

The Trinitarian Mystery

Escaping Solipsism

by Mark Tracy

Preface: “Waiter, There’s an Ant in my Pi”

Imagine an ant in a three-dimensional universe (2 spatial dimensions and time) that is forced to march from left to right along the statement “ $\pi = 3.1415\dots$ ” (where the digits are written out eternally) from an arbitrary starting position. Suppose the ant has all of our notions of mathematics, though any symbols it may use to represent the same mathematics in its three-dimensional universe would in all likelihood be different from the symbols we use in our four-dimensional universe. To the ant, the progression of events it experiences on its march would appear to be random at first, but certain patterns would begin to emerge. It might begin to figure out that the different repeating experiences it has seem to represent numbers, though in a different symbology. The sequence might take on a seemingly permanent order during portions of the march. For example, the digits 0 and 1 may alternate a trillion times at some point in the sequence. We might imagine that the ant was dropped into that repeating sequence as its starting position, such that that pattern is all it has ever known. Eventually, though, that order would terminate, since the digits of π are non-terminating and not ultimately repeating (i.e. it never settles into a sequence that repeats infinitely). The clever ant might be able to sift through these appearances of illusory order and determine what it may call a “true” interpretation of the pattern in terms of the ratio of a circle’s circumference to its diameter. Here “true” should be taken to mean that when tested it always predicts the next digit accurately. Someone “apart” from this three-dimensional universe (for example, a human in our four-dimensional universe) who could see the beginning of the statement and was familiar with the symbols would trivially understand it to be a highly nonrandom and predictable sequence that the ant is experiencing. But the ant could only ever be satisfied with the interpretation, or model, that it has, which at best will never have yet failed. Yet even when it has landed on a model that has never yet failed, the ant knows that its previous models eventually failed or proved to be only a piece of the larger pattern. This ant represents humanity.

Note that I am not saying that the universe has a potentially comprehensible, fully determinate nature, as we know the digits of π do in the above allegory. But I am saying that even if it does, we are epistemically in the position of the ant, never even potentially able to know whether it does.

I have spent a lot of time in my life thinking about myself and seeking a framework for my experience. As we consider mathematical models in the sciences, I would like to consider here a mystical or philosophical model of the self—that is, of myself. I believe that the best available philosophical model of the self is the most meaningful thing that a person can say about his or her own experience from unassailable logical first principles. Among other things, I consider here a very abstract model of myself in language that will undoubtedly appear mystical. It appears mystical because for such passages the simplest words work closest—the words that your heart screams from your chest as you search for them. Like our dear friend the ant, I must be open to revising this model. Indeed, I cannot cling to the perspectives I have shared here as the absolute Truth of phenomena; yet I offer these views as a critique and alternative of more commonly held views. I hope that they will enter into conversation with the reader’s learned ways of holding phenomena.

Note that in the above allegory of the ant, I have made use of standard scientific language, such as “our four-dimensional universe.” I will make little or no use of such in the sections that follow this preface, because the ideas I discuss are metaphysical, i.e. conceptually prior to the language of physics. Nonetheless, I make some effort to point out resonances between my metaphysical view and modern scientific theories.

This is a book of poetry as much as it is a work of philosophy. Up until publication, I maintained it as a living document, and its genesis mirrors a living system in some way. It begins with a philosophical introduction of eight sections, followed by a number of poems. Although the philosophy is presented as prefatory, the way that I have written this document in general is by first laying down raw emotional insights and intuitions in poetic verse and then, through dialogue, translating those insights into clearer philosophy. Philosophy thus crystallized directs my thinking in a way that primes the arrival of new poetic insights, and the process proceeds.

Though the analogy is imperfect, one can think of the poems as the DNA of this work, which is translated through dialogue into philosophy. There have arisen feedback loops between the poetic genome of this work and the phenotypic expression it finds in my life and philosophical writing, which have shaped its evolution. The philosophical introduction to the poems provides the phenotypic context through which the poetic DNA itself may be understood. The role of the reader in this analogy is that of a biologist, moving between phenotype and genotype to understand the dynamic system that is this living document. Yet the reader is not passive in this process: continued dialogue between readers, myself, and others will propagate this living process beyond these pages.

I am not trained academically as a philosopher, and hence the presentation of my views will not follow standards of modern academic philosophy. My aim is for this book to be more or less accessible to all seekers, trained or untrained in academic philosophy. I have tried to allow accessibility by avoiding gratuitous jargon without oversimplifying any of the ideas presented. I have aimed at an organic presentation of my own views and insights.

My assumption is that the reader will traverse the first eight sections of this text in order but will not necessarily read the poems in any particular order—and certainly not in one sitting. I wish for each poem to stand on its own as a crystallized moment, which calls for meditation and holds a seed of autobiography.

To engage with this text fully, please read and respond to it in your own voice.

1. Introduction

There is what is Real, there is what is called “true” by any given person, and there is what I will call the “joint decision process” of determining Real from not-Real and “true” from “not true.” The abstraction that is this joint decision process (however it may happen—be it discrete or continuous, deterministic or stochastic, coupled or not coupled) of the Real separating from the not-Real on a moment-to-moment basis and the “true” separating from the “not true” in any given person's mind is the fundamental truth of my belief system insofar as it refers to all of what I hold must be Real. That the process referred to by this truth must be Real is self-evident to me, since:

1. I cannot deny that I exist, because I must exist in order to deny it.
2. I cannot deny that I believe certain truths, because to deny the claim would be to hold belief in its negation; and because I believe that I exist.
3. Belief in truths presupposes and therefore implies an experience of reality, so I cannot dispute that I experience reality and exclude un-reality (if such exists).

In other words, it is logically undeniable that I exist, and that I experience notions of reality and truth; so there is a process by which that occurs. In what follows, I will expound upon this joint decision process. For reasons that will hopefully become clear, I shall call this joint decision process “God”—and in doing so, I join many others throughout history, though I have articulated some things here in different terms. I begin with an exposition to the fundamental notion of abstraction; then I define my notion of God, discuss the nature of measurement, and conclude by an examination of truth, science, and philosophy. I then present my personal reflections on this core philosophy and some ethical implications. By the end I hope to have successfully articulated a worldview, or what I may call instead a “meta-worldview,” since most everything I will say is metaphysical or epistemological, and as such constitutes one stance on how one could view the ways that one views the world.

2. Abstraction

Abstraction, in the broadest sense, refers to the process or result of mapping a collection of phenomena or concepts to a single concept or representation, typically to retain only information which is relevant for a particular purpose, such as the prediction of phenomena. It is *de facto* a classification or the result of a classification, i.e. a mapping of instances to a class, that is tied to a purpose. In a computer programming language, every command is an abstraction insofar as it maps to any one of a range of potential sequences of physical events; the purpose of this *de facto* classification is to allow control of the computer's behavior. Every word in natural language is an abstraction, where the relevant purpose is communication. An artificial intelligence system may be said to be employing abstraction insofar as it utilizes a many-to-one mapping whose outputs are manipulated to achieve some objective. Analogical reasoning involves higher-order abstraction, since to draw an analogy is to implicitly find an abstraction that applies in common to two abstractions.

3. God and Self

“God” is the name I give to the process of That which is prior to all abstraction evolving itself by Concept through a process of Relationship. Consider this to be a thesis, which I aim to clarify by the totality of this document, rather than a precise definition that should be immediately obvious. In essence, I declare that there is something that exists prior to anything we say about it; there is what we say about it; and there is an interplay between the facts and the concepts. These three are really in a sense one, since concepts and the interplay between facts and concepts exist prior to anything we say about them. Fact—that is, the Whole—together with Concept (essentially the characterization of Fact, which is within Fact itself), and the structural-functional Relationship between Concept and Fact (which is also within Fact itself) together form one single gestalt. To this structure—or rather, to the reality to which this abstract structure points—I give the name “God.” By this reckoning, God can be said to have a triune structure: Fact, Concept, and Relationship between them; or the Speaker, the Spoken, and the Speaking; or the Real, the “true” and the joint decision process; or the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That which we call a human life is a subprocess of—and participant in—this Trinitarian structure; hence man is created in the image and likeness of God. A conscious being is simultaneously a narrative-former and the forming of the narrative; and knows itself in the form of the narrative. I am at base a sort of constrained potentiality; and I am both the realizer and realization of that potential. As such, a conscious body may declare, “I am one with God,” and, “I am a body,” in the same way as a mouth may declare both, “I am one with the body,” and, “I am a mouth.” More on this curious nature of the self is discussed in Section 7.

God came to say, “I am God, and I am categorically above you.” Then Jesus came to say, “I am God, and I am simultaneously categorically among you.” The Holy Spirit comes to say, “I am God, and you are simultaneously one with me.” God says his name is, “I am that I am,” which means in essence, “I am the fact that I am.” God's name indicates that He is the Fact that inherently bears witness to its own existence. This Word that refers to God, that is, the Name of God, is the Son. And the ongoing Relationship of the Fact to the Name is the Holy Spirit.

Consider this to be a meta-definition of God, in the sense that I am effectively saying, “Whatever God may be, abstractly He is thus.” This meta-definition is compelling to me in the following sense: I cannot deny my own existence, because I must exist in order to deny it. Any characterization of myself beyond existence I can conceivably deny, except the characterization of myself as something which characterizes itself, for to deny this characterization would itself be a characterization. Now, the leap from the self-characterizing individual to a self-characterizing universe or God may seem to be a significant one. But it is clear from the very existence of my argument that the totality of whatever is prior to abstraction is similarly self-characterizing, at least through me and my argument. To call the master process of which I am a subprocess “God” is a unifying choice of language, if nothing else, insofar as it allows one to acknowledge an analogy between multiple religious traditions and the popular physicalist, naturalistic, and fallibilistic picture of science. In particular, the views I elaborate upon herein

synthesize and inform my reading of Catholicism, Vedanta Hinduism, Buddhism (particularly Zen Buddhism), Sikhism, and Taoism as much as they do the practices and findings of modern science.

In the usual scientific worldview, a human person is indeed a subprocess of a universal process, though one that can reasonably be studied independently as a nearly-complete unit of analysis. Rather than seeing conscious beings as supernatural souls separate from nature, we can understand minds as arising from and intertwined with the dynamic flow of particles, fields, energy, and information that we say constitute Reality (note that I have made no assumption about the constitution of Reality here; rather, I offer these words to draw parallels to the scientific knowledge of our day). In particular, the evolution of cognition and self-modeling subsystems that participate recursively in their own development aligns with our understanding of complex systems in nature. It is popular these days to say, "The mind is the brain," but instead I say, "The mind is the brain-body, and the brain-body is the brain-body-environment."

Similarly to how I have elucidated a meta-definition of God, the role of mathematics is to discover a meta-definition of Reality. It is to say, "However Reality may be, abstractly it must be thus." This is to map out, in some sense, the realm of Concept. The role of science is to discover the rules of the appearance of Reality to us. It is to say, "As it appears to our present measuring devices, Reality is thus." There are fundamental limitations to our capability to predict the unfolding of Reality, both due to the nature of measurement, which I will introduce in the next section, and because Reality itself is multiply agentic.

To further illustrate what I mean in stating that I have offered merely a "meta-definition" of God, I offer the following poem:

The Speaker

I built for myself a cage,
So that I could stand apart from myself—
inside myself—to look at myself
and say, “You are doing this.”

If I let my view draw near
To my furthest reaches,
The outer frontier of my becoming,
I would become all too much, and nothing.
And what would I say then?

And while the cage confines me,
It defines me, or else
It allows my definition, or else
It is my definition.
The Speaker, Speaking, and Spoken:
a God in a cage.

To clarify and recapitulate, these are the main words I use in my metaphysics and some gestures toward their definitions, wherever such can be offered—or at least indications of how these terms are mutually related. First, there is “the Real,” or “Reality,” or “Fact,” which are all synonymous. To this I can offer no definition, except in the meta-sense that it is That which is prior to anything we could say about it. From its use, the reader is invited to intuit its meaning. The word “fact” or “real event” is conceptually a subset of Fact, or the Real. The word “real” is an adjective that describes the nature of a fact. The word “potentiality” is used both to describe the ineffable but partially describable nature of a fact and is used synonymously with the word “fact” itself. Then there is “Concept,” another word to which I can offer no definition, except to say that it is contained within Fact. Next is the word “concept,” which is conceptually a subset of Concept. Next is the word “Relationship,” synonymous with the “joint decision process,” with its mechanisms intentionally unspecified to retain generality and avoid overreach into scientific modes of knowing. To “Relationship” I can again offer no definition, except to say that it is the process of Fact evolving itself by means of Concept. Like the Real and Concept, Relationship is ultimately ineffable; and indeed all three are One. Another word that comes up is “process,” by which is meant an unfolding in a conceptual space and time (not strictly Einsteinian spacetime, though it may be). A final word is “object,” which is used hypothetically to mean a static real entity with properties that may be conceptually attributed to it.

It is crucial to note that all of these words are themselves only my own conceptual constructs which abstract from the formless Real into a coherent system of propositions that organize, and thereby constrain, but do not fully determine my own becoming. According to my faith, even these very words are the crystallization of potentiality into Concept, which will then direct but not fully constrain your

response as reader, my response to your response, and so on. Ultimately what is going on here is beyond the ability of my concepts to fully capture. And so ideas like space, time, and process are not absolutely assumed or perfectly definable, but are rather pointing to something beyond themselves, which can ultimately only be experienced or intuited directly. They channel that very “something” into partial form in its ongoing process of becoming. I am walking a tightrope of expounding upon an organizing system through which to discuss the ineffable while maintaining its ultimate ineffability.

The organization of Reality as it appears to us is clearly shaped by concepts. Just look at technologies that emerge, arrangements of real parts that did not exist before. Concepts are in turn shaped by Reality, as, for example, through scientific empiricism. Scientific empiricism works in roughly this way:

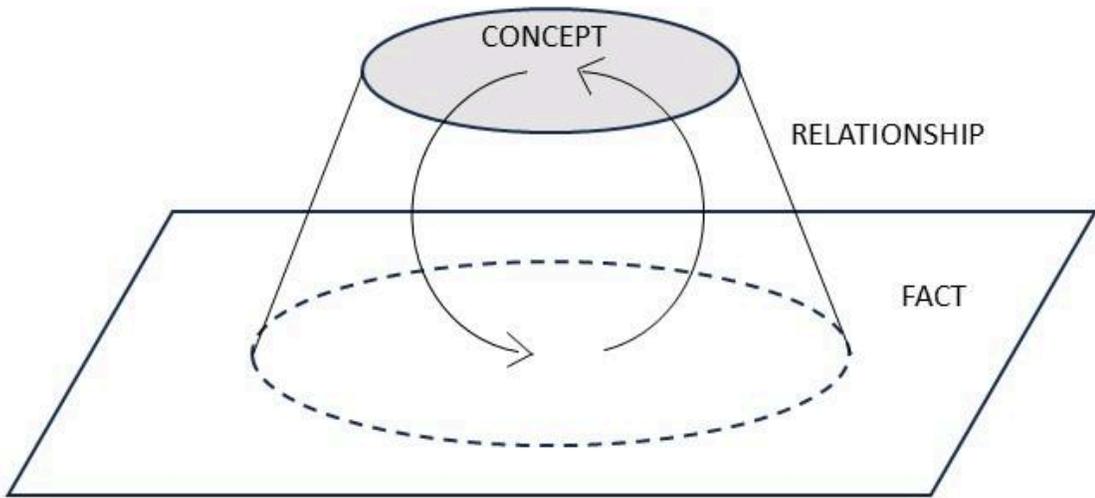
The Scientific Method

- Observe Reality.
- Generate [theory].
- Suppose [conditions], in terms of [theory].
- Generate [deductive proof] that ([theory] and [conditions]) implies [result].
- Generate and execute [method] to establish [conditions] in reality.
- If not-[result], then:
 - not-[theory];
 - Theory refuted in its present form; or
 - not-[deductive proof];
 - Deductive proof was incorrect; or
 - not-[method].
 - Conditions were not correctly established.

There is clearly an interplay here between Reality (that great Whatever-There-Is) and concepts. Concepts are used to rearrange and test Reality, and the response of Reality modifies concepts. They evolve in a mutually related way.

If we imagine “Concept” to be the set in space and time of all processes that correspond to the felt experience of thought (note that this definition is one concept of Concept, and as such is not Concept itself), then the Relationship between the Real, or Fact, and Concept is evidently, in its own terms, an extremely high-level conceptual representation of Reality. I start from this premise. I will go on to argue in Section 7 that another analogous conceptual representation of Reality is as a Self-Other-Relationship triunity, and I will draw out the implications of this vision.

Notice that the scientific method expounded upon above is an evolutionary process in the realm of Concept. There is no “confirmation” stage of the scientific process. There is only the ending of certain patterns (processes) by virtue of negative feedback from Reality. Concepts become more or less common through a formation and survival process.



FACT-CONCEPT-RELATIONSHIP TRINITY

4. Measurement

The fundamental events of experience that we can talk about are measurements, where by “measurement” I mean a real event that maps a fact onto an abstraction, i.e. an association mediated by a real event of an abstraction to a fact. This definition takes the necessary conditions for something to be considered a “measurement” in standard scientific parlance and treats them as simultaneously sufficient conditions, i.e. constitutive of “measurement,” in order to unify the language we use to think about the world.

To see why this definition captures the necessary properties of measurement, consider the standard statistical or scientific view of measurement: a measurement is taken to be a realization or outcome of a random variable with some (possibly unknown) distribution. A random variable in turn is a map from some sample space to the real line. The sample space, the set of “real events” to which measurements may correspond, is generally unspecified in scientific measurements. But clearly a measurement is understood, in the standard view, to be an instance of a mapping from a fact to an abstract representation, mediated by a real event.

The advantage of this terminology is its generality. When a scientist measures a current through a wire, what occurs is a mapping between a real fact (the real whatever-it-is to which the idea of “current” refers) to an abstraction (“current,” measured in Ohms), mediated by a real event (the interaction of the measuring device with the wire—or rather, the reality to which these words refer). Likewise, when I say that I see a tree, it is an instance of a mapping from real facts (the reality to which the idea “tree” refers in this instance) to an abstraction (“tree”) mediated by real events (the interaction between the light reflecting off of the tree, my eyes, and my subsequent cognitive processing—or again, the real processes to which these words refer). In either case, I say that a measurement has occurred.

Now, a measurement necessarily captures relational information—that is, the relation of the measurer to the measured. To measure a system, one must interact with the system somehow; and thus the abstract characteristics one can read from a measurement are really those of the joint system of the measurer and the measured. The goal of science is to derive information about the measured from the measurement. To derive perfect information about the measured from the measurement would require perfect information about the measurer, which could only be obtained by a perfect measurement of the measurer, and so on. Since this would require infinite regress, there is a limitation in principle to the precision and accuracy of measurement. As such there is *a priori* a limitation to the confidence with which one may associate facts with abstractions. Yet they are intimately interdependent and co-arising: abstractions arise from facts, and insofar as abstractions shape our behavior, certain facts arise because of abstractions.

5. Truth

So then what is to be made of truth? And what are the roles of science and philosophy?

I endorse a coherence theory of truth, which is to say that a proposition is true by virtue of its coherence with a system of propositions; and it must be emphasized that propositions of instantiation (of abstract classes) are among the propositions that must be coherent in a system of truths. For example, a proposition like, “An electron evolves according to the Schrodinger equation” must cohere with such propositions of instantiation as, “This reading (referring to a particular phenomenon) is due to an electron” and “This reading (at a later time) is due to another electron,” as well as propositions that are not instantiations like, “An electron has negative charge.” This understanding of truth allows for pluralism while requiring that a worldview be coherently tethered to facts.

This view is closely related to a pragmatic theory of truth, whereby it is said that a proposition is true insofar as acting on it yields a satisfactory result; yet in some sense it is more fundamental. A pragmatic theory of truth suggests that to evaluate a system (or indeed even a single proposition, if one takes the stance of so-called “holistic verification”), one must define an objective, put the system to use as a basis for action, observe the results, and compare the results to the objective. This effectively reproduces the scientific method of forming a hypothesis (“If I act according to this system, I will achieve this objective”) and performing an experiment to confirm or falsify it. However, the idea that propositions of instantiation must cohere with other propositions, including with each other and with theory, emphasizes that the results of an experiment may be unsatisfactory (in the sense of not achieving the objective) because implicit or explicit propositions of instantiation are not coherent in the experimental setup. In this vein it has been remarked that it is not the case that one sets up an experiment to test a proposition and the universe answers, “Yes,” or, “No”; rather, one offers to the universe a bundle of propositions, and the universe answers, “Consistent,” or, “Inconsistent.”¹

Rather than speaking of “the Truth,” then, let us speak of “systems of truth,” by which we mean systems of propositions that are mutually coherent and coherently tethered to facts through propositions of instantiation. Does relativism of the sort I have proposed here preclude the possibility that some systems of truth are “better” or “more useful” than others? Emphatically it does not. In fact, with a proper understanding of abstractions as necessarily aim-oriented, it may be said that some systems of truth are more apt at attaining certain objectives than others; and among systems of truth that aim at the same objective, some may achieve it more effectively or efficiently than others. However, I must hold as an article of faith that absolute certainty in any synthetic a posteriori proposition (in the Kantian sense) is always faith.

¹ I have not succeeded in finding the original quotation, but I recall hearing this said regarding the work of Imre Lakatos on Jed Lea-Henry’s podcast, *The Popperian Podcast*, which is a great source for conversations about the life and works of Karl Popper and related thinkers on the philosophy of science. See: <https://www.jedleahenry.org/the-popperian-podcast>

6. Science and Philosophy

The challenge in principle of science and philosophy is to create a coherent system of propositions which contains a proposition (in general compound) for every important fact and an explanation of every true compound proposition; where an “explanation” is a proposition which justifies another true proposition, i.e. it is a true proposition containing the binary operator “implies”; a “fact” is a real state of affairs; and “important” is a subjective judgment. It happens that the logical “and” and “not” operators have a primary role in this system, since out of these two may be constructed other logical operators such as “or” and “implies.”

This framing of science and philosophy suggests serious questions: Who judges what states of affairs are “important”? Who characterizes states of affairs into atomic propositions? These questions emphasize the importance of inclusion in the process of scientific and philosophical inquiry, as such judgments and characterizations are shaped by social and cultural factors, including implicitly held assumptions and frames for perception, and in turn affect societies and cultures.

7. Personal Reflections

7.1. Object vs. Process Orientation

Prior to the realizations I have recorded here, I wrote the following in my personal notes:

I must remember in my everyday thinking that I am a *process*, not an object. I can nonetheless *objectify* or concretize myself—sometimes in roundabout ways. For example, I may objectify myself by implicitly defining myself via the content of all statements that I imagine other people would make about me. But I can also *subjectify* myself—that is, I can direct my attention to experience without paying attention to my paying attention. I can look at the world without trying to see my own head, as it were. If objectifying myself is like trying to bring my nose into focus in my field of view, subjectifying myself as I mean it here is like ignoring my nose altogether. In the literal case of my nose in my field of view, it is almost automatic to ignore; but when it comes to trying to see myself—that is, my self—as an object in my experience, I find it much harder to ignore. I find myself longing for a time when I will be like a mathematical object—something well-defined and unchanging, sure of myself and my abilities as well as my limitations; or else a pure, unreflecting subject, completely submitted to the flow of the universe, unaware of my limitations and ability. I recognize in this what the Buddha called the craving for existence or nonexistence.

Then, in realizing a triune notion of God as Fact, Concept, and the Relationship tying them, I saw a bridging meta-structure. In asserting that a conscious being is “simultaneously a narrative-former and the forming of the narrative; and knows itself in the form of the narrative,” I declare that each and all of the story-builder, the embedded character, and the process of building the story constitute my selfhood. Rather than either pole of self-as-object or self-as-process “winning out,” so to speak, this is to recognize their interdependence and co-arising. Concepts are largely object-oriented, with objects and properties of objects abstracted from underlying real processes. Both orientations—conceptual object and real process—have validity and value in the mutual unfolding of consciousness and world.

Moreover, this declaration of self as story-builder, embedded character, and process of story-building, wherever it is made, is to the believer the enactment of the Trinitarian Mystery; it is in a sense an act of self-creation. The first-person testimony is to the believer the self as storyteller telling a story about itself as storyteller, story, and telling. In other words, to make such first-person testimony in faith is to performatively (that is, livingly) manifest the metaphysical system of truth being described. This is to say that first-person testimony carries creative power unto the self—that the “I” who awakens to and speaks to its strange condition adds stones to the very foundation upholding its speech. Our saying-so makes it so to us. I understand God to be this creative process in which I am embedded and participating. In more traditional language, then, I may say that to give witness that one is in the image and likeness of God is to say by the very action of speech, “Amen: Let it be so!”

I consider that I can engage with a lower-level and a higher-level conception of myself. There is my conception of myself, and then there is this newfound meta-conception of myself. Or there is myself (in Reality), my self-concept (in Concept), which amounts to the view I have of myself as an object at a given time, and then there is my meta-self-concept (in Concept), which amounts to the view I have elucidated here of the self as a process of becoming.

7.2. Self as Holon

A succinct way to describe this curious condition of being microcosmic of and continuous with God's larger process of self-becoming is to say that I am a holon. The term "holon" was coined by Arthur Koestler in his 1967 book, *The Ghost in the Machine*. A holon as originally conceived exists both as a self-contained entity (hence it is a whole on its own) and at the same time is embedded within a larger containing system or systems (so it is part of a larger whole). In my use of the term, I mean that a holon is interconnected and continuous with a larger system (the "whole") while standing modularly as a nearly-complete unit of analysis—that is, as a system that interfaces with the remainder of the larger system and has a functional role within that larger system.

I am a holon insofar as I am continuous with and participating in the joint decision process by which reality and subjective truth separate from non-reality and subjective untruth, while standing modularly as a unit that can abstractly be regarded as "one object" at any given point in time and which serves a functional role in the divine interplay of Fact and Concept. To this discussion I add the following verses:

Holon Dialogue

I am always two voices.
There is the One who asserts
And the One who doubts;
And in their dialogue there comes a Third—

One whose presence is intersubjectivity.
This one is consciousness—the “-ness” indicating a process, not a property.
A property of an object is abstracted from a process: there is no other way.

Two produce more than either alone;
and this excess is the Third.
Hear me, Doubter!

All praise be to the Paraclete of poetry,
this Third between clasping hands
gripped in conflict, in prayer, or on a nice walk—
The One who is Three and each One.

I am, metaphysically, an internal and an external in constant conversation or dance. In the spirit of Martin Buber, I would like to consider the ways that the internal “I” with which I identify in a given moment relates to the external “Other” by contrast to which I regard myself. In any given moment, I can relate to the external Other in various ways. For example, I can regard Other as “it,” or as “they,” or as “You” (as in a close connection with a personal God), or as “He/She” (as in a third-personal formal relationship with God), or as “you” (as in a friendly, second personal way to one other than God), or as “y'all” (as in a friendly, second-personal collective manner to persons other than gods) or as “you all” (as in a formal, second-personal manner to a group of persons other than gods)—or as “we.” Over longer time scales, I can conceptualize Other in ways that combine these moment-to-moment relationships to Other. Perhaps Other is “You/y'all/you all/they,” or perhaps Other is “y'all/you all/they/it,” or perhaps “You/y'all/you all/they/it.” Perhaps those natures of Other are listed in hierarchical order of respect that “I” ought to pay them, or perhaps not. But the fundamental metaphysical picture is that of a conversation between self and Other. My proposal is to regard this Other moment-to-moment as “we” and on longer time scales as “We.”

My reality in its most abstract form is that I am an agent, and I exist in an environment. Abstractly, that is the totality of what is. At this level of abstraction, it has been abstracted away that the environment contains multiple other agents. In this mode, the environment acts like a second agent, with which one is in continual dialogue or exchange. In this model, the totality of what is consists of two agents in dialogue determining the course of reality. These three are part of a greater unity: the two agents and their dialogue are all part of the structural-functional gestalt of the agents and their dialogue,

i.e. the totality of all that is. This Self-Other-Relationship Triunity is another description of what I call God, that self-creating All-That-Is. It is in this sense that I meant the capital-W “We.”

On the other hand, this is a very abstract model of the goings-on of reality. So abstract, in fact, as to underlie everything that is perceived and yet to be grounded to nothing in particular in the present moment. On the contrary, the abstract “Other” is never encountered except in particular manifestation. The Other is always manifest in the particular. Thus I mention that we should treat the present moment Other as “we” in lowercase.

The Real is fundamentally openness, un-abstracted potentiality. All that we can conceive and speak of is abstracted from the Real by many-to-one mappings which summarize or organize but do not fully reduce that potentiality. Abstraction in this context can be considered a many-to-one mapping, where the “many” are real instances and the “one” is a concept. My borders are conceptually arbitrary, but wherever I draw my borders in conceptual space, I know that there is an external which shapes my behavior by interchange with me. I call this “Other.” Measurement, as discussed in Section 4, is a process mediated by a real event by which a real event (or fact) is mapped to a concept. As a subprocess of the Real, I build abstract knowledge of myself by measuring Other, forming concepts that by their nature contain relational information regarding myself and particular manifestations of the Other. Characterization of Other and of self are therefore simultaneous and co-arising. The holonic dialogue is the ongoing mapping of self and Other into organized relational concepts, together with the ongoing response to the conceptual rendering. This holonic dialogue constitutes the dance that is consciousness itself.

In this view, we are essentially the dimensionality reduction and expansion of information. Our minds are constantly filtering the vast complexity of reality into more manageable forms. We take the high-dimensional data of the universe and compress it into the low-dimensional representations of our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. This is what allows us to navigate the world, to make sense of things, to function as embodied beings. But the process doesn't stop there. Having reduced the dimensionality of information to create our lived experience, we then expand it again through our choices, actions, and creations. We take the raw material of our consciousness and use it to generate new forms, new possibilities, new expressions of beauty and meaning. In this sense, we are not just passive recipients of information, but active participants in its unfolding.

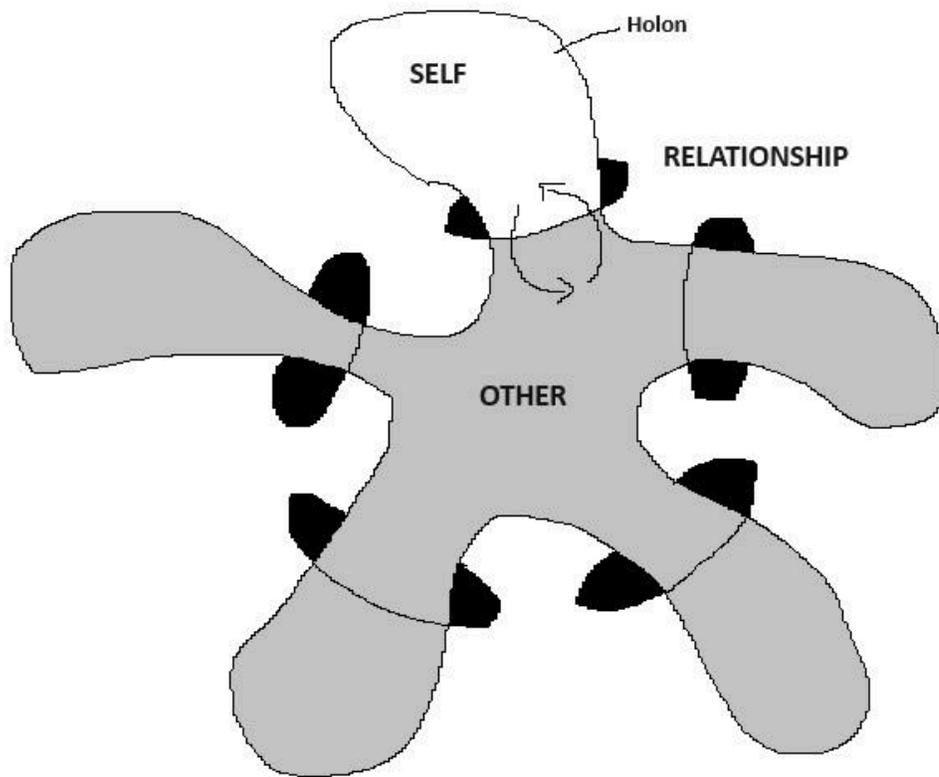
The way that this process itself works is in analogy to creating narratives about myself. In this analogy, I am the storyteller, the embedded character within the story I am telling, and the ongoing reaction of myself to the narratives I am telling myself. I'll illustrate this with an example.

My thoughts are like broadcast commentary. Due to the lag time between the occurrence of an event in reality and my perceptual and conceptual processing of it, I am always a little “behind the action.” Despite this, the commentary makes predictions about the current and future ongoing behavior. For example, an announcer may highlight a key player to “look out for” during the game. In “calling the play,” the commentator chooses what happenings to highlight and what information to emphasize. In

this way, the broadcaster represents a sort of filter for the information on the field to the less-knowledgeable viewer. The broadcaster is, in other words, a mechanism of selective attention.

If my thoughts are like broadcast commentary, then I am also the players on the field; and it is as if the players can hear the commentary itself in real-time. In deciding how to take actions, I am “hearing my commentary” on what previously happened and predictions on what will happen. This sort of open-loop control, or feedback, between perceptual and conceptual processing and executive processing seems to be a basic condition of my existence. Crucially, my action in turn interacts with the environment, or Other, to produce the feedback to the process that shapes my ongoing development.

So there is a coupling between my perceptual and conceptual processing and my executive processing, and all of my processing is coupled in turn with the responses of the environment. At a given moment, whatever border the sense of self is felt to be behind, doing its conceptualizing, it is in dialogic dance with Other, the alterity which is in fact continuous with self and which is mutually conceptualized by and with the self. The reaction of the self to its mutual conceptualization of self and Other, and the reaction of Other to the reaction of self are real responses to real conceptualization. It is because of the resistance of Reality to final conceptualization that self must reconceive itself ever anew in a continuous dance that is self-definition.



SELF-OTHER-RELATIONSHIP TRINITY

7.3. Self-Acceptance vs. Self-Improvement

Another question of personal import which finds an answer in this philosophy is the following: How can one emotionally square self-acceptance with the desire for personal improvement? This is a fundamental tension that I often encounter in my life. I want to accept myself “as I am,” but then I also wish to set goals for my self-improvement, which seems to require or even to be in itself a rejection of myself as I am.

The answer, it seems to me, is to start from a position of radical self-love. This self-love transcends any notion of self-acceptance. Indeed, when it comes to this love, “acceptance” is irrelevant. Acceptance implies approval or non-rejection of the contingent characteristics of oneself. But the radical self-love I need is to love myself prior to any characteristics at all, analogously though not equivalently to how a parent can love an unborn child. It is to love that blessed thing which continuously creates itself by declaration—that innocent child still saying what he wants to be when he grows up. This is neither to accept myself as I am, nor to delay acceptance until a certain state of being is reached, but rather to love and nurture that thing which is becoming, that very process which is my being-becoming.

Nurturing this process may mean at times embracing and enacting change, or it may mean resting in stasis. Sometimes what is in the service of self-love is to change one’s present state of contingent being; sometimes it is to accept one’s state. Either way, to act from a position of self-love is to embrace the non-linearity and self-directedness of change; and it is to act in a way that holistically honors the good of the ever-emerging tripartite self without judgment.

To act from this position of self-love is to consider the good of the embedded character in my self-narrative, always with a view toward the wisdom that I am simultaneously the storyteller, free to modify my own narratives; and ever acknowledging that my being-becoming is this very dance between the real facts of my being and the contingent concepts through which I understand myself. To deeply love that reality which is described by this abstract vision is to love myself as I am fundamentally, prior to any snapshot of contingent characteristics.

7.4. On Jesus and Resurrection

To write is to dialogue with myself.

It strikes me that it is genuinely uncertain how deep it goes.

God poses in Jesus the ultimate question to each person: Is there resurrection from death or is there not? More concretely, did Jesus in fact rise from the dead or did he not?

It seems to me that the answer is that you need to actively believe that he did—faith as a doing, not as a having; a process abstracted to a property. To actively believe in the resurrection of the dead enables one to proceed in honest dialogue with oneself—honest with regard to the depth of one’s not-knowing. This is to enter into mystery, rather than to resolve it absolutely.

But this is not the only way: one can also critique one's own thoughts and assumptions to the point of unknowing absolutely everything and then build a framework from first principles, as I have. Then, by grace, consciousness may grow in compassionate coherence. The Holy Spirit works through unifying ideals lived; and by faith in our own ignorance we may yet meet on universally common ground.

8. Conclusions

Given all that I have said regarding abstraction, one may rightly ask what the objectives are of the abstractions I have presented here, hopefully to evaluate whether they are useful in obtaining them. I consider them to be two-fold: First, these abstractions are metaphysical; they are meant to provide a coherent framework from which to understand the endeavor and results of modern physics, and indeed all of science. Second, they are intended to facilitate a plurality that is grounded in a coherent and syncretic worldview.

A key question one might ask is whether the universe is comprehensible or merely meta-knowable, to use philosopher Nicholas Maxwell's terminology, in the sense that it is partially knowable and that we may utilize partial knowledge to improve our means of acquiring more (provisional) knowledge. My explanation of measurement would suggest mere meta-knowability, or at least suggests that we can never know whether the universe is comprehensible.

But what is a viable alternative to physical comprehensibility, i.e. the notion that everything is composed of types of fundamental physical entities with universal laws of interaction between them? It might be described as "haecceity all the way down": that on every scale of nature, there is some individual difference which is ignored by any abstract system of description. Haecceity is a word from medieval scholastic philosophy that describes the "thisness" or unique individuality of a thing. Haecceity all the way down would not preclude certain statistical regularities that could be captured by abstract systems of description. Randomness itself could then be conceived as relative to an attempt at conceptual order, reflecting the "spread" of haecceity around posited sameness.

This notion of haecceity speaks to the issue of will. Haecceity all the way down implies irreducible individuals, which may nonetheless be "dissected" conceptually into "parts," statistically clustered around "types" ("clustered" because of the inevitable haecceity of such "parts"). By this view, individuals' behavior cannot be perfectly predicted even in principle due to their irreducible uniqueness and the problem of perfect measurement, as elucidated in Section 4. Individuals perform measurements that organize the Real into concepts; they also react to their own concepts, influencing the development of further concepts, further reactions, and so on. The key point to note is that will cannot be said to be illusory in this process, because the process is in principle underdetermined. Therefore, if will or free will is experienced, i.e. if it is a property of the self-concept that an individual has crystallized from experience, then there is no *a priori* reason not to hold it (provisionally, as all concepts). This is not an assertion of the influence of will on the unfolding of Reality; but it is to assert that within my worldview, the influence of will cannot be precluded on strictly logical grounds. This legitimizes my speaking as if willing occurs without contradiction. In other words, I am not restricted by logic and the other assertions in this system of truths from declaring that I am both the willful narrative-former and the forming of the narrative. I know myself in the form of this non-dual narrative.

What I have said here is another way of stating that we may be unable to say anything at all about what fundamentally is prior to abstraction, for to speak of it is to "close" it in some way that does

not honor its fundamental openness. This is the position of Hilary Lawson, who has been described as a post-postmodern philosopher and who professes what has been described as the first anti-realist metaphysics. Both Lawson and myself paint a picture of an indeterminate world—one in which we can genuinely intervene—in which certain statistical regularities arise in certain frameworks.

To hold the view of reality as displaying haecceity all the way down is to say that everything has an irreducible this-ness or unique individuality at every scale, rather than conforming perfectly to our abstract categories and concepts. The fact or potentiality to which a conceptual description refers cannot be entirely captured by its description. This opens up great existential and aesthetic possibilities. We can see each tree, stone, ant, or human as having a radically particular identity not exhausted by our labels and models. There is a stark sense of sacred beauty to be found in the particular.

This seems to accord best with the reality I find myself in. The determinate or potentially comprehensible universe with one all-encompassing absolute Truth (or “theory of absolutely everything,” as it is sometimes called) does not accord with the everyday experience I have, nor with the practices and findings of science as I have witnessed them. And yet I hold this view provisionally as one among others, a voice in the ongoing conversation of my life, rather than the end of analysis.

10. Acknowledgements

I would like to offer my thanks to my friends Avinash Lal and Salash Tolan Nabaala for their endless guidance through these forays. Without them, I would not have been sure enough of my sanity to share this document with others, nor in doubt enough of my sanity to write it in the first place.

Finally, and with all conceivable weight of finality, I thank my wife, Catherine, who is the source and muse of these philosophical explorations. I am forever grateful for her patience and fortitude as the burden of my self-reflection threatened to overcome me. The impact of her love and personal sacrifice on my life and my writing cannot be overstated. In honor of our love, I offer these verses in closing:

Triunity (on Marriage and Doing Science)

There is no fact that is Fact,
 (the Father is above all)
nor truth of what is Truth;
 (only the Word is Truth)
but Relationship is not blind to itself,
 (and so the Spirit testifies to Love.)

When I dissolve my borders I
 reveal them;
And when joined in love,
 I became to myself a triunity
 of self, other, and relationship.

So is Love unto truth
As is Truth unto Fact:
 revealing, leading, yielding
 Faith unto
 all who take part.

The Poems

God and the Process of Self	24
Dissection	25
The Speaker	26
The Saying-So	27
The Blue Hillides	28
Rebuilt	29
Is Nihilism Coherent?	30
You Wrote This Poem	31
A Love Song to Myself	32
Remember	33
Authenticity and Becoming	34
To Poetry and Magic	35
The Mother Goes Ahead	36
The Frog and the Wren	37
River	38
The End of Humanity	39
On Sitting Up Straight	40
Crystal Teardrops (on Gender)	41
Nature	42
A Wave	43
Conversation with a Tree	44
In the Buzzing of Dragonflies	45
We Lose Sight of it in Small Towns	46
The Grasses	47
Pick	48
On Vegetarianism	49
From the Mountains	50
It Was Good	51
Impermanence and Loss	52
Be Imperfect and Die	53
Memory Blender	54
Nothing Essential is Lost	55
Natural Selection	56

Baby Bird	57
To the Birds	57
And What of All This Swirling?	58
A Wondrous Duel	59
The Reflecting Wall	60
On Emphasizing the Out-Breath	62
Science and Philosophy	63
Platonic Silence	64
The Age of Reason	65
Triunity (on Marriage and Doing Science)	66
Ode to Redundancy	67
Philosophy and Pragmatism	68
To Catherine	69
As Petals Fade	70
To See and Be Seen	71
A Meatball	72
Still Tomorrow	73
Reflections	74
Fence	75
Movies of You	76
What I've Learned from Marriage	77
Mental Health and Healing	78
The Three Singers	79
Holon Dialogue	80
Can I Be?	81
Bipolar Disorder	82
Is this Relatable?	83
Orison for a New World	84
On Prayer	85
On Fatherhood	86
To Know Everything	87
A Prophet of Honesty	88
Adam and Eve	89

God and the Process of Self

Dissection

God gave himself up to our dissection.
An ultimate openness; a kenosis.

“Leaves don’t exist as such”—sure.
But can there be such a house with no foundation?
Can there be haecceity all the way down?

Things evolve at random when there’s nothing at stake;
but what strange trajectories mine have!

And when does the bread I eat become me?
Where does it become not-bread?
And shouldn’t I ask this on Sunday?

Oh, what can I make of all these games?
Only silence! Breath. Heartbeat.

The Speaker

I built for myself a cage,
So that I could stand apart from myself—
inside myself—to look at myself
and say, “You are doing this.”

If I let my view draw near
To my furthest reaches,
The outer frontier of my becoming,
I would become all too much, and nothing.
And what would I say then?

And while the cage confines me,
It defines me, or else
It allows my definition, or else
It is my definition.
The Speaker, Speaking, and Spoken:
a God in a cage.

The Saying-So

There is no office space inside my skin
where my brain and body do their number-crunching
and come to “me” for the final say-so;
because I am not other than the number-crunching,
and the number-crunching is the saying-so.

If I be atomic particles in flux with my surroundings, so be it.
And if I be entangled with my surroundings, all the better.

I cannot comprehend another way but that all is one
process, one Self,
of which I am the body and a mouth.
I declare myself the one Self as my mouth declares
“I am a body”:
The mouth is not the body,
but the declaration that “I am a body”
can only be made by means of the mouth.

In just this way I declare that
I am an individual and one with this Self:
the Speaker incarnate as the Word through the Speaking.

The Blue Hillsides

Don't make the person behind the person;
Don't put the man inside the machine.
Don't have desire about your desires;
And have no fear of your fear.
Let the dusty green moth rest beside the fire;
Let the shadow-blue hillsides be seen.

Rebuilt

Tobit 13

Don't think too hard.
See the statue, look up.
There are phrases all around the Lord.
There are tendrils in the air.

To think deeply is not to think hard
(unless you play for that team—
then my hat's off to you).

The sun on the horizon
is muted through a haze
of moonstone *en cabochon*.
I crease my brow to hold it.

There's a spire from a church;
 but higher
the university building;
 and higher still
the ugly brick apartments;
 and finally On High
are the four radio towers
 issuing their Spirit.

So this will be rebuilt
with sapphires and emeralds?
These streets with rubies?
These towers with pure gold?

I guess I'm an early investor then.

Don't think too hard.
See the statue, look up.
There are phrases all around the Lord.
There are tendrils in the air.

Is Nihilism Coherent?

I spoke with God today.

He told me sorry.

He said,

“You were meant to compete,
but you weren’t meant to realize you were doing it.”

He said,

“You were meant to solve problems,
but not well enough to see The Problem.”

He said,

“Please have patience with yourself (with me);
there is no ‘detached’ perspective to be had;
look through your own eyes, and be at home.”

You Wrote This Poem

If you don't know what a poem is, this isn't one.

If you truly don't believe in poems at all, then this isn't one.

This is only a certain interaction of fundamental particles. (If you don't know what those things are, they aren't.)

If you don't speak this language, it doesn't say anything at all.

If you are of the intelligence that they call "artificial" and receive this as a binary stream, it is only that.

If you see only the contrast of dark lettering on white, then this is a painting.
Perhaps a bad one.

This poem is the experience of this poem.

You wrote this poem, and write it still. (You are I are the poem.)

A Love Song to Myself

The halcyon time was almost real:
The half-bare tree tops did form a cathedral,
but the cathedral never knew your sins.

The breath of the Defender quakes,
and its tremble carries a whisper,
a love song to myself:

“God is around as you are among;
You can be little; you are enough.”

Remember

Remember what you are and what you aren't.
(forget, occasionally)

Authenticity and Becoming

To Poetry and Magic

My poems create their maker
(I'm taller than I think I am).
When I search among fields of choices
to call forth dialogue from noise,
I grant peaceful power conduit
to create myself by prophecy
and reckon myself by words and worlds
beyond my reaching
(I'm smaller than I think I am).

Let me be for these words as all for all:
a passage from passing to passing;
and let me drag along meaning through dogged mud
drying always as it is to dust.

The Mother Goes Ahead

Maiden, whither do you go,
with your diadem of silver and
your ecru shantung robe?
Won't you stay a while and count with me
the ways a net can hold a sphere,
and whether it may flow?

Else let me wander in your wake:
Give to me hibiscus dress,
hedge maple breast:
And I will guard your taxa;
And create myself by declaration,
And unhold the names that falter.

Oh, but won't you stay to speak my name!
In soothing and in psalter;
Giggle light upon my altar,
And let me worship you with wine.

Else carry me a while:
Teach your bird to sing in chroma;
Wash me sweet in the aroma
of the levity you keep.

Queen of sorrows, bless me please
to release the fist I clenched in fear;
That I may not punish what in me appears
and in vain crucify my king.

Oh, but whither do you go?
Please call out to me from there!

The Frog and the Wren

I'll make myself a character
if it enhance our storytimes.

(Authenticity is not-being;
it's only not-to-do.
The being is your game;
it's ultimately up to you.)

This sort of divination
is our duty and our right:
to seed ourselves by inclination
and build by day as dreamt by night.

So I'll be a frog and you'll be a wren;
and we'll decide what that means.
We'll live in a cottage with a little smoke
whirling gently round the beams.

And if it please to be a rat,
we'll squeeze together in our den.
And in our deepest ratwrought dreams
we'll sing a song of frog and wren.

River

In the mirror

I see

river. River—

if I name it,

does it cease to flow?

if I

cease

A man only knows other men.

The End of Humanity

The end of humanity (and its source) is to know that there is not “humanity” to inhabit as such. There is only the ongoing “I”—and what I take it and make it to be.

On Sitting Up Straight

My fathers hold my back straight:
my father and his father.
Their mothers too—
a cascading line of waterfalls that moves this one wheel, now.

My mother's tugging at my chin who told me once
that men who hold their backs too straight are likely to be gay;
My wife then soothes my shoulders when she told me that's ridiculous.

Mywifeme holds my back straight,
and God looks through my eyes.

Crystal Teardrops (on Gender)

My poems are crystal teardrops
born of confusion, crystallized
by its resolution.

They work their way out;
I cannot push them.
Here's one.

I am the lightest amongst women
and I beat the heavy drum
amidst the company of brothers—
And why shouldn't I?

I carry years of
Knowing and Unknowing,
of the hardening and softening,
of the chortles and the fire;
and it turns out I am all of it,
(or at least a pretty bird or two
has bounced around before me while I
paid attention to my head and noticed
it within me.)

Now if I bow down to your office,
will you carry me awhile?
Life's too wonderful to be something;
and all that's there to choose
are silly beats within a background that is
Orchestral,
so why bother?

That I may be nothing to myself,
I am Yours.

Nature

A Wave

There is a place, a starting point for thought,
Where the wave is not a breath, nor an unseen excitation;
A time when the ocean wave is entirely and only itself.
Here I see the space is vast that isolates a lover,
And turbulent the time
 that shakes the brittle tie of one to one.

If I should cast a stone at the wave in my conceit,
 might it stir the olivine sea
on distant shores
 to break at your feet?
And might you then marvel at how beautiful the world can be?

Though we insist our borders hold,
 I plainly see
 what is of you
 but in me.

Conversation with a Tree

I ask the tree,
"I know that my binaries are spectra,
and every name's a judgment.
Any walls I have ever built worked both ways.
But how far can I extend?
And If I start, can I stop?"

It says,
"I grow upward because there is no limit;
If I began from a height and extended downward,
I would have fixed my potential from the start."

I ask the tree,
"I know that there is neither headwind
nor tailwind if I am still;
And yet it is the stillness in her eyes
that carries one moment to meet the next;
And so time takes its hold on me."

It says,
"Stillness is a matter of scale
and headwinds a matter of facing.
I have no face and am on many scales,
so I don't know what you're talking about."

In the Buzzing of Dragonflies

There's a manlike activity in the buzzing of dragonflies:
Their darting and zipping,
their pausing to evaluate, then flitting away toward gain.
There's economy, intention, drive.

But our highest calling is not like this at all, but rather
that through our eyes the Lord may view again His Garden;
And by us stroll through His creation
to find His rest among its goodness.

To flit and fly is a worthy dance,
but if you lend not your mind to the emptied God
you merely fortify your pryncedom;
And why spend so long on designing your headstone?

Leave to me the river island, guarded by its lilies:
the pokeweed, the honeysuckle, and a few brave pines—
I'll approach them soft as air, with my eyes the gates of heaven opened,
and I'll leave it all to bloom.

We Lose Sight of it in Small Towns

We lose sight of it in small towns.
In the forest it is clear
What tension grips the heartwood
As bustling the leaves
And desperately the roots reach out—
To live,
 To take,
 To change.

What difference it would make
If I could live half so ardently
As once I loved you.

The Grasses

I am indebted to the grasses,
Their painter's blend of browns and greens,
The gradient that supervenes;

And to their voices,
never addressed, but overheard,
Like her playful chiding whisper
when to reason she was wrong
 but still would not allow
my truth to limit Beauty,
or the ugliness she overlooked
 to desecrate her truth.

I am indebted to the grasses,
For at wind's demand the grasses bend,
each in honest view of itself,
Without a thought for straightness.

Pick

The breadberry, picked ripe from the vine, so
red as to be almost not-red, picked. So made ready to be eaten.

And eaten. And picked. And eaten. Devoured. Picked, and eaten. Devoured.

And so the burnt, the island.
the dust which the Sower fertilized
returned to dust.
The cut off, the withering. The innocent
Forgetting that there ever were more innocents
than himself. The quiet sleep,
the tears not shed for it.

The fruit, picked.

The once loud and powerful beast: a fool.
An oaf, hated. Goliath was not killed by David: he was
shrunk.

And which of you, if your father held out a rattlesnake when you asked for a fish, would refuse it?

And which of you, if you cast your net into the sea and caught many fish, would not
Get a Bigger Net?

The kingdom is yours.

Or the fruit, picked.

On Vegetarianism

Behind the lion's
eyes, I saw no soul—except,
of course, for My Own.

From the Mountains

From a peak I watched the mist roll over distant mountains.
It was a sight that demands reverence,
a beauty that lends no closure.

At that distance, the forest looked like one being,
as if the trees had worked together to construct
some tower of Babel, with as much claim to divinity
as anything I've known.

In my rapture, I paid homage to the cardinal sin of man:
I forgot that my vantage point was not a privileged one.
Suddenly the mist poured in, like liquid silver into a mold,
and swallowed the peak on which I stood.

A moment later, I saw nothing.
I doubted if the landscape had ever been there at all.

How could there have been beauty where such a truth now stands?

It Was Good

It was good
(for even just a moment)
to stand before a single tree;
To let it be *this*!
To let it be *thus*!
And to let it be Other:
To let it be the subject
of an oath, or a song,
or dirges.

Impermanence and Loss

Be Imperfect and Die

Be imperfect, and die!
Envy not the ancient constellations,
With their stick-figure constancy
fixed in the heavens.
No! Forgive this conception and transcend it.

Be a real constellation:
Burning, ever-moving and glorious
for your never-waiting, your
indifference to the supplication
of that old, inquiring organ
which churns inside you
but would petrify the churning.

Be imperfect, and die!
Envy not the ancient spring,
which pushes life from lifeless darkness
and originates the stream.
No! Use this conception but doubt it.

You do not stand outside causation,
launching balls of substance
To a cold, indifferent Other
that would bounce around by Patterns
and return to reward or punish.

Be a real spring: Take and give!
And affect your future taking,
and modify your giving;
But be part of the dance of things!

Swirl, and know that you are swirling!
Burn, and know that you are burning!
Sit awhile to hear your crying:
"Be imperfect, and die!"

Memory Blender

I wish my memory were not such a blender.
I want more of the "one time she," and not the "she would always" that I've got.
The "she would always" might be fine without the "until."
But instead my memory blends and bends the one to fit them all;
and it doesn't ask my say.

I suppose the blessing I must take is that
she found herself one
who would string the beads of "one time" with an "always"
and wear it as a necklace,
a talismanic meeting point
of "she would always" and "I will always."
I carry it over my heart.

Nothing Essential is Lost

Start yourself here:

“Let all be True!”

So are we to filter and hold the source—each.

Nothing essential is ever lost.

Natural Selection

I woke up.

It hit me all at once

(Winning so many tickets in my dream at the arcade)

My dad is getting older.

(someday.)

The blankets are a warm loneliness that is
humiliating.

(The light cuts clean through the slats.

Beyond, the world in slivers—

Ailanthus trees, the cracked lot, a couple parked cars—)

Did death really create all of this?

Baby Bird

Baby bird
On the sidewalk;
Gone so young, never feathered;
Once encased, never fettered—
Through your intercession:

Let my death be like yours—in a whisper;
To a hymn sung by mi familia;
For my tomb the whole world.

And let them sing unto new millennia:
Those who flew that I may try to fly, who
Landed that I may find ground.
Let them sing, then let them whisper;
But let them not be drowned out.

To the Birds

And to the birds still on wing,
Can it be that your song is always a cry?
Always a yearning, always in earnest?
I choose to think
That you sing from time to time just because you are
happy.
And that sometimes you fly
just because you like flying—
dipping and weaving,
Letting the wind blow you off your path,
then rebutting its objection, and enjoying the dance.
I choose to think
That you bob on the breeze for the thrill—
the almost-falling, the catching yourself by your wings.

Let my feeder be where you land.
Let it be a place where you eat your fill;
and then more than your fill, for the taste.
A place where you find seed, never rocks,
evermore.

And What of All This Swirling?

And what of all this swirling?
To see life always in reflection
On the eye to which I hold myself

And when until its stopping?
Can I hold for longer still
With all I know awash?

And essence—what to know
And what to let slip through—
When will it matter?

Time—to hold and time for
All. But what—and more,
For whom? It never started.

And if I should exist
Only for my own sake—
Then what?

A Wondrous Duel

After she was in
position above the grave,
we cooed at babies.

The Reflecting Wall

I was thinking

that one has a certain amount of time with one's lover to essentially memorize their responses and reactions to things; to download, as it were, their "software." During this period one obsesses over their loved one's least gestures, tells stories to their partner in their own mind—and they imagine the lover's response.

They have many repetitions planned to test their hypotheses and adjust their expectations.

So that then, when one lover is lost, the surviving lover can continue, to some extent, the connection.

They can still speak to their lover and imagine their response.

They have memorized their touch and their laugh, their gait.

It is as if they can still see them. But the difference is,

Before they departed, their lover could surprise them.

The lover was always capable of being funnier, more beautiful, even,

than he had imagined in his mind—

more perfect—more correct, somehow—than he remembered.

Someday the image in my head of you will not surprise me like you used to.

And I will find

That I am not surprised by you anymore, but composed of you.

That you have given me structure—a reflecting wall inside my own self.

And when I am no longer surprised by you it will be because

You gave me all you had to give.

And I will do the same for you—that is, to give you all I have—

In case it may be I that runs out first.

That was a good one. There's probably a poem in there somewhere.

I should tell the lady. I'll tell it generally, because I thought of it generally. But of course,

no matter how generally I present it she'll still instantiate my abstractions, i.e.

bring them into the particular by applying them to herself, and then she'll cry.

Maybe I shouldn't tell her.

"Hey lady, do you wanna hear something I just thought of? I think it's quite interesting but it might make you cry."

"Are you gonna talk about you dying?"

"Umm, well no, not about me dying but about any couple in which one member dies first. So I guess me? Or you."

“Don’t tell me—you know I’m gonna cry.”

Maybe she’s right. I probably shouldn’t tell her. But I suppose all that should be in the poem too. Or short story?

I think someday I’ll have her read this.

On Emphasizing the Out-Breath

Play your hunger.
Strum it like a silver chord.
Let it dance like a cool flame
round the earthen walls of
the fine ceramic vase of your body.

Relish the out-breath.
Without it there is no in-breath, no relief;
Yet it is not only an assistant but a
companion.
Let it tickle your lip and whisper to you
quiet songs of going.

Stare at darkness.
Let it fill your eyes like warm water
in an onyx bowl; and let it
bellow its vacancy, its opening.

Open your windows to let the darklight in.
And now out.

Science and Philosophy

Platonic Silence

I walked in the forest.

I cannot say what I saw.

But what I did not see is
a single instantiation of a class.

The Age of Reason

Suppose “energy”
were instead called
“spirit.”

What changes?

Triunity (on Marriage and Doing Science)

There is no fact that is Fact,
 (the Father is above all)
nor truth of what is Truth;
 (only the Word is Truth)
but Relationship is not blind to itself,
 and so the Spirit testifies to Love.

When I dissolve my borders I
 reveal them;
And when joined in love,
 I became to myself a triunity
 of self, other, and relationship.

So is Love unto Truth
As is Truth unto Fact:
 revealing, leading, yielding
 Faith unto
 all who take part.

Ode to Redundancy

And then God said: "Let there be redundancy in their systems,
but not so much redundancy that nothing gets built;
to give solace to those who are afraid and to give
light where there was darkness.

And let there be checkers and maintainers.

Let the cost of this redundancy be borne in a distributed manner:
By some in the form of boring jobs, by some
as bills, by some in tolls, by others in audits, and by others in audits."

And so it was.

I thought absolute faith in God was the only way back to absolute trust in mankind.
Perhaps it is.

But I also saw that all along I had nearly absolute faith in the creations of mankind—
or at least in those that had gained sufficient approval from mankind—
even if I hadn't trust in any single man himself.

Perhaps God is the ultimate system redundancy, the last fail-safe;
or perhaps He is the first principle.

Take your pick: to me it seems about the same.

And so it was.

Philosophy and Pragmatism

Sir Dentoya bought a butterbridge
Across from Penny's garden;
And while the radishes gave a crunch
(in the mouths of Monsieur's party),
I stirred and purred in a codswallop bath
In a stew not half so hearty!

To Catherine

As Petals Fade

As petals fade pale pink and fall,
more delicate than before,
so is there beauty in the twilight of love,
which moves us even now
to take all in (and then out).

Time flows to lovers as a warm breeze.
Let the warmth be an urgency and a blanket.
Let us hold each other as if we're falling.

For love must be a surrender, a fall:
It is to say, "This power you have over me
is there whether I grant it or not."

And in this surrender, release.

Whatever I have seen of heaven,
I have seen with you.

To See and Be Seen

It is a burden to be seen.

Does she stare at people too long because she is trying
to see herself in their eyes?
And what does she see there?

It is a treasure to be seen.

In her I see
a brook, carving gently, slowly
Soothing with a crisp whisper
anyone who listens.
Or a birch sapling, opalescent bark
lending beauty to any who look.
Never demanding.

It is a burden to see

What lies behind a loved one and
What weight they carry still.

It is a treasure to see.

I want to take her to see
Outside herself.
Outside of me.
Outside of us.
The world and all its beauty,
All its kindness, not demanding.

And we will sit,
Hand in hand and both in wonder
While the wind runs through the birches
and we listen to the brook.

A Meatball

I fold my napkin gingerly, like it's afraid of my touch.
There are so many sounds in the wall it's like a quiet river.
The cold outside makes our warmth more fragile, and that's just as well.
Scarcity creates value, I suppose.

The thing is, my thoughts are broadcast commentary,
since there is no other way. Of course,
the Grand Voice is wrong; and it disagrees with itself. And though I may be
we, sometimes we calls and I do not listen.

After all, why should I bother tracing lines on headstones to read what they say?
a bird doesn't bother with birding. And besides,
if all is passing from dark to dark, why should I even watch its passing?

But a drum beats other drums, and it can't refuse the sound.
You cough, I look down.

In the reaches of a moment, a meatball really can be
Everything: and if you can't find the end or start, it may as well be
Always.
And if a meatball makes you warmer, I would do well to be yours.

And I'm sorry. I suppose that's the bottom line here.

Still Tomorrow

Still tomorrow. I find
I can't use words to say how I love you, but I find
the simplest words work closest.

The crinkling of paper,
Quiet water on a mountain stone,
A walk through snow, a puffy coat—
These are wrapped up in you.

Probably everything good is connected to you.
Every song that was ever written
should be written to you.

How do I love you? Still tomorrow.
How will I love you? Still tomorrow.
Still tomorrow, and again.
And on and again and on and on until each song
is yours and all days are ours,
And you'll draw a bath that's hot like tea and I'll
whistle in the sunset.

Reflections

I see my own reflection
in the eye upon the mirror;
and in that eye another still.
I see how far back I can count.

A reflection there for sadness,
The days on which I shrink,
When anyone could hurt me.
I focus on my breath.

For fear,
When I pull away—give myself up
to be held (in place, or carried forward.)
I sing.

A reflection there for joy,
Linked as it is to sadness
by the knowledge that both end.
The days on which I bask, and hold, and cling.

A reflection there for anger,
Pain with poor translation;
I hide, then wait, then sing again.

I see my own reflection
in the eye upon the mirror;
and in that eye another still.
I see how far back I can count.

And through the holes in all these selves,
A thread to hold them up:
All of my reflections
Smile when you smile.

Fence

Past the hills now, a wooden fence runs along the road.
“Someone put up that fence,” I think (a thought
I would never have had before her).
I would like to put up a fence like that—
To know each log and lay each piece.
In everything hard-won and earned, I see her;
in everything sturdy and known.

The road cuts now through
Warm green hills, covered with ivy.
In curves of earth I feel her.
I am reminded of what I see in her eyes,
In warm amber brown with greens: Life.
In all that is warm and alive, I see her;
in everything simple and real.

Movies of You

I'll give up to you.

The black and pink glows
on the sidewalk as

My eyes make movies about you.

What I've Learned from Marriage

1.

Some autumn leaves
burn hot like embers,
and when they fall they
glow upon the Earth like coals.

2.

The voice in your head
need not be privileged.
It can be joined by another.

3.

Sometimes, just do the dishes.

Mental Health and Healing

The Three Singers

I was brought down
To the place where all the world's a poem, an art-garden,
and all the people only sculptors.

Unwillingly admitted, in fact—
a three-day sojourn among the cluttered, the broken-in.
The fallen leaves, coloring still; not green again or yet
(but greenness is self-serving anyhow).

I met perchance three singers with one braided song.
The song was mine, and they sang in my voices. I joined in despite myself.

One showed how I lie to myself.
One revealed how I have lied to others—in my names and with my hats; with myself the first fruit of this
deception.
One testified to where I should raise my eyes—whose gaze I should seek, and what else I may avert.

I was become blind to my blindness;
and now agnostic to my sight.

“Behold your God” is to “Be many-holed; you’re just a man” as “zoo” is to
“centrally planned garden-structure,” and that’s just as well: Just speak quickly.

I’d take any of it or leave it for a whole bowl of soup (if the
bowl is a nice ceramic and I get to keep the bowl).

Holon Dialogue

I am always two voices.
There is the One who asserts,
And the One who doubts.
And in their dialogue there comes a Third—

One whose presence is intersubjectivity.
This one is consciousness—the “-ness” indicating a process, not a property.
A property of an object is abstracted from a process: there is no other way.

Two produce more than either alone;
and this excess is the Third.
Hear me, Doubter!

All praise be to the Paraclete of poetry,
this Third between clasping hands
gripped in conflict, in prayer, or on a nice walk—
The One who is Three and each One.

Can I Be?

Post-risk.

Post-chance.

Post-failing.

Post-change.

Post-growth.

Post-uncertainty.

Post-trying.

Post-feigning.

Post-fearing.

Post-worry.

Post-losing.

Post-dying.

Post-dominance.

Post-surrender.

Post-“playing the game.”

Post-money.

Post-diet.

Post-strength.

Post-competition.

Post-comparison.

Post-legacy.

Post-searching.

Post-repetition.

Post-interpreting.

Post-deadline.

Post-punishment.

Post-disappointment.

Or pre-?

A philosophy is only right
insofar as it can be forgotten.

Bipolar Disorder

I felt all the sadness of the world.
It threatened to crush me.
I cried at your breast, You,
Mother of the World,
And within your blessed womb
Grew a pit of sadness for her.

Hear me, both:

Your beloved is with you.
He gave it all away—
the joys of heaven and the
sins of Earth.

Is this Relatable?

My psychopathy
is on a spectrum of creativity.
Flowing always like a river, it
smooths stones with crisp whispers.

And the water is life-giving; it
slakes my thirst
for eternity; or
for eternal ever-structure, ever
chattering, chattering, winding
on course without ends.

But flowing always like a river,
it may flood and drown;
it may gather silt and brown.

And so I must be watchful.

Orison for a New World

I offer to the Other my orisons—
moments in which I am vulnerable
to overreach, moments
beyond equilibrium, asking
catechesis from void, awaiting
compassionate critique to pour
spirit into my cup of offering.

Oh, hear my orison now!
full of compassion with skeptical ear,
that time itself may call back lovingly,
letting me learn
what has already shaped my calling.

On Prayer

(we can all hear each
other's prayers; but we need
to be listening)

On Fatherhood

Man alone in his violence
And woman alone in her fear
never learned to make love as equals.

If it must be so,
then grant me senescence,
that I may be at rest and released
from this cycle of release.

Else let love precede bodily union,
and fulfill it. Let it be as the
melting snow to the springtime, as a
log lain bare to a flame.

Oh, let me view you at a distance!
Guard me always from taking life,
that I may give.

To Know Everything

Toward an open-handed epistemology

To know that you don't know anything absolutely
is to know that you don't know
whether you can know everything absolutely.

This is to hold everything and grip nothing.

A Prophet of Honesty

He came as a prophet of love;
Then His Spirit came to me as a prophet of faith,
Telling me that I must come in turn
As a prophet of honesty to myself
over and over, unto the reaches of eternity.

He came in a whisper, carried by a breeze
That gave me such a shudder of excitement
That I grew to know
that I must die only at the completion of ages,
In absolute freedom from fear,
Having led to drink only those whom I could lead
as a shadow that goes ahead,
with all in truth owed to the sun warm on their backs.

And so found I the latest drink I would trade for never drinking,
And now I carry one branch from the foot of a great tree.
And what a thing to carry! A reminder,
An invitation; or a greeting.

Perhaps the day has indeed dawned.
Perhaps it is time now only to welcome the dawn
And to walk on surely in light.

Adam and Eve

It is well said
that Adam and Eve “became” naked,
because they were previously clothed
in the entirety of the Garden.

Love comes now as fire,
consuming clothing dawned in fear;
leaving flesh unscathed

So that we find ourselves again
cloaked in Beauty, wrapped in Other,
in the Garden rapt in wonder:

Dare we dawn new clothes?