The End Of Philosophy

– Tales Of Reality –

by

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Foreword

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

countless others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 – Language, Lies, And Illusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The foundation of technology

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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