining. If it's any other number, it's not. They throw a 1, then we look outside and it's raining. Whatever else we can say about this "proof," we can note that it "proves" that dice work only in terms of empirical method, and so can only "really" be proven to work if the empirical method can be proven. (A dice knower who had an absolute belief in his method would merely say we were deceived if we reported it was not raining when his dice reported that it was.)

B.) We might rely on "faith". Here we choose a picture of the world and then "believe" it come whatever contrary experience or thought. Once we have this picture, we can make any amount of deductions from it, just as those who believe in the bible, for example, can make deductions from it. But they might have believed something else, in which case they would have made different deductions: how is a person to know what to believe? One might try to have faith in one's faith, and faith in one's faith in one's faith, but what if one

doubts one's faith in one's faith in one's etc. etc.? The whole process is somewhat analogous to painting one's windows, which might be pretty and inspiring but is art, not "knowledge".

C.) Intuition. By "intuition" I mean any kind of direct knowing where the exact method used is unclear but where some kind of "knowing" seems to result. Someone might say, "well, I don't need a method to know that the president is not being mind-controlled by martians (or whatever); it's intuitively obvious." But someone else might say that their intuition tells them the president is being mind-controlled: whose intuition to trust?

The option of testing someone's intuition naturally occurs. The scientific method can be applied to an individual intuition, to test its validity, as in the martian mind control case. Or it can be used to test intuition in general, to see if intuitive results always or generally agree with scientific results: but even if they do, intuition is still not proven as a primary method of "knowing". It is only proven that intuition works if science works, and the primary method in that argument, science, remains to be proven. It may be intuitively obvious, to those who have good intuition, that intuition works, but this only means something if intuition works, and is invalid otherwise.

D.) Sensory Experience. Someone might say we don't need any of the above methods, or any formal scientific method, to know things: that we can at least know something just by direct sensory experience. The view is that sensory experience is not dependent on any kind of belief or model or theory or method; sensory experiences just happen to us.

People who value "sensory experience" often assume a clear distinction can easily be made between "sensory" and "non-sensory" experience. But any such distinction relies on some theoretical framework, some idea of what kind of an organism we are and how to distinguish dreams, hallucinations and such from true "sensory" experience. Also, it is easy to overlook the fact that what we think of as "sensory experiences" are usually memories of experiences, not sensory experiences we are having now, which haven't been processed yet. We have theories about time, space, and the mind which we use to make sense of memories, and without some theory it would be difficult to know what to do with them.

E.) Consensus Verification. Those who feel that a vote by a majority can determine the truth or falsehood of a phenomena, must be extremely satisfied with elected government, since the person elected is therefore always the best person for the job. But then, I have never been clear on just how consensus verification works. Must all voters be 18, or is it 21? Is a majority required to make something a fact, or does a simple plurality suffice? If by consensus one means unanimous opinion, then, when one considers all those presently in mental hospitals, it is obvious there are no facts since there is nothing that all could agree on.

To take this concept to an extreme, we can imagine a planet inhabited by 5 sentient beings, 2 of whom are materialists, 2 mystics and 1 undecided. Whenever the undecided being temporarily became convinced by one or the other pair, the reality of the whole planet would change dramatically. Spirits, causal principles, and divine lights might pop in and out of existence by the hour as the fifth being vacillated between belief systems.

If one could know that one person is more likely to be wrong than many, then the consensus vision is at least an indication of what is probably true. But how can anyone know that, without first knowing what is true?

Consensus verification is sometimes confused with the scientific method, but the two are not the same. For example, no scientist would consider creationism true and darwinian evolution false just because the majority of the world's population voted for creationism. Even if the majority of the worlds biologists voted for creationism, many scientists would remain unconvinced if they thought

the scientific method

4

the convincing factor was fundamentalist religious belief and not particular "scientific" tests and ways of thinking.

F.) Science. (For a more thorough investigation of the arbitrary element in science, read Probability and Scientific Inference by G. Spencer Brown.)

At the roots of science lies the notion of inductive logic. Inductive logic bears a curious relationship with deductive logic. Deductive logic, as I mentioned before, is always certain because the conclusion says no more than the premises, but in inductive logic, the conclusion always says more than the premises. In other words, the very thing that makes a deductive argument invalid, is done in inductive arguments as a matter of course. Many different attempts have been made to show why inductive logic must work even though it is in a sense "illogical". The recent tendency has been to admit that induction will not necessarily work, but to say that it will probably work. In other words, it is admitted that scientific knowledge is uncertain, but it is felt that this uncertainty is limited, unlike the uncertainty, say, of the dice method.

Let us say I am a naive scientist interested in observing ducks. I observe 10,000 ducks, all of which have only one leg. I conclude that "ducks have one leg," by which I mean "any duck will probably have one leg." I will still consider this inference good if I encounter an occasional 2 or 3 legged duck: these will just be ducks that have been influenced in some abnormal way, probably by a genetic mutation.

But my inference is probabilistic, or uncertain, in a deeper way. I might find that almost all ducks I observe after the first 10,000 are 2 legged ducks. (I had, perhaps, started my duck observations in the midst of an experimental test on the survival possibilities of one-legged ducks.) After sufficient observations of 2 legged ducks, say, 20,000, I have two choices. I can say that the 2 legged animals resembling ducks are glucks, not ducks, since ducks, as everyone knows, have only one leg. But if I never again found more one legged animals, I would probably decide that the one legged animals were "really" just an abnormal variation of a duck and that any duck is probably two-legged, not one-legged. If I was really upset I might further say, "well, I guess I have disproven the scientific method, since it led to a statement which was incorrect." "Oh no," someone might reply, "scientific inferences are only probably true, usually the scientific method works!"

To summarize: the predictions that scientists make are said to be probably true in any given instance, which means they may not come true in some instances. Also, it is only probably true that any prediction made by using the scientific method is correct: that is, it is possible, though we calculate not probable, that our prediction predicts something that is truly improbable.

The notion here is that we can use science to calculate that an event has a particular probability, but it is only probably true that the event has that particular probability. We could further say that it is only probably true that it is probably true that the event has that particular probability, and so on. The uncertainty, that the next duck will be one legged, or whatever, which we try to define as being limited, through the use of probabilistic calculations, is in fact unlimited, since those calculations are only probably correct, etc.

It is commonly accepted that particular experiments might come up with invalid results: that is why we have the concept of repeating experiments. What is uncertain is where we can draw the line and say that an experiment has been repeated sufficiently. G. Spencer Brown constructed a syllogism relative to this:

Major premiss: No isolated experiment, however significant in itself, can suffice for the experimental demonstration of any phenomena.

Minor premiss: Any series of experiments may be regarded, for the purpose of statistical argument, as a single or isolated experiment whose length

is the aggregate of the separate

is the aggregate of the separate experiments comprising it."

(That is, there might be, by coincidence, a pattern common to the whole series which resulted in the pattern which was observed in each experiment and which cannot be expected to be repeated.)

"Conclusion: Therefore, no series of experiments, however significant in themselves, can suffice for the experimental demonstration of any natural phenomena."

If we could repeat an experiment infinitely, then its results would be proven significant, but we can't do that. What we do is to repeat an experiment some finite number of times and then assume that it could be repeated indefinitely. But assumptions are not knowledge.

But, someone might say, it could not just happen that researchers would find the same result over a period of months or years just by chance: it could not be a random pattern, it must indicate something of significance. There is the notion that the laws of probability are deductive, certain, laws that allow us to draw information out of experience. It is necessary to examine those "laws" more closely.

"Suppose that in a random series of digits we take units of five digits as our events. Since the series is random, we have no reason to expect any particular group such as '12345' any more than any other such as '32213' or '00000'. There are, as we can easily calculate, exactly 100,000 different permutations of five standard digits, allowing for repetitions. So in a million such groups of digits we should expect to find roughly ten groups of each - that is, about ten 00000's, ten 00001's, ten 00002's and so on. Why roughly ten? Because there are 100,000 possibilities to be divided between 1,000,000 instances, so that if, say, 00000 consistently appeared about thirty times in every million such groups, we might begin to expect it in preference to other groups; and if these expectations turned out to be justified, then the group 00000 would not be the primarily random event we are supposing it to be. Why roughly ten? Because if we knew it to be exactly ten and we had examined, for example, the first 99,990 of our five digit units and found no groups of five noughts, then we should know that the last ten groups were all groups of five noughts; the final ten observations would thus have no element of primary randomness whatever.

"Let us suppose a very long series divided up into groups of a million digits each. As there are $10^{1000000}$ different groups of this kind, we shall expect to find, if they are primarily random, about ten of any particular kind in a series of $10^{1000001}$ of them. Thus in a random series of $10^{1000007}$ digits we should expect to find about ten subseries of a million consecutive noughts.

"Now let us consider an observer with a machine for making random numbers, having arrived at the beginning of one of these subseries of a million consecutive noughts. Will he be calling the series random? If he is accustomed to checking long series of about $10^{1000007}$ digits, he might. But if he is a normal observer, dying at about 70, he will be mildly surprised after five consecutive noughts; after ten he will begin to suspect the machinery; after twenty he will call for his laboratory assistants to see to it; and, if he happens to be compiling a table of random numbers for scientific uses, he will certainly regard the records from where the noughts began as unpublishable."

from Probability and Scientific Inference by G. Spencer Brown

Brown goes on to point out that for an observer with a shorter lifetime, such that it never counted beyond five in that lifetime, alternate ones and zeroes might not be significant but a repetition of, say, two zeroes would be extremely significant.

The paradox of probability becomes more clear when we try to explain how to determine the true probability of an event which we are experiencing. It turns out that opposite probabilities require the same criterion for verification.

If the true probability (p) equals 1/2, it should sometimes appear to equal 1/100. Also, if the true probability equals 1/100, it should sometimes appear to equal 1/2. To say that if p equals 1/2 it will "probably" appear to equal 1/2 when we look is just to bump the paradox of probability up one level: we then have to ask, what exactly is the probability it will appear to be 1/2? How do we verify that probability?

In practice, we do not deal with an open ended series of events; we "cut" the series at some point and look at a finite pattern. If within that finite pattern it appears that p equals 1/2, then we theorize that p equals 1/2, "really". It is sometimes felt that theorems such as Bernoulli's theorem can be used to justify this practice. That theorem runs as follows:

"If the chance of an event occurring in a single trial is p, then the probability that the ratio of the number of times the event occurs to the number of trials differs from p by less than any preassigned quantity, however small, can be made as near certainty as desired by increasing the number of trials."

The problem here is that the "p" referred to in the theorem is something we do not know directly but which we have to attempt to discover in practice. We estimate "p" based on some finite series of events. Since, according to Bernoulli's theorem, we can expect the series upon which our estimation was based to vary from the true "p" more so than a longer series, it follows that any estimate we make most probably is wrong, and will show up as more obviously wrong the further we continue. So while we cannot argue that any event will occur in something other than its "true" probability in an infinitely long series, we can point out that this "true" probability is metaphysical and unknowable. We are left with estimates, and equal criterion for making opposite estimates, as previously discussed.

It is interesting to apply this logic to the universe as a whole, and to address the question, "is the universe random or ordered?"

Someone might propose that the universe as a whole is utterly random and chaotic, but that within it order, or what seems to be order, randomly appears. All the rules and scientific laws we have found are just chance guesses that are temporarily working because we happen to be living in the midst of some randomly occurring order. (Just as an observer watching a series of 1 million zeroes might learn to predict zeroes, even though the zeroes were random and not causal.)

Someone else might propose that we are living in a perfectly ordered, or causal, universe, which contains no randomness at all. What appears to be random is just an order that is too complex for us, or too unexpected. As Bertrand Russell said, "Take, for example, the numbers of all the taxis that I have hired in the course of my life, and the times when I have hired them. We have here a finite set of intergers and a finite number of corresponding times. If n is the number of the taxi that I hired at the time t, is is certainly possible, in an infinite number of ways, to find a function f such that the formula

$$n \text{ equals } f(t)$$

is true for all values of n and t that have hitherto occurred." (from Human Knowledge, Its Scope and Limits). In other words, there is a pattern to everything, you only have to have a large enough mind to put it together.

Both proposals, universal randomness and universal pattern, are flawless; there is no way of "testing" the universe to discover which is correct. Nor is there a way to determine whether the universe has free will and is doing whatever it wants. These are all different ways of thinking about events, impossible to validate one way or the other.

Anyone who has followed the logic to here will see that the situation is a real bind; we now have no way of distinguishing significant from insignificant

7

experiences, no way of making sense at all. Or rather, we have no way of justifying making such distinctions, but we can still make them if we want: we can be arbitrary, or artistic. The result, however, will not be knowledge as we have previously thought of it. The resulting "knowledge" will be indistinguishable from "art", which previously we had thought quite separate from knowledge.

Science, which pretends to be non-metaphysical, and to not be based on arbitrary assumptions, can actually be shown to be a collection of assumptions, of conventions, of rules for interpreting experience. By following these rules, we can collapse a plurality of world views, or confusion, into the one "scientific world view". It is interesting, as an example, to examine a theory which violates all the assumptions of science, and to observe how these assumptions would disqualify this theory even if it were true. This is the theory:

"I am really an 8 legged underwater creature, part of the ruling class on a planet that bears little resemblance to "this" one. My natural life span is 10,000 years. I am currently having the experience of being a human being on "this" world (this world does not really exist) because I have been captured by enemy forces who are using a mental force field to cause me to forget my previous experience and to create for me false memories and experiences of "this" world. (You can't escape this theory by saying that mental force fields don't exist: they only don't exist on "this" world.) I can perceive myself to act on "this" world, and I have all the usual components of the human experience. My problem, though I don't know it, is to shake off these false beliefs about being a human, and to wake up to reality before enemy forces take control of my planet. I do feel, though I can't explain why, skeptical of the "earth" reality, and I am emotionally certain I must enter another world. But within the context of earth reality, which is all I can remember, this is insanity. I now find myself apparently in a roomful of earth empiricists trying to reason out whether my feelings might be correct or if they are certainly wrong." Let us examine the arguments the empiricists might use.

Inductive Logic: that is, "you've obviously been a human being for many years now, isn't that good enough to prove you shall continue to be?" But here the argument can be shown to be uncertain in two ways: it is not certain that my seeming to have been a human for many years is not a false memory, and it is possible that, even if I have seemed to be a human for many years, that from some wider context (like my true planet) I have never been a human at all.

Consensus Verification: Consensus verification is, as a last resort, brought in as a part of science. In the light of the underwater creature example, a new flaw in consensus verification appears: namely, that the "other observers" one gets together with to become objective may be unreal. One can never prove that the other observers exist anywhere except in one's subjectivity.

Occam's Razor: that is, the simplest explanation of the data must prevail. The problem with it is that it only works when and if reality is simple, and not if it isn't. It is a blatant assumption, and would surely lead me to pursue the illusion of being human while my enemies took over my planet.

Retroactive Reclassification of Phenomena: Let's say I start remembering my life as an 8 legged creature before I began to think I was a human being. I tell a few of my earth friends about it. They say, "well, it may have seemed to you then that you really were such a creature, but we know now that you weren't because look how real this world is. So you were probably just having a dream or a fantasy." It is commonly believed that science always progresses, exchanging the old limited theories of yesterday for new and better ones. Trying to explore the world while holding this belief is like exploring a maze with the belief firmly in mind that there are no dead ends: it works only if there are no dead ends. But the experience of being a human being is a dead end since

I am really an underwater creature, and I would be foolish to classify my memories of being that creature as "dreams".

Theories Must Be Testable: we limit the adjective "scientific" to those which are simple enough that we can choose among them on the basis of experiences which we know how to have within a convenient interval of time. The theory of the existence of heaven and hell is out, since we must wait till after death to test it. The theory that martians are everywhere but know how to disguise themselves is out, since we don't know when we might expect to penetrate their disguise. The theory that the world is an inter-telepathic creation of spiritual beings attempting to sustain the illusion of scientific law is out, since we can only test it by waiting until they (we) quit making this illusion, which we might not do.

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It is not usually clearly distinguished whether the scientific view is that such things might be true but that it is a waste of time to talk of them since testing them is inconvenient, or whether it is believed that such things cannot be true because they violate occam's razor or some other rule for scientific beliefs. At any rate, we can see that the requirement for testability has a tendency to focus our minds on what we can do, or appear to do, in the apparent here and now, and a tendency to cause us to ignore our ignorance of what may be going on in the larger context. But if it is the unknowns in the larger context which are important, as in the underwater creature example, then the requirement for testability will probably lead one wrong.

Repeatability: that is, the belief that real things or events are always repeatable, at least if another person experiments again using the same method. If I turned lead to gold yesterday but cannot do so again today then I almost surely did not do so yesterday. This applies equally to if I experienced myself as an underwater creature yesterday but cannot do so today: then I almost surely, or surely, am not an underwater creature. Miracles are categorically not allowed. Of course, what was yesterday's miracle (which isn't real today) can be allowed tomorrow if a method is found to make it repeatable. It then, however, is no longer a miracle but is, magically, a part of science.

Distinguishability of Causal and Random: "Causal" means part of a significant pattern which I can expect to continue into the future; "Random" means a temporary pattern, insignificant in the long run. If I truly was a human being then the human experiences I had would be significant and I could expect them to continue into the future; but since I am truly an underwater creature my experience is neither significant (since my captors might have picked any other experience to trick me with, and it is just an illusion), nor can I be sure of it continuing into the future (since my captors might shut off the force field at any time when they feel it is no longer necessary.)

Distinguishability of External Reality and Internal Reality: Let us say I manage to shake off the human being illusion, I escape the force field and my enemies and then fight my enemies for control of my planet for 5 years. I am then recaptured, the force field is turned back on, and I experience myself as a patient on a mental ward on earth. I try to explain what is really happening to the psychiatrist but he says the whole adventure is only happening in my internal reality, to which I must quit paying so much attention. What is really true of course, within this example, is that "earth" is an illusionary external reality embedded in my internal reality which is really underwater. We can always arbitrarily distinguish internal from external reality, or do it consistently with other assumptions and beliefs, but we cannot "prove" we are doing it correctly.

One World Hypothesis: Those believing this hypothesis in some form might say this whole scenario I have been imagining is impossible. There is one world, they might say, and it does not allow these complexities. We are on earth, and force fields such as I have been describing are impossible. This is really

only a variation on occam's razor, and also on Descarte's belief that God is responsible for our sensory experiences and he would not deceive us. The problem is, how can we know if such assumptions are correct?

Consciousness is Embedded in the World and not the World in Consciousness: Many of the people involved simultaneously in both science and mysticism share this assumption and so limit their mysticism. But is it necessarily true? I might believe that I am "in" the earth reality but then find that I have been making it up, and that I am really an imaginative creature that exists in another reality. The earth reality, I find, only existed in my consciousness. But "strange loops" are possible: I might find the reality I woke up to to be only a part of my consciousness which exists "in" another reality: and that world and the consciousness that sees it might be found to exist in an "earth" reality! Have I really been in the earth reality all along, or am I now on a "higher" earth reality, with other "higher" realities beyond?

Consider another example. My enemy underwater creatures might arrange it so that I have the experience of escaping the force field for 5 years, etc., and then the experience of being recaptured, but really I never escape the force field at all. How can I tell if I am really escaping or not? We see we can have no sure ground to say that a consciousness exists in a particular world or that a particular world exists only in consciousness. Either, in particular circumstances, can appear to be true, but it would be arbitrary to assume that appearances cannot be deceiving.

To some, my use of the "underwater creature" example may seem insulting or stupid, because it seems "so obviously untrue". But that is the whole point - we have no method, without making assumptions, that is, without inventing the truth, to disqualify even the most off-the-wall theory or map. There are an infinite number of theories waiting where this one came from, all impossible to disqualify except on the basis of some assumption or other, either blatant or concealed.

It is for fear of these innumerable theories, and the uncertainty they represent, that we have developed the scientific belief system and the belief that it is not a belief system. Science is now being questioned, for example by the creationists, who prefer their beliefs to scientific ones. It is curious, however, to observe how they still hold onto science, loosely, as they attempt to disqualify evolution. They try to prove that "there is not enough evidence for evolution"; that is, they share the assumption of science that if a collection of evidence made it appear that evolution was true then evolution would really have to be true. They might equally theorize that Satan invented the evidence to mislead those who preferred to look at fossils rather than read the bible.

The notion of teaching alternative theories of evolution in schools is an interesting one. The principle question concerns just how many options to teach. There is darwinian evolution, creationism.....and what about the theory that God created the world yesterday, complete with memories, scientific laws and fossils? (It is the simplest theory, which should please those who prefer simple theories except that it reveals a flaw in simple theories. That is, it is necessary to explain why things are so simple, what explains the explanatory principle? Of course, one should probably explain the explanatory principles, like quarks and big bangs, in complex theories, but usually one is too tired by the time one gets to the explanatory principle to dig any deeper.) At any rate, the problem with teaching alternative theories of evolution is simply that there are an infinite number of them, some already invented, some not, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. A teacher, trying to be fair, could

spend his or her whole life on the project and still not get far. Giving up, The teacher can either be arbitrary, and teach what s/he wants; or say nothing, since it is hopeless; or encourage the students to invent their own theory.

To work towards a conclusion to this confusion, we need to do four things:

clarify the nature and depth of this confusion.

examine arguments for keeping some system of knowing even if it cannot be rationally justified.

examine arguments for abandoning all systems of knowing.

try to draw some conclusions from all of the above.

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The simplest way of stating what has been discovered is this: there are no logically certain or even logically probable ways of distinguishing the known from the unknown, the true from the false. There are ways of drawing such distinctions, but this is art and does not reveal anything outside of itself: like a painting on a window glass, it might be said to obscure vision as much as reveal.

M. C. Escher created a picture of a dragon attempting to escape the two dimensional world: the dragon, being a two dimensional representation, naturally failed. All of our methods of knowing, which we wanted to use to escape uncertainty, can be seen to be themselves embedded in uncertainty. The dragon never escapes the 2-D world, even a little: nor do we escape uncertainty, even a little.

This paradox might be compared to Zeno's paradoxes, which prove that motion cannot happen because in order to reach a goal something first has to move halfway there, and halfway to halfway, etc. But motion can happen because motion does not have to be rational, time does not have to be rational. The problem is that knowledge does have to be rational or else it is not knowledge

in the sense we have previously thought of knowledge. "Knowledge" can certainly still "just happen" like motion, or like the weather, but hallucinations, delusions, and mistakes can also "just happen": how can we separate the two categories?

Systems of knowing, like simple knowing or experience, can also "just happen" - can't we just discriminate between experiences on the basis of a system of knowing which just occurs to us naturally? But why even have a system of knowing, if one is not aiming at some higher goal, like the real truth? Systems of knowing do have the^{ir} casualties. Before there were "real experiences" and "unreal experiences" there were just "experiences". Then someone noticed that there were some experiences that themselves "said" they were more real than other experiences: imperialist experiences, we might call them. But were these experiences more real than others, or were they less real, less real because they were lying about being more real? What does it mean for one experience to be more real than another?

We need to examine a little more closely the notion of a "reality" beyond one's mind. Conventionally, we assume that our mind is finite, and so some of what happens to it is the result not of its own activity but of the activity of that which is outside of it. Here is a typical description of how this is imagined to work: I am "seeing" the Buddha within my mind and having a conversation with him, and then a fly bites me. My conversation with Buddha is pictured to be "only mental" while the fly is imagined to be a product of "reality". But this conventional vision is an interpretation open to challenge in two directions. I might claim that Buddha is real, that Buddha is an astral spirit that visits higher beings and converses with them. I might also claim that the fly was not real, that it was mentally imagined by me, by the negative part of my mind, to distract me from the wonderful state of mind I was in. (It is usually felt that negative experiences, being unwished for, are a product of

reality and not mind. This explains why many people find their painful experiences to be more real than their pleasurable ones, but it is based on the assumption that one's mind does not contain elements that betray one's wishful thinking.) In any case, it is possible to believe that any change in consciousness (perception) is the result of something in one's own mind, or of something outside of it. It is impossible to know when we are getting outside of our own mind, though we can, at any point, draw the line and say that we know.

Another way of saying this is to point out that there is no way to distinguish, in a non-arbitrary way, between an experience and an assumption, or between something seen and something created by the seer. I have already pointed out one way in which this is true. The way one interprets an experience provides the context from which it is understood: the transcendental experience of talking to God can be reinterpreted as misbehavior of the neurons of one's biological machine. But, one might argue, "there is still the experience itself, with its own form and nature, which still exists even after all interpretations have been taken away." But does anyone have to believe there was a real experience? What if the person who "talked to God" just invented or made up the form and nature of his conversation and then decided to believe in it? To believe there was a "real experience" we have to believe that it happened to him, it came, at least, from outside his conscious mind. We do not always believe that reports of conversations with God are real experiences and not assumed beliefs, but we do believe in reports (our own and those of others) that the sun came up, or the earth went around, many times in a row. Do we have any real basis for saying any experience is not just an assumed belief?

Conventionally, we believe that we cannot sustain an imaginary scenario in our mind, like a 70 year lifetime as a human being that isn't real, because something outside our mind, "reality", would intrude and disturb that scenario. So what is not easily intruded upon, that is, rocks, armies, painful events and uncontrollable experiences, are real and not imagination. However, this is all

based on assumptions about the nature of mind, which cannot be proven. Reality may be beautiful, peaceful, and blissful, pure joy, while we continually imagine or assume something else so as to avoid being overwhelmed by it, or perhaps so as to know it better by contrast. We may not be human minds in human bodies thinking about unreal things, but may be in heaven or even be God, capable of thinking about whatever we want, but for some reason we are temporarily thinking about unreal things (humans) thinking about real things.

One way of dealing with this is just to say that anything one experiences is real, that hallucinations and delusions are just different forms of knowledge. There are as many different truths as there are possible experiences; in other words, "each person, or mind, creates their own reality." But is this really true, or is it just that each person thinks about the same reality in a different way, some more accurately than others? Also, let's say I and some friends create a reality in which we do not create our own reality but it is created for us by God, or by the operation of scientific laws and our brain which is formed by those laws, or whatever. Here, if it really is true that we create our own reality, then the reality that we have just created (the experience that we didn't create what we are experiencing) will be unreal. So already there is at least one category of experiences that are deemed hallucinatory or wrongcan we justify calling them that?

It is interesting to see how the arguments so far presented in this paper bring us to the opening thoughts of Laws of Form, G. Spencer Brown's book on the arithmetic of thought. To understand Laws of Form, it is first necessary to understand that we do not necessarily know anything; then we can begin to explore how we can draw lines, or pretend to know. Distinctions, which we are accustomed to think of as real things existing outside of ourselves, exist first neither outside nor inside ourselves: the notion of their being an inside or outside of oneself is itself a distinction.

"The theme of this book is that a universe comes into being when a space is severed or taken apart. The skin of a living organism cuts off an outside from an inside. So does the circumference of a circle in a plane. By tracing the way we represent such a severance, we can begin to reconstruct, with an accuracy and coverage that appear almost uncanny, the basic forms underlying linguistic, mathematical, physical, and biological science, and can begin to see how the familiar laws of our own experience follow inexorably from the original act of severance. The act is itself already remembered, even if unconsciously, as our first attempt to distinguish different things in a world where, in the first place, the boundaries can be drawn anywhere we please. At this stage the universe cannot be distinguished from how we act upon it, and the world may seem like shifting sand beneath our feet." (from Laws of Form)

This state, of being unable to distinguish anything or to define or even see anything, is a state of total mindlessness. It is a state most would describe as hopelessly insane or at least so deeply mystical as to be incompatible with life as it is usually defined. Most of Western thought can be seen as an attempt to be free of this state, this "cloud of unknowing", this void.

Up to this point we have seen that as far as we know, or can know, not only is anything possible, but anything is as probable as anything else. We are now beginning to see a curious converse to this: in order to perceive ourselves as knowing anything, we cannot believe this is so. I can only believe I am a human being if I believe it is at least improbable that my situation is radically other than what I imagine, or perceive, it to be. So while there is no pure logical necessity to believe anything at all, there is a necessity to believe something before we can have any particular experience.

So beliefs (if we value particular experiences) are important. Are some beliefs better than others? What possible criteria are there for choosing among beliefs?

Different kinds of beliefs are compatible with different kinds of experience. For example, the experience of getting outside of one's mind requires a belief that there is an outside. That is, to have an experience of "real experiences", one must believe that one's experience is not a product of one's beliefs. Thus, while it is entirely obvious that we cannot know anything,

few will admit it, because they are attached to experiencing "real experiences".

Those who wish to repress their knowledge of their inability to know anything will argue that it is very dangerous, in reality, to believe that one does not know anything. One might see a car coming, and think "well, I don't know, it might be a car but it might also be anything else, anything is probable" and so he would not move and the car would run him over. What's more, the person would ^{then} no longer be able to believe that he did not know anything, because the consequent pain would be overwhelming. So he might as well avoid the whole situation by believing that he can know something now.

Belief systems such as the above can be extremely intimidating. But there can be many of them, some contradicting others. For example, "Pascal's wager" has been used to justify a belief in christianity: it is argued that one loses nothing by believing in it if it isn't true, but one loses a lot if one doesn't believe and it is true (one might go to hell). But contrary belief systems can argue for opposite actions. Maybe God wants to not be believed in and will punish those who believe. Maybe there is a real world but the one I currently believe in is an illusion, and in the real world I am about to be overcome by my enemies in octopusville. Paying attention to cars could actually be detrimental because it reinforces my attachment to an illusion.

One might argue that one's beliefs should at least be consistent. But any case of two apparently inconsistent beliefs can be made to appear consistent with the application of the correct theory. For example, let's say I believe I'm God and also that I am being held on a mental ward. This appears extremely inconsistent, since God should be able to escape: but I could theorize that I am certainly God but I am suffering and enduring imprisonment to express my oneness with the human condition. Or, other theories are possible. The urge for consistency alone constitutes no justification for the acceptance or rejection of any belief, though it might justify the search for a better theory. Only the

urge to be consistent with a particular belief can justify the rejection of another belief: for example, if I really want to believe in and experience being a human then I might refuse to believe I am God. If I really want to believe in and experience my human friends then I might refuse to believe I am really an 8 legged underwater creature.

There are formal differences between different ways of knowing, and those formal differences show up in the "known" that each method arrives at. We know that no method provides any certainty, but we note different qualities in the kind of "knowledge" created. The dice method is amusing and surprising, but it has many artistic faults. There is no consistency, and the truth changes with every roll, so much so that it is easy to lose interest and not care what is true at any particular minute. A vision held by faith, on the other hand, can be very reliable, but also confining: it contains no mechanism for change within itself. Whatever the eternal truth is, one cannot do anything about it, and so one loses interest. Pure intuition can allow for creativity, but there is the problem that no one knows exactly what it is, unless they use their intuition or some other method, and so clear distinctions are unobtainable. Sensory experience is similarly ill-defined, for until one can distinguish a sensory from a non-sensory experience one cannot know anything by means of it. Consensus verification is democratic and allows for the creation of a shared vision all can participate in, but it is no method at all taken alone: one can imagine the difficulty of trying to hold an election when the only means of deciding who to vote for was to see how one's neighbor was voting, who also had no method of deciding who to vote for except watching his neighbor, etc. Someone has to make an independent decision.

Science is another story. Its uniqueness comes from the way it combines all the above methods, in a way that transcends the faults of the above methods taken seperately. This is not to say science has no artistic faults.

Faith is required to do science, but it is only necessary to believe in the scientific method, not in what the method will find. Anything is permitted to happen, but once certain things happen then various laws are "proven" and it takes time for them to be disproven: in the meantime particular things can be believed in. Here it is different from the dice method, where anything can change any amount in and at any time. Sensory experiences are used, but they are refined through comparison with the results of other sensory experiences and only the consistent ones are believed to be real. Intuition is used, but it must be backed up with other procedures. Consensus vision is used, but it is not so confining because procedures for getting beyond it are allowed.

There are two primary methods for escaping a consensus version of reality, within science. One is critiquing the consensus view in terms of whether it ~~follows~~ was arrived at using scientific methods: for example, creationism can be critiqued at this level. A more significant method, perhaps, is the method of the inventor. A dull-minded empiricist might conclude, by jumping in the air a few times and flapping his arms, that man cannot fly. An inventor-type is not content with this: he would say that the empiricist is proceeding unimaginatively, and might proceed to show that a person can fly if they proceed correctly. An inventor, to proceed, does need to know of some kind of law or regularity. For example, it is difficult to build a wooden table without knowing certain properties of wood. But once a regularity is known, the inventor stands the law on its head and uses it to do whatever he wants. One might say, well, only within limits, what can be invented is limited. But any limits are also a kind of "law" or regularity and some future inventor might find a way to use them to create what he wants. Thus there may be no final limits, and it may be possible to do anything we want, or to see anything we want, depending on our use of the correct method of looking.

Traditionally, technology is viewed as a product of science and the scientific attitude. But it might better be attributed to the attitude of the inventor, who

uses science but does not necessarily believe in any of its findings, at least not when they are negative, as in, such and such does not or can not exist. A valuable mind-set for invention is to believe that anything is possible, or, as Arthur Clarke stated, "A sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

But there are subtle differences between people who believe in technological invention and those who believe in more "primitive" forms of magic. The airplane allows humans to fly, but only if they have an airplane, otherwise they can't. A "higher technology" might allow humans to fly by less cumbersome means, until, eventually, a naked person might fly about with no visible means of support. (We don't know this is possible, but we don't know it isn't, either.) This flying person would still be dependent on some technology, however hidden, and an enemy might destroy it and the flying person would be grounded. Magic on the other hand is often imagined to not depend on any technology, and an enemy of a flying sorcerer cannot ground him by attacking his technology. However, an enemy of the sorcerer can ground him by attacking him magically. From the outside, one might not always be sure what was a magical attack and what was a technological attack, because any line drawn between the two is ultimately a convention.

It is important to note here that neither the magician nor the technologist knows that he controls anything; he just finds an appearance of control. It is possible to be deceived into thinking one is controlling something when one is not. For example, I often allow my 5 year old daughter to win in games of checkers, though she does not really know how to force me to loose. Nature, or whatever if anything is outside of us, may similarly be giving us an illusion of being able to control her, while all the while retaining both the capacity and the consciousness required to do whatever she wants despite any attempts to control her. Here we note that science, which has sometimes even attempted to prove that humans do not have free will, cannot even Prove that the entire universe does

not have free will: it can only point to a temporary illusion that things are under control, which illusion might itself be controlled by nature. (Of course, I cannot prove that we do not control things, but neither can anyone prove they do.)

There are really two uses of science or other forms of knowledge. One is to satisfy an urge to "know" or to be controlled by the truth, so that one only experiences what is true. The other use is to control one's experience, by invention of a method to experience whatever one wants, for example, flying. A new paradox is encountered here. These two uses of science, or other systems of knowing, can be shown to be fundamentally incompatible. In order to feel that one is controlled by the truth, possibilities must be limited, for example, the universe must be simple enough that complex deceptions such as the octopusville scenario are impossible. But in order for us to learn to experience whatever we want, it must be possible to do anything, that is, possibility must not be limited. (Here one might say that while it is necessary that one's own possibilities must not be limited, the possibilities of the external world-without-one's-intervention must be limited so that one can accomplish one's goal. But the paradox is not escaped: if one is part of nature and can have unlimited possibilities, then other parts of nature might do or be doing the same thing, and might oppose one. If one is super-natural, then one can be sure of controlling things: but how can one prove to oneself that one is supernatural?)

Science has pretended to serve two masters, the urge to see accurately and the urge to see what one wants. But it cannot do so, because the two urges are contradictory: it has actually served each to a finite extent, always subtly limiting each possibility. To see clearly or accurately one is not to interfere or create what one sees. But science always interferes, or looks in particular ways, as we are beginning to admit. At the same time science attempts to discredit

those who do attempt to see whatever they want by calling many experiences impossible, unreal, etc. and so encouraging people to give up seeking them and to reject them if they occur. Science is a compromise between contradictory urges and ideas, and the fact that it is a compromise has been repressed.

The urge to transcend science can itself go in two directions: the urge to find a "real reality" unchanging and not dependent on scientific beliefs, and the urge to find other appearances outlawed by science, by embracing different beliefs. Conventionally, we group all those who wish to escape science as people who "want to believe" in something different. Usually, no one notices that an unlimited skepticism is inconsistent with science and itself leads to a mystical point of view.

A true skeptic can accept no knowledge at all, because a true skeptic refuses to accept any arbitrary factor. Thoughts, perceptions, and particular experiences may arise, but the skeptic makes nothing of them, since what seems a real experience may be an assumption or hallucination, and what seems a hallucination may be real. The skeptic has no desire, and also no way to fulfill any desire if one was chosen, since while it appeared one's desire was being fulfilled it might equally actually be being frustrated! The skeptic could not identify himself in any particular way: he would believe in neither his brain nor his body, no particular inside or outside, no particular space or time. (A skeptic might eventually become skeptical of skepticism, and look for something to believe in. So a believer cannot be distinguished from a sophisticated skeptic. But it is the simpler kind of skeptic we are talking about, though also those who are skeptical of skepticism of skepticism (odds count, evens don't)).

Mystics, when they are not claiming to have absolute knowledge and oneness with the universal mind, often claim to have no knowledge and no mind. Void and form are the same to them, as to the true skeptic. When one looks carefully at mystical ways of knowing, it becomes clear they are equally ways of not

knowing. One is supposed to look within, perhaps, but then one is also supposed to clear out the inside, so that nothing in particular is there. One is to quit grasping. One is to give up attachments, one is to transcend one's ego. One might simplify this to say that one must not see or be anything, one must look at nothing and be nothing. Often mystics do not go to this extreme, but I would argue that they all go in this direction, and that if they don't go this far it's often because of the possible confusion between seeing "nothing" and being ignorant, and between being "nothing" and being a nonentity in the negative sense of the word. But if "nothing" exists, or if "nothing" is true, then to see nothing is to see what is, not to miss seeing what is. And further, if nothing is "what is" then it is not an absence of something else, as we often think of it, but it is a presence, it is fulfillment and perfection. It is both negative and positive, it is undefinable, it is beyond words, concepts, or even feelings.

A great deal of confusion exists concerning whether what a mystic experiences or knows is a map, that is, knowledge about what is, or a territory, that is, a particular place or thing that exists. Scientists who study mysticism prefer to consider it a territory, that is, a possible experience, probably possible because of the particular structure of the human brain, or something to do with quantum physics, or whatever. The mystical experience is often viewed as an inner Disneyland, acheivable (!) by some particular kind of sitting or drug or whatever, something one can add on to one's other human achievements without any contradiction. I believe this attitude an attempt to contain mysticism, to keep it locked up.

From an unrestricted mystical viewpoint, the notion that maps and territories are really distinct is not particularly valid. A map is a map by virtue of formal similarities with something called the territory. But what is a map to one person can be a territory to another. "A map 1 inch to the mile is a model

of a part of the surface of the earth. But what about a map 1 mile to the mile or, worse, 10 miles to the mile? And what if I have made a perfect scale-model of a flea, one-tenth natural size? Whenever it is convenient we use one part of nature as a model or symbol of another." (from Probability and Scientific Inference). To the scientist, the experience of no-mind is a territory to be explored, but to a mystic it may as well be a map of what is real.

It is easy to speak of mystics as though they all say the same thing, but actually, since the states they deal with involve so many paradoxes, and since it is so easy especially when trying to speak to embrace just one side of a paradox, mystics often contradict each other and even themselves. There are many subtle variations of experience and belief, all called mystical, that can be separated if one proceeds cautiously.

Those called mystics often advocate their experience as a positive one, as a state that is desirable or better than others. In as much as they do so, they are claiming to know or believe something as distinguished from something else that is possible (for example, that mystical experience is negative or neutral.) and so their method of knowing that particular fact can be challenged. I can only say that one should see that nothing/everything is real if I know some particular thing about the world, at least, that it is structured so that this vision is rewarded. Paradoxically, however, the belief that this vision is rewarded itself implies some minimum structure to the cosmos, which implies that the vision itself is unreal. The urge to make one's transcendental experience important itself requires a belief in the reality of the unenlightened state, so that one has something definite to transcend from. But the world is thereafter separated into enlightened and unenlightened, heaven and hell, and other dualisms of a new variety. Why bother transcending dualisms if they don't exist? In order to get the energy to transcend dualisms, and to make sure the task is taken seriously, some mystics have decided to believe in a particular kind of them (Wilber's hierarchy is an example): but now that dualisms are so firmly believed in how can they ever be transcended?

Mystics often believe they should not see patterns. By quieting the mind, they hope to escape patterns which are seen as confining. The western mind is more likely to seek patterns to escape emptiness, emptiness itself being seen to be negative or even evil. But form is a map of emptiness and emptiness is a map of form. "Nothing" is a map of anything and everything, since if nothing is true then any appearance is possible. Also, any appearance of experience is a map of nothing, since nothing in the transcendental sense is equally well described by any form or absense of form. Both form and void are either map and/or territory, depending on how we look.

Let us look at this another way. A mountain, to a determinist, is a completely determined event or thing, a big lump of rock and dirt. But in practice, it can be anything. Its nature is determined by how we interact with it. It can be our antagonist, if we try to climb it. It can be a pretty object and we can photograph it. It can be our death if we crash our plane into it, or fall off. To a sufficiently imaginative person it might even be a companion with which one might hold a conversation. A mountain's form is only fixed if we limit our ways of relating to it.

A mystic who says we should not see patterns is demanding that we relate to what is in a particular way. A scientist who says we must see patterns is also demanding that we relate in a particular way. But do we want a limited relationship?

When we read a work of fiction, we assume the reality of it, and it pays off with an experience or a truth. If you assume a, then b, c, and d follow. Mind, by taking on certain beliefs, and ways of looking, can also see certain limited truths: if you are hungry (not to say you are, or even that you exist as a biological organism, but assuming that it is real and that the whole context that defines it is real), then a) this is the consequence, and b) this is a method to change the condition, etc. We have the choice of either attaching to the drama and taking it seriously, or seeing through it and being detached.

Of course, the belief that there is a drama to be believed in or not is itself something we can believe in or not.

One chooses to believe in a drama in order to be moved, to feel involved, to seem to get outside of oneself. One chooses to disbelieve often because one seeks quiet, stillness, relief from a drama that has gotten oppressive or seems to lead in circles. Variations in this are also possible. One can choose to believe in the importance of a drama, such as a political contest, because one is confused internally and needs an identity and the calm sureness which having an identity can imply. Or, one might want to disbelieve in the drama just for the excitement involved in transcending one's belief systems, etc.

If a believer cannot rationally justify his beliefs, neither can a skeptic rationally justify his skepticism or a mystic his mysticism.. These are all just choices that can be made, on a non-rational, non-compulsory basis. But being able to see that no particular view is justifiable is itself a particular point of view, though transcendental. Is it a superior point of view?

The advantages of this point of view is its flexibility. One can believe anything for any length of time, but then one can also quit believing it. Forms appear, forms disappear, like breathing in and out, everything is accessible and anything can be escaped from. But, one might argue, this is a very beautiful fantasy, but what if it is wrong? What if you really are just a dumb human, a little crazy, philosophizing to yourself for your own amusement? What if you will really die in a few years and that will shut you up forever? Shouldn't you go out and make some money now while you still have a chance? Or what if God will get you in the end for thinking bizarre thoughts instead of going to church?

This sounds unnerving, but anyone who has followed me this far realizes that worrying about what is real is useless. There is no rational, non-fantasy method for distinguishing reality from fantasy, so one might as well fantasize what one wants, or not fantasize, or fantasize that one is not fantasizing

(as in science) or whatever seems desirable at the time. At the same time, one has no way of knowing what one wants to fantasize or not in advance: something that just happens to one cannot be distinguished from a fantasy that one wanted to indulge in that one did not know one wanted to do. What seems to be reality might be one's mind, and vice versa.

To sum up: there is no way of escaping the absolute unknown and absolute uncertainty, so why not enjoy?

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While I have addressed an apparent audience of human beings, using an apparent medium of material paper and material technology to type and copy it, I have not assumed that my audience is "truly" or "really" composed of human beings. Communication requires a context, it requires that certain beliefs, or fixed forms of thought, be shared. (This is a "law of form", true for all possible worlds, in the G. Spencer Brown sense.) Once we share some beliefs, we can share the experience of transcending them and proving to ourselves that the forms weren't necessary.

Belief, when the means are not provided for transcending them, are death itself. All spirit and life leaves, and we are left with a bunch of automatons crashing into each other in the dark. The current race toward nuclear war, in our current cultural context, is a product of beliefs about the limited possibilities of the ways groups of people can interact. This is not to say I am advocating a "transcendence or oblivion" scenario. "The fool who persists in his folly will become wise" (William Blake), and death itself can be a transcendental experience.

The relationship of belief and transcendence is a paradoxical one. The

event of transcendence is only possible when there exists a believed context to transcend from. Belief, on the other hand, always initially arises for no reason, from no context, a flash of light in the dark, a movement of the void. So belief can be seen as transcendental, and transcendence as just a second order kind of belief. But I would advocate not attempting to freeze them into a "hierararchy" with either one on top: it is kind of like arguing the old chicken and egg thing again. They work well in a cycle, and the cycle itself can be seen as both existing and not existing. When one is tired of transcending, one might see things, and when one tires of seeing through things, or transcending, then one believes again. There can be a rhythm to this: the mind, freed from the need for rationality in either direction (though still capable of it), spins, flows, moves. The paradox, seen by some as an obstacle to life and thought, becomes itself the fuel for life and thought.

Paradoxes, or opposites where one implies the other, are usually seen by those in our culture as unreal or as something from which to escape. We choose one opposite and call it "right" and the other "wrong"; or, as Alan Watts put it, one is "taken" and the other "left". We can always escape a paradox, in a way, by stopping thinking about all of it: we can just "cut" the process at some point, and only look at what has appeared up to a certain point as "real". The problem is that the resulting experience of the universe is a mutilated one, and furthermore, the paradox is not really escaped. If we embrace life as opposed to death, death does not quit being implied by life. It is just that in our experience death becomes the evil force stealing life away from us, and life itself becomes tragic.

There is another way to escape paradox besides stopping thinking about all of it, and that is to stop thinking, period. If a paradox is like a wheel, then the stopping of thought is like the microscopic, area-less center of the wheel that does not spin because it is so perfectly centered. (The "wheel of death and rebirth" is also the wheel of paradox.) The question is, should we

embrace of accept only the center of the wheel - is not the dualism between the wheel and its center just another paradox or wheel, each implying the other?

I now wish to examine the relationship of an omnipotent thinking entity to these paradoxes. I will discuss this process from the point of view of a masculine God, because that image is more familiar. (I think a masculine and a feminine God arise mutually, but the whole process looks different from the eyes of a feminine God and I feel less competent to express that viewpoint.) God might not think, and in that case, nothing would arise, there would be no paradox. But to be "free" of paradox he would have to confine himself to not thinking, and this itself is a paradox.

Consider the state of God before anything was created. For 3 billion billion years God might not think, or in other words he would see clearly that nothing existed outside of himself, but what is time when one has nothing to judge it by? In a sense, all this would exist in no time, in other words, it would not exist. To exist means "to stand out", one thing is seen by comparison to another. God, to know himself, would have to compare himself with something else. Since nothing was yet created, there would be no way for God to know himself. Also, God would see nothing, and would not know whether this meant there was nothing outside or if he was just out of touch with reality, shut up somehow, not seeing what was there. There might even be another God, tricking him by making her or himself invisible. One might say, "but God would know that nothing had yet been created." Here one imagines that God, having no rational means of knowing what had been or not, since he could see nothing, would just assume that nothing had been done. But God would see that this was an assumption: why would a thinking God prefer one assumption to another?

After, 3 billion billion years, or no time, depending on the point of view, God begins to look for something that is real, something outside of himself. God being all there was, he would have nothing to see, unless part of himself became

the "perceiver" and saw another part of himself. At first God might say, "this is just me I'm seeing, let's not be ridiculous." But the part of God seen by the perceiving part might speak up and say, "no, I'm not you, I'm your environment". In the sense that this perceived part was speaking to a perceiver part, it would be speaking correctly. Here is the first reflection. God might find he could control this reflection, to give the best image of himself: in short, he might demand that the part worship him. However, he would encounter a paradox. The easier God found for him to control the "environment" the more obvious it would be that it was part of himself, and not real. To really feel that he was really being worshipped, that he was really seeing an honest, real reflection of himself, he would have to feel that the world (part of himself) was out of his control. So God would either be unable to see himself or would see himself as an utterly powerless being. As a compromise between these two views, God might invent science, so as to see himself as in a real world yet a comfortable one in which he possessed at least some power.

On the other end of the spectrum, consider a madman. He loses interest in the "real world" but notices he feels good if he can make up any world that he wants. This is fun until he notices that his imaginary world only becomes real and solid when he loses control of it, i. e. an imaginary fire is only hot when it burns one despite one's wishing it to or not. He then quits controlling his fantasies, so as to make them more real. And so they are real, but they now pick up all the original defects of the original real world, that is, they are uncontrollable, unresponsive. Plus, the madman is now even further from the destination of being in control, in a way, since to gain control of his life he *now* first has to gain control of the world he has created, and then attempt to control the "real world". Of course, he may invent a fantasy world which is part real, or uncontrollable, and part uncontrollable. But wasn't that also the case with the world the madman left behind?

Is the madman God? Or is God mad? Are the two states distinguishable? Perhaps by inductive method? If the madman is truly God, he should be able to make the world disappear; but any madman can do that. It then reappears, and says it was there all along: since the madman said and felt he did not want it to reappear, does this prove he is not God? Hardly. It just proves that God is not of one mind on this issue, or, God is mad. Well then, surely God should be able to make himself of one mind? But, the madman might explain, I am the part of God that would like to be of one mind, but the rest of me (God) will not agree to it.

Might God be guilty of pantheism? Or, if there really are many Gods, might they be guilty of monism, and worship one of themselves, or even a fictional God that didn't exist?

The confusion here is inherently endless.

Eventually God might experience all the infinite states of mind/reality and then comprehend the whole picture of possibilities in an instant - but it would take infinitely long to get to that point. One might suggest that God, being omnipotent, could have this experience, this comprehension, before any particular experience or creation began. This is certainly so, but how, without the contrast of more limited states of mind from which to emerge into this comprehension, would God know that this comprehension was real? How would he even know what it was he was comprehending? And so the wheel of paradox spins: before it is finished, everything finds its place in no-where.