



## The Flimsy Edifice and Façade of Knowledge

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### ABSTRACT

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In this brief essay I outline why one should consider knowledge to not be on a firm footing. It is riddled by the possibility that nature can change its nature i.e. the miraculous may occur or even nature itself as miraculous. I argue that nature (the external world) can be seen as an illusion, that knowledge is always human knowledge subject to the biological limitations of humans, to cultural relativism and the inherent subjectivity of all knowledge systems, including the scientific. I conclude that this need not cause fear in the notion that there is simply no foundation, no grand narrative, but rather accept the vacuum as the mystery, the invisible Infinite that supports the material universal, such is the Uncaused Cause, the Creator. I conclude that such acceptance will yield a knowledge in which societies will flourish leading to less greed, violence and deceit.

### KEYWORDS:

miracles; cultural relativism; new paradigm; illusion; knowledge

### INTRODUCTION: The arrogance of each generation

What we learn from history is that every epoch and especially the prevailing powers and authorities consider their position ironclad buttressed by what they view as impervious and almost complete knowledge and control. Yet what we also learn by subsequent generations is that such powers that be only understood a minuscule amount, and that through decadence or conquest by others were overrun by other groups or nation states who themselves followed with the same fate – an endless cycle of power mongering, falsehood and conceit.

One of the ways by which those in power wield control is through the machinery of “knowledge” whether in the guise of religious authority, national pride, superior feats of culture, the royal line and ideological mesmerizing of the generally ignorant populace.

Today such ideological sway is rampant and stronger than ever. There is an assumed interrelatedness between all parts of the globe and industry musters such control over nature (it would appear) has rendered a dogma of materialism, hedonism and emptiness.

In this essay, I argue that the very edifice and façade of knowledge – the apparent domination of the prevailing culture – is spurious, shortsighted and smacks of the same Errors as our forebears. I offer 4 basic notions that dispel such

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a myth, and I argue that an awareness of such limitations may mean a better society, one less sure and confident of the current cultural ethos, and ready to invite speculation upon notions of human limitation, the infinite and the mystical. The real basis for knowledge then is cognizance of the underlying mystery and in that empty space we may yet build a civilization and higher forms of knowledge in addition to what humankind has accrued thus far.

### 1) Miracles, above nature

At this point we have accounted for all known chemical elements, their properties, how they bond to form molecules and thence their lineage as they form part of living matter. Thence we have a biological understanding of the processes of such life forms. We have investigated the earth's lands and seas and have begun exploring space. The queen of the sciences is probably physics (and mathematics, the king, the abstract edifice of logic and quantifying behind the empirical sciences) whose reach and know-how is able to penetrate matter itself, harness it and all within what are known as the four elemental forces of nature. The digital revolution, a climax in our understanding of electricity, has allowed for vast communications networks, instant calculation abilities and storage and access to huge quantities of data and the analysis thereof in order to create more machines. The primitive tools of the club and knife and use of fire has over the hundred-thousand-year hiatus made incredible strides – clearly a beacon of light, illuminated knowledge, enlightenment.

And yet, the depraved reality is that humans have constantly been at war. Last century knew two massive world wars. For

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all the sophistication in tool making and theoretical understanding of the universe and reality, something is terribly wrong. Humans are as barbaric as their forebears and civilization is just a word whose meaning has little value. I conjecture that while knowledge and education is important and much of what we know is robust, especially in the sciences, there needs to be understood and taught a new attitude towards this knowledge, lest it leads to arrogance, materialism and emptiness and in the worst case, mechanisms of war and destruction.

The great religions all record miraculous events. Yet one need not look to a miracle, defined as going against nature, as the only definition of a miracle. Miracles can also be the commonplace and the ordered functioning of nature and its systems and processes to produce and sustain life. In terms of the former, water could behave as fire at the will of God and vice-versa; in terms of the latter, it is God that oversees the functioning of nature, whose secrets we can understand and manipulate in turn. In both instances, nature (of which humans are a sub-set) is as it is miraculously, could change at any point or at least could continue as it always has and both perspectives are based on faith, not reason, not certainty, and not human ingenuity.

I am thus arguing for a perspective that transcends nature, a meta-physics. I believe it is such an attitude which will mitigate the effects of arrogance in the accumulation of knowledge, rendering man humble, at the behest of the Creator who is the source of life. It is nature that is the tool of the Creator and could thus be changed at will. I envisage such an attitude would lead to a less destructive civilization and caution in building an edifice of knowledge bereft of the notion of the Creator, an experiment that has not worked either under the guise of capitalism or Communism, neither as dogma, nor ideology, but rather as an acknowledgment that all things, all humans included are creations of the Creator, and that nature is not self-sufficient, its laws not immutable and anything is conceivable. There can be miracles in the conventional definition, but it takes just a little tweak in perspective to see the natural as itself miraculous. I believe it is such an attitude that ought to be cultivated if we are to thrive as a civilization both in building knowledge systems and in doing so with humility and a sense of awe and mystery that pervades existence, the ontology of being, itself.

### 2) Illusion: the philosophers and mystics

The divide between idealists and realists; between empiricists and rationalists and its synthesis in Kant renders the perception of the material universe by humans as constrained by various modalities of the mind, a propensity to see in a certain way. Though this was a synthesis of these divides, in all instances philosophers of the West have been concerned with defining what properties are part of the external world, incidental or necessary and what is simply an expression of the very faculties that perceive it so.

Mystics go a step further. Instead of an intellectual analysis of the terrain (of mind), they experience it in its essence,

before enclathment or a divide between self and external world. It is for this reason that descriptions of such experiences defy verbal articulation, notwithstanding Israel's prophets and others. Yet even so, the word is always a garb and hides the ecstatic experience. The point is the claim of the mystic or prophet is that there has been a communication with the Cause and Source of all, which people use the appellation "God" to indicate the Creator. However, in common usage the Creator is transcendent while nature is a separate entity or one with God. Both designations are false: God's aloofness is also His immanence, the divine presence in nature; nature itself is an illusion for there is only God; only we realize this through nature, for a human being is also a creation, having elements of the inanimate, the plant and animal, as well as a uniquely human soul with which to engage with reality. In this sense, it may be the case that the mystic does not simply find this essence through meditation alone, but also through harmony with the outer world.

In religious-mystical conceptual frameworks, reality is an illusion, a mirage which presents itself as a test and the would-be journeyer needs to see through this is he is to pass the tests of this world, whose actuality is non-existent. The world hides the Infinity appearing real and substantial and yet having no more reality than the absence of light. The world beguiles. In contemporary vernacular one may describe it as some kind of simulation, alternative reality, magic trick and beneath the veil, the truth exists in its pristine perfection.

The philosopher seeks enlightenment through rational argument (at least in the Western tradition) but may also come to similar conclusions: Reality is ultimately the will (Schopenhauer); reality is a shadowy truth (Plato); reality is a concoction of the mind that exists as and through thinking it so (Descartes); reality is a construction that is based on the beguiling nature of language (post modern deconstructionists); there is no essence or nature but one's choices (Existentialism); or in physicalist accounts reality is simply how the brain is hardwired to perceive and may as well be a "brain in the vat".

The point is, either mystically or philosophically (and Eastern philosophy is inherently mystical, intuitive), the world is not conceived as self-sufficient and real, and knowledge thereof can therefore neither be certain nor true. In this sense, the world or reality is no more than an illusion and truth is elusive.

### 3) Cultural relativism and human subjectivity

The edifice of knowledge has no foundation. Truth is a façade. This is evident philosophically and mystically, and also insofar as different cultures have distinct narratives whose claims of knowledge are mutually exclusive, it is unclear what constitutes reality and knowledge thereof. There may be a singular truth of one such narrative or part truths of all the narratives or part truths of some of the narratives or all the narratives may be false and there is an as yet undiscovered narrative that is truth. How is one to know and by what authority? Even if one were to discern the truth it will at best

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always be human truths limited by the grasp of the eye, hand and mind supported by a limited, though exasperating biology.

Are rational truths in mathematics and sciences objective, transcending human subjectivity? And is the subjectivity of art a kind of objectivity concerning the psyche and its creative, playful spirit? In the former case, the number system measures time and space, and the constants model the universe, but it is based on a human system that are one of many and the “measuring” of the expanse may use a different system, just as logically rigorous, and also a language. In the latter case, art is a mechanism to elicit imaginative fluidity while creating harmony or even dissent. If harmony, it mirrors the eternal concept of beauty. If dissent, if anticultural, it is a tool of protest and transformation which in turn often becomes a new standard of beauty, another form of knowledge.

If all knowledge is human knowledge splintered into various cultural expressions, global interconnectivity, human limitations, then there is no transcendent point of arbitration; we are all enmeshed within nature as much as we can master nature. In this sense, what we are to know of nature is also the story of ourselves, and therefore knowledge is not an edifice as such, but rather a façade that hides that we cannot ultimately know the ground of all being – what is matter, what is consciousness, what is the Cause of existence – only a surface, and what we build are only a flimsy pack of cards. Today’s fashion is not tomorrows; technologies change but human violence and deceit have yet to be curbed; knowledge accrues but a miracle could change all held sacred since institutions (of knowledge) is a will to power, not a will to truth itself, a truth forever elusive (anyhow).

### 4) Paradigm Shifts

Every so often a major shift occurs that revolutionizes human societies. There are many. The more obvious is the harnessing of fire and the wheel. Others include the industrial revolution, the digital age, agriculture, the Enlightenment and explorations and conquest of the Earth, and so on. In all cases, this created a radical shift in human-cultural and epistemological conceptions of reality. It often cancels pervious paradigms as Einstein’s notion of gravity is more accurate than Newtonian physics; the Copernican revolution was perhaps even more powerful as well as Darwin’s Evolution and Freud’s unconscious. These advents of human thought transformed the landscape making the past a flimsy façade of knowledge and the revolutionized version the new powerful statement of knowledge.

But this begs the question: If such is the nature of knowledge and human progress then the next such revolution may be imminent, in which case such a find would revolutionize and alter what we hold to today and offer future possibilities currently not dreamed of.

## CONCLUSION: ACCEPTING THE INFINITE

Whether a transcendent Force can alter nature; whether reality, the external world is an illusion; whether human limitations, subjectivity and cultural relativism all impinge on knowledge such that one cannot be certain of anything, then it cannot be from within the current framework of knowledge that one seeks a solution. Rather, it is the Infinite (that which has no limitations, is enduring and eternal) – a grand ideal – that is the only solid foundation. Not knowledge, not human power. It is with this as the first principle that any subsequent knowledge humankind can accrue will be used for the good in pursuit of the good. With the acceptance of the Infinite, the step into the abyss is possible – knowledge can be acquired, developed and used – yet it begins with the mystery. Connecting to that mystery within our frail limitations is wisdom and understanding and leads to knowledge that ultimately expresses love, beauty and form (language, systems, tools, culture). Conversely, pursuing knowledge without the invisible foundation is a walk into a labyrinth of power games and human greed, deception and even violence.

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