

## Essay

## On Atheist Spirituality Part IV: The Interplay, Sensation of Truth, Comte-Sponville and Existence of God

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### Abstract

In this series of essays, I explore and discuss spiritualization of materialistic atheism in support of Andre Comte-Sponville. These essays are further dedicated to Marie-Louise Nykamp. This essay contains: The Interplay Between Our Affective and Cognitive Beings ...; Mere Sensation of Truth = Truth, or Is It Indeed ? Back to C-S, and Starting with Its First Chapter; and On Chapter Two: Does God Exist?

### The Interplay Between Our Affective and Cognitive Beings ...

Regardless of being adepts of Darwinism, or not, the presence of animals on our Planet Earth can constitute a most fortunate opportunity to learn about ourselves as humans, and also try to improve who we happen to be. And obviously, four avenues are widely open for such a venture, namely, we can study :

1. In which ways we function better than animals, and do so to our advantage.
2. In which ways we function better than animals, and do so to our disadvantage.
3. In which ways we function less well than animals, and it is to our advantage.
4. In which ways we function less well than animals, and it is to our disadvantage.

As it happens, we very much tend to focus only on the first aspect above, do so with a rather arrogant sense of most obvious superiority, and miss so much to note the other aspects, especially the second of them.

But here, we are interested in other issues than a more thorough study along the above four categories. Namely, we shall focus for a while on the dual aspect of us humans, namely, of being endowed both with an affective being, as well as with a cognitive one.

The affective being is clearly there in animals as well, and quite well developed at that, especially in the higher animals, among them of course the monkeys and apes. On the other hand, none of the animals seem to have a cognitive being which would come anywhere near to our human one.

And yet, our human cognitive being, that is, the coachman in the ancient Hindu analogy, is hardly without exception but a mere servant of our affective being, a set of rather wild horses, hell bent on as continuous a flow as possible of instant gratifications ...

And the Lord inside the coach, what about that Lord ?

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Is he for evermore to be condemned to nothing else but, say, a cheerful desperation ?

### **Mere Sensation of Truth = Truth, or Is It Indeed ?**

A typical and fundamentally unfortunate failure of our affective being, a failure we share of course with the animals, is the extremely strong tendency instantly to take our mere sensations of truth for nothing less than the very truth itself ...

This is, needless to say, a most important and consequential ontological position in one's life, and it is so both in the short and longer term. And in the case of animals it may indeed be - without any other significant choice being there for them - absolutely indispensable for moment to moment survival. Indeed, when out in the jungle, either as a prey or predator, an animal definitely does not have the luxury to sit down and try to sort out which of its mere sensations of truth may indeed happen to be the truth itself. Instead, it must act as fast and with as total a commitment to the action taken as possible, since otherwise it may never ever have a chance to do so again. And then, no doubt, the more strong and instant the sensation of truth, the more it is instantly taken to be truth itself ...

But now, we humans, we who happen to live in some sort of civilization, are we indeed still condemned to the very same sort of ontological approach ?

Of course, if and when we may face a major and imminent danger to life, health or property, and we are caught in a situation we have not been prepared for in any way whatsoever, well, we may indeed feel reduced to the case of animals in the middle of a wild jungle ...

But then, it is precisely one of the features of any a civilization that we are not so often faced with any major and imminent danger to life, health or property ...

And then, why nevertheless behave like animals in a jungle ?

Why instantly take one's own mere sensation of truth for the very truth itself ?

Well, the most likely answer seems to be that we, so to say, put the horses before the coachman, and even more so before the Lord, if ever we manage to become aware of the Lord sitting inside the coach ...

Yes, our affective being is so easily replacing the actual Lord ...

And for that purpose, is using our cognitive being ...

And in doing so - given the abilities of our cognitive being which abilities, comparatively, animals hardly have - our affective being is of course so much more effective than any animal's could ever be ...

So easily, indeed, do we replace the Lord with our affective being that this phenomenon all alone, and without the need for any additional archaeological or other proof, can rather decisively support the Darwinian claim to evolution, the claim that we humans have evolved from animals, and did so rather recently, with our specific cognitive being not yet properly enough integrated with our earlier and very strong affective one ...

And then, how many decisions do we make, decisions in which, no matter what amount and quality of cognitive input may be present, our affective being ends up so easily carrying the day ?

How many decisions, such as for instance, to approach life through a cheerful desperation ?

Amusingly, the way to avoid that animal like behaviour is very well known, and since time immemorial, it is expressed in sayings like :

“First measure seven times, and only after that cut.”

To be more precise, it is most certainly a blessing to have sensations of truth, and if possible, plenty of them, and quite strong as well. However, one should better try to validate each and every one of one's mere sensations of truth, and do so no matter how strong they may be ...

Validate !?!

Yes, of course, even if hardly without exception it is a painstaking and time consuming venture, a venture that one would most gladly avoid ...

Well, as it happens, only Mathematics, from among all human ventures, has a well and clearly defined validation methodology, called “proof”. Other hard sciences, such as for instance, Physics, rely both on Mathematics and experiments in their processes of validation. And in this respect, their validation methodologies are sufficiently credible. On the other hand, ventures like Social Science or Political Science, let alone, Philosophy or Theology, do not, and simply cannot have validation methodologies that may come anywhere near to the credibility of those of Mathematics or Physics. And the reason for that failure is simple and clear, even if so often disregarded, if not in fact, squarely rejected. Namely, in such ventures, and much unlike in Mathematics, the validation methodology cannot be reduced to rigorous mathematical proofs.

As for experiments, rigorous scientific ones, well, how do you do experiments which may involve many years of your own life ? Many years, after which you could still end up without clear answers, or on the contrary, you could still hold so much to a sensation of truth which is actually not truth ?

As for experiments on the social scale, well, during the last couple of centuries, and even more so during the last one, we have been doing such experiments at horrible costs to far too many humans ...

So much for being better than animals, and being so quite often to our own disadvantage ...

### **Back to C-S, and Starting with Its First Chapter**

In its first chapter, the book starts with several admirable statements. Here are some of them : “God, by definition, surpasses us. Religions do not. They are human, all too human ... God, if it exists, is transcendent ... God is reputed to be perfect. No religion can ever be so ... The existence of God is open to question. The existence of religions is not ...”

Of course, an atheist rejects the existence of God, and thus also the need for any religion. And then, what is such an atheist left with to do ? And before doing anything at all, what is he or she left with as a foundation for existence, a foundation which may inform his or her life, thus helping to keep to a life which is not mere nihilism, or simply run by animal type instincts ?

C-S gives an answer with two components : be in communion with certain other humans, exhibit a fidelity to a certain prejudice which in the case of the author of C-S is cheerful despair ...

The communion is, of course, supposed to replace the traditional church going crowd, while fidelity is the substitute for the good old faith ...

An amusing possible consequence along such a path is what in C-S is called a “Christian atheist, or Integrated Goy” ...

At least this is what is likely to follow in “What remains of the Christian West when it ceases to be Christian” ...

Well, altogether, when facing such fundamental issues, C-S exhibits a marked responsibility both on individual and social level. The trouble is, however, that it is not aware of essential and unprecedented features of our times mentioned above, and related to the ongoing inflow of new relevant realms which are being brought to our awareness. Instead, C-S is marshalling a considerable amount of citations from old masters, old in the sense of having lived in times which allowed the reduction of one’s thinking to concepts and categories that tended to stay the same for evermore ...

For instance, when C-S asks “What difference does loss of faith make?”, the answers are anchored in such a traditional framework.

One of such answers is that loss of faith does not affect knowledge. Another answer is that morals are not - or rather, need not inevitably be - affected either by loss of faith.

Both these conclusions are questionable. Faith, indeed, can quite dramatically direct one’s interests in knowledge, and alternatively, can close as irrelevant or even undesirable whole avenues of enquiry. Examples in this regard abound, for instance, in the history of science.

As for morals, the arguments in C-S are convincing only for good hearted persons, one of whom is so obviously the author of C-S himself. Certainly, it is not so easy to argue against an Ivan Karamazov who says that “If God does not exist, everything is allowed.” And citing Kant or Alain does not much impress when the latter, for instance, states that “Ethics means knowing that we are spirit and thus have certain obligations, for noblesse oblige. Ethics is neither more nor less than a sense of dignity.”

On the other hand, the two sections in the first chapter, entitled “Nihilism and Barbarism”, respectively, “Nihilism and Sophistry : The Two Temptations of Post-modernity” are worth pondering about a lot ...

But then, comes the section “Cheerful Despair”, a section which, all alone, may make one write a letter to the author of C-S, in order kindly to inform him about far far more preferable alternatives so widely open even to atheists ...

That section starts with Kant’s question “What may I hope for ?”

Well, having claimed - quite questionably - that the loss of hope does not change knowledge or morals, C-S now admits that it certainly changes to a considerable extent the hope, or for that matter, the hopelessness in human existence.

What C-S does not state, however, is that faith, mere faith, any faith for that matter, is a most sorry prejudice. And as such, it should be avoided, no matter what advantages, be they related to hope or whatever else, may elicit.

Furthermore, C-S does not seem to be aware of the fact that hope, just as much as hopelessness, is but a form of faith, and as such, it is merely yet another prejudice ...

Altogether, cheerful despair is also no more than a mere faith, and thus a prejudice ...

But to put it a bit more blatantly : we humans, just like animals, must face the physical world each and every day all over again, and that means among others, that we have to find enough to eat and drink, not to mention that we have to keep breathing all the time ...

Is there, therefore, any sane human who would like to find such a food and such a drink, let alone, such an air, of which one single intake may suffice for the rest of one's long and happy life ?

And if you happen to answer that, most honestly, you do not in any way whatsoever dream, let alone hope, for such a miracle, then why do you try to find a faith, a belief, a hope, or any other instance of one specific prejudice which - once you subjected yourself to it as a slave who would never ever re-think it afterwards - you do nevertheless expect it to keep you alive during a long and happy life ?

Why indeed are you ready and capable to face physical reality in such a day after day, one day at a time fashion, while when dealing with ontology, you cannot ever think of anything better than falling for evermore for one single particular prejudice ?

Let us, at the risk of repeating it, recall that the fundamental issues addressed in C-S are above all ontological, that is, are about what exists, what is real, what should we therefore take seriously, regardless of its practical advantages or disadvantages, and either we like it or not. And since the emergence of modern hard science which inaugurated the flow into our awareness of ever new relevant realms, a truly unprecedented aspect of approaching ontology has come into play. Namely, what is even more important, in fact, much more important than all the specific relevant realms discovered by hard science is the enriching mobility - never before experienced by us humans in known history - of what we can consider to exist, to be real ...

Clement of Alexandria could only dream about such a blessing, and then tried to identify it in Gnosticism ...

We, nowadays, do no longer need to dream about it, and one can hardly think about anything more solidly credible than the new relevant realms brought forth by hard science ...

And once such an ongoing expansion starts happening, one should better reconsider accordingly one's earlier and long time established, traditional approaches to ontology ...

As it happens, however, in C-S one can hardly find any such reconsideration ...

What one finds instead is the testimony of a truly good man who, having lost a traditional faith, has tried so very hard over quite a number of years to find an alternative ontology, one single and for evermore saving ontology. And in doing so, he has missed on the unprecedented novelty of the ways ontology can be pursued in our times ...

But to try to get to what may be an important point :

Who said that all approaches to ontology are reducible to language ?

Or, who said that all approaches to ontology are confined to our cognitive being ?

Are there, indeed, other, and possibly yet more fundamental ways we humans may deal with ontology ?

According to a number of well established old traditions human approaches to ontology do indeed go beyond language or our cognitive being ...

No trace of such awareness can, however, be found in C-S ...

### **On Chapter Two : Does God Exist ?**

C-S starts in chapter two with “Now comes the hardest part, or at least the most uncertain. Where God is concerned, two questions need to be raised : that of his definition and that of his existence ...”

Further, C-S states “I am what you may call a non-dogmatic atheist - that is, I do not claim to know that God does not exist, but I believe that he does not exist ...”

Well, honest and intelligent persons also reduced themselves to believing that Planet Earth is flat ...

What kind of foundation can belief, that is, mere belief, give to fundamental ontological issues ?

Now of course, if you set up a definition of God, or at least some sort of partial definition, as for instance one can find in C-S on page 68, then it is not so difficult to shoot down that alleged God, or at least, to end up believing in its nonexistence ...

On the other hand, it is hard to think of any sane person who, for instance, at the present moment, would claim to be aware of absolutely everything that exists, or in other words, who would believe to have completely solved the ontological problem. And then, if one is so determined to give a definition of God, so that it can shoot it down immediately after, well, why not venture the following tentative definition of an aspect of what traditionally is called God, aspect that quite clearly cannot so easily be disposed with :

- The likely infinity of realms which exist outside of one’s present awareness - and about which one’s only awareness seems to be that they are outside of one’s present awareness - can be seen as an aspect of what traditionally is called God, at least to the extent that, possibly, infinitely many such realms are nevertheless relevant to one’s existence.

Of course, the gap between knowing, and on the other hand, merely believing or having faith in, is immense. And when and where our knowledge happens to end, what can we do ? What can we do, in order to avoid undue psychological discomfort related to ontology ?

And is it, indeed, in the realms of “doing” that an end to such discomfort is to be found ?

But even more importantly : why should we escape for good all ontological discomfort ?

Well, traditionally, when and where we run out of knowledge, we can hardly help running into the refuge of belief , faith, unsupported conviction, or straight superstition ...

And when it comes to ontology, the easy satisfactions such a run can offer seem indeed considerable. And as we can see nowadays with the Islamic version of suicidal terrorists, such benefits may appear to

be extraordinary even to the extent that one is ready to sacrifice one's life, and do so right now ...

This is, of course, but one example where our affective being turns our cognitive being into a rather miserable slave ...

And lo and behold, to be a slave sometimes makes one feel better than to be free ...

Freedom, as is well known, has two sharply different variants : freedom from, and freedom for.

In order to enjoy the first, one need not always do anything at all, need not always qualify in any specific way since, on occasion, one can simply become "free from" by some lucky event ...

Far from being the same, however, with freedom for. Indeed, in order to be able to enjoy it, one must possess certain qualifications, certain abilities ...

And much of the history of humanity, and even more so during the endless varieties of liberation struggles of the last few centuries, is but the story of considerable number of humans firmly believing that ... one is free from having to be free for ...

Hence the rather rapid degeneration and failure of such struggles, a degeneration and failure which, nevertheless, hardly ever teaches many enough that one is simply not free from having to be free for ...

And when it comes to that immense gap between knowledge, and on the other hand, mere belief, faith or conviction, we keep endlessly falling for the illusion that one can be free from the discomfort of not knowing, and be so without being free for anything better than a fixed prejudice, if not in fact, a superstition ...

Strangely enough, even within what traditionally has been considered as essentially a n era of faith, such as for instance, Christianity in Medieval Europe, there had been remarkable approaches to the immense gap between faith and knowledge. One such example is the anonymous book *The Cloud of Unknowing* which was written for monastic novices and gives certain simple basic instructions about how to come nearer to God, how to try to know God better ...

A rather trivial, yet widespread view of such books and instructions is to call them "mystical", and then dismiss them as rather irrelevant for our modern times ...

And yet, an essential point in the mentioned anonymous book, for instance, a point even if less directly stated, is the stress on knowing, rather than first of all, and above all, on mere blind but most determined faith ...

And the only meaning the label "mystical" attached to such books and teachings can have in a more appropriate manner is that two fundamental ontological points are being stressed in them time and again, namely :

- The utter unknowable nature of what they call God, or the cloud of unknowing.
- The possibility of a relevant two way interaction with that cloud.

As for the first aspect, nowadays we can quite clearly see that the mentioned unknowable nature is far from being static, and thus given and fixed for evermore ...

It follows that such a “cloud of unknowing” is in fact far from being an absolute lost in its own contemplation of its own splendid and untouchable isolation ...

Related to the second aspect, what is recommended is not so much in the realms of our affective being, but rather in that of our cognitive one. And a good part of it, as mentioned in the sequel, is detachment, which certainly is not exactly a mostly affective approach to ontology ...

But let us return in more detail to some of the arguments in this second chapter of C-S.

A first debate is about the alleged difference between atheists and agnostics, with the claim that agnostics are some sort of negative atheists, or atheists by default, since they do not deny the existence of God, but only leave that issue up in the air ...

Well, once again, we are not explained why is it so important to take up a prejudiced position, be it atheism or agnosticism ...

If the air which you breathe in is so important that you could not do without it even for a few minutes, then, please, may I kindly ask you : why do you so soon breathe it out ?

Yes indeed, breathing in and out are by far the most important activities in your life. Yet most certainly, you do not dream, let alone, hope that a nice day may come when, at last, you can once and for good breathe in some very special kind of air, so that you need no longer bother about breathing for the rest of your life, a long and happy life ...

But then, with respect to a far less urgently and vitally important need, namely, an ontological one, you are ready to let yourself fall for one particular superstition, and expect to keep yourself satisfied in this way, and why not, even happy, for a long long time to come ...

Well, if this is how you choose to face and deal with ontology, then please, do not bother, and be an atheist, agnostic, or whatever you may like, including a cheerful desperate ...

C-S, of course, is ways more sophisticated and erudite in order not to dwell for longer on issues such as above. And then, Kant is brought in, among others, with his arguments from his celebrated Critique of Pure Reason. One of them is the three fold discrimination between opinion, faith, and lastly, knowledge. The respective differentiation, according to Kant, is made upon two criteria, namely, objective and subjective sufficiency. Opinion, says Kant, is insufficient both subjectively and objectively. Faith, on the other hand, is claimed to be considered by the beholder to be subjectively sufficient, while the issue of its objective sufficiency, or otherwise, is disregarded. As for knowledge, it is assumed to be both subjectively and objectively sufficient.

Amusingly, the alternative when one holds to a position which is objectively sufficient, but subjectively seems to be insufficient, is not considered. And this is precisely what the so called Greek mind is all about : to be able to follow truth, no matter where it may lead ...

Clearly, C-S is not quite able to stand up to such an approach. Instead, the criterion of subjective sufficiency has an all overriding priority. And then, in order to be able to reach the ... final ontological destination ... in one's life, a destination which makes one no more than a cheerful desperate, C-S is marshalling a considerable amount of arguments, many of them quite astute in their erudition ...

What a great pity, therefore, that when it comes to ontology, C-S simply cannot take the position which every human, and also animal, for that matter, does when it comes to such a vital and urgent need



as breathing ...

And thus the unprecedented opportunities in approaching ontology brought about by the great novelty of our days, when so many relevant realms are continually brought to our awareness, are simply missing from C-S, although this novelty - either we like it, or not - does in fact make us perform a certain kind of permanent breathing regarding ontology ...

But if we are with a German master of the order of Kant, then perhaps, we may as well recall an earlier and not less seminal one, namely, Meister Eckhart, who anyhow is considered to be the first German philosopher, in addition to being a truly remarkable and strikingly original Christian theologian. In one of his many sermons, some in German and other ones in Latin, Eckhart makes the statement, no doubt rather shocking in the Medieval Europe of his time, that he praises one's detachment above one's love of God, since when a person is detached, such a detachment is obliging God to love that person ...

Needless to say, such or similar views of detachment are not unique to Eckhart even within Catholicism, since Saint Teresa of Avila, for instance, had a not much different view. And when we look further afield at various other better known traditions, among them Buddhism in particular, the idea of detachment in realms ontological has an impressive and widely known record ...

And quite clearly, detachment is not in the realms of "doing" ...

Neither is it an instance of our affective being using our cognitive one as a miserably subservient highly qualified and efficient slave ...

So much for the all overriding priority given to subjective sufficiency or satisfaction ...

As for knowledge, C-S seems to have a rather narrow view when it states that "... no knowledge, either today or yesterday, has come along to decide" between atheism and faith.

Well, do we ever need a more clear knowledge than we have already nowadays about the fluidity of the boundaries between the known and the unknown ?

And what does that fluidity tell us in ontological terms, what else among others, than the sorry nature of a position which is based on ontological prejudice, or even mere superstition ?

But then of course, one can marshal arguments which claim to prove the existence, or otherwise, of God. And C-S is busy with three of the better known ones, namely, the so called ontological, cosmological and physico-theological ones, so as to be able immediately after that to shoot them down ...

This is, of course, good old stuff, going back a millennium, if not more, even in the Christian tradition. And it gave opportunity to some remarkable persons to exercise themselves in arguments which were either in favour of, or opposing those formulated by earlier thinkers.

Yet what is missed in C-S is the ... third alternative ...

The alternative which, from the very start, recognizes the utter futility of any such argumentation. A futility which follows from the fact that relevant aspects - and quite likely infinitely many - of what goes by the name of God are never to be accessible to our awareness, except for our awareness of that very fact of their inaccessibility ...

In short, all such arguments may be seen as breaking the Second Commandment, namely, the prohibition of worshiping graven images. And clearly, arguments in language are - and can never ever be more than - mere graven images ...

On the other hand, what is at stake here is so astutely described by well known Zen-Buddhist saying :

“You show the fool the Moon, and he is looking at your finger.”

Well, so often, such a fool is not even looking at your finger, and instead, is only looking at his own dirty toe ...

And if we may be tempted to take an example from Meister Eckhart’s not seldom daringly striking formulations, we may even see the present day situation as follows :

- The unprecedented fact in known human history that, nowadays, so many relevant new realms are brought to our awareness by science is but a new way God -whatever that mere name may happen to stand for - is speaking to us, to so many of us, to those for instance who are more directly involved in this phenomenon and are able to realize fully enough its significance, a significance which reaches far beyond any specifics or utility.

Certainly, what we came to learn in modern times is the fluidity to which even the deepest and most fundamental theories of science are subjected. For instance, Newton’s physics is a particular case of Einstein’s Special Relativity, let alone of his General Relativity. As for Quantum Theory, it is widely considered among specialists to be underlying all presently known Physics, including the realms of Special and General Relativity, thus also of Newtonian Mechanics, although so far, one could not bring together Relativity and the Quanta into a grand unified theory, and do so in a rigorous manner ...

Thus even the realms of hard science turn out to be subjected to a significant fluidity ...

Why should then not be the same with realms beyond the reaches of science, realms relevant to ontology ?

And how about the very concepts one uses in ontology ?

If religion and faith in the existence of God must be affected by such a fluidity, than how about atheism, agnosticism, and the like be also affected ?

What may so uniquely special about them as to remain ever the same, no matter how much fluidity one is experiencing all around ?

To paraphrase Karamozov : “If God goes, then everything else must go as well ...”

The presence of evil is another issue debated in C-S at some length. And to given an idea about the extent of concern with that issue, one can mention that C-S manages to enrol even some important teachings from the Kabbalah related to “tzimtzum”, which is supposed to explain why God appears as if withdrawn from Creation ...

Altogether, the touching naivety of the various arguments brought forth over the ages related to the existence of evil is only exceeded by the blindness to the utter insufficiency of the avalanche of such “doing” in language, and thus once again failing to heed the above Zen-Buddhist saying ...

But then, if it is indeed so irresistible to “look at the finger” and merely get lost in “doing” language, then let us try and use one more “finger” in order to try to point to that most elusive Moon ...

Well, evil is of course a highly value charged concept. And as such, it is much dependent not only on a specific culture or civilization, but more generally, on a strongly biased anthropocentrism as well.

To give an example, I remember a story told to me by one of my friends, a South African white man whose roots in the country happen to go back more than three centuries. Well, prior to the advent of the New South Africa in 1994, many people kept asking him whether, being classified as a white Afrikaner, he was not afraid of the ANC black government coming into power. And his answer to that question was simple : “I would rather be afraid of the fish, chicken, sheep, pigs or cows coming into power, since so many of them got killed in order to be eaten by me ...”

Well, for all such animals, we humans are of course evil, and as such, just about the ultimate one ...

As far as we are concerned, however, we are not at all evil, as long as we kill those animals for food, and do so mercifully. Indeed, one of the seven laws given to the Biblical Noah is precisely about that, and those laws are supposed to apply not only to Jews, Christians and Moslems, but to all humankind as well ...

So much for the manifest relativity of the concept of evil ...

As for what may appear to be its more deep roots, the following may be worth considering.

On our Planet Earth one important feature is that life feeds upon itself. And that holds regardless of what Noah was allowed, or for that matter, was not allowed to do ...

Well, according to the Hindu tradition one is advised to get out of that cycle, and not feed upon life, not even plant life ...

Given, however, the reality of that cycle, a lot of relative evil can, and does happen. For instance, an immense range of bacteria and viruses find us humans, as well as other living creatures, to be a most delicious food. And certainly, they cannot be accused of not having studied the seven laws given to Noah ...

More basically yet, we can note that the realms of biosphere, which include us humans as well, can be seen as existing upon a dynamic equilibrium that has a rather fragile stability. And that equilibrium is manifest both on the level of individuals, as well as of the species, and in fact, of the whole relevant ecosystem. After all, such an equilibrium applies as well to realms other than the biosphere, as for instance that of Physics, thus it should not necessarily be seen as having anything evil in it ...

As for us humans, we are supposed to be not only entities in Biology or Physics. And regarding our role or place in Creation, we cannot so easily reduce it to the expectations of one or another culture, or even to those of one or another civilization ...

Furthermore, apparently so much more than other living creatures, we may indeed be endowed with the potential ability for a two way interaction with what is, with what is real ...

And needless to say, that ability, if exercised, may tilt the equilibrium to our favour ...

And what “favour” means here is certainly not reducible to what some culture or civilization claims to be ...

And it should not be reduced to the more usual versions of anthropocentrism either ...

And so it comes to pass that the question “Why bad things happen to good people ?” can so easily give major headaches to so many a theologian, philosopher, or even mere atheist, agnostic, or others of the kind ...

C-S presents a number of related views. Freud, for instance, states that “The world is not a nursery.” Alain prefers a more mature looking formulation, according to which “The Earth made us no promises.” And so on, and so on ...

Amusingly, an extraordinary insightful thinker like Leibniz prefers two questions, instead of any sort of statement, namely “If God exists, whence evil ?” and “If God does not exist, whence good ?”

And if we are to further pursue a certain sophistication, we may as well recall Simone Weil’s view : “Creation is for God an act not of expansion but of withdrawal, of renunciation. God and all His creatures are less than God alone. God accepted this limitation. He emptied Himself of a part of being. Already in the act of His divinity, He had emptied Himself - which is why Saint John says the Lamb was slaughtered as of the creation of the world.”

Certainly, such a statement cannot, to use Kant’s criteria, ever be found objectively satisfactory, and all it can do is to give some subjective satisfaction, one that itself feels rather tentative, thus must somehow be renewed or reinforced time and again ...

Thus, willingly or not, either we like it or not, we are back to the ways of breathing ...

Of breathing in and out ...

Of ever having to try to breathe in, since what we had a moment ago subjectively satisfactory may so easily cease to be so simply all on its own, simply due to an ever lingering doubt, and all that no matter how much we would like to hold to it ...

And it is not only that we have to keep breathing in. No, not at all. We better try all sort of “air” to breathe in ...

And if one happens to be as good as a Simone Weil, or the author of C-S, then one may have to struggle to provide such “air” for himself or herself ...

So much for having ever to chase subjective sufficiency ...

So much for having our affective being in the position to run our cognitive one ...

And as one can note, that kind of breathing in is not quite a cheerful venture, since it is imposed upon us by the ongoing vagaries of lack of a stable and reliable subjective satisfaction ...

C-S expresses a deep sympathy for Simone Weil, when writes “Despite the great admiration and tenderness I feel for Simone Weil, this is what I’ve always found impossible to conceive and accept” in reference to the above citation from her. Then C-S continues with “In these matters, experience is more eloquent than metaphysics, and sensitivity may be more important than experience ... There is too much horror in the world, too much suffering, too much injustice - and too little happiness - for the concept of its creation by an almighty, infinitely kind God to be tenable in my eyes ...”

Further C-S cites Pascal's comment "We must be born guilty, or God would be unjust", and decides to cut the Gordian Knot by declaring that "There is a third, far simpler possibility : namely, that God does not exist."

Well, no matter how much sympathy one may feel for the persons fallen for such views on fundamental ontological issues, one may perhaps has to say it that the whole venture of such argumentations may rather recall the ways of an elite chattering class ...

Elite, both by having such ontological concerns, and being erudite enough in the chattering of those who came before them and were similarly minded and preoccupied ...

Elite which, however, suffers from two important weaknesses :

One is a general typical human one, and it manifests itself since our earliest childhood. Namely, the utter asymmetry how we tend to treat the questions we raise, and on the other hand, the answers to them, as given by others, or even by ourselves. Certainly, we hardly ever, if at all, question the questions we raise. No, they just about always come up in us with such an absolute certainty about their burning relevance that we would not think of questioning them ...

On the other hand, seldom if at all do we feel in the same way about the answers we may get from others, or from ourselves. No, such answers far too often tend to be shadowed by doubt, by some ever lingering doubt ...

The second weakness is, of course, the endlessness of the chattering, internal or external, the members of this elite seem to have to fall into, as if by some necessity ...

As for being involved in not much more than chattering, well, there is all too often a certain awareness among the members of this elite about the insufficiency, if not in fact, inadequacy of such an approach. And to warn against this weakness, C-S writes in this respect that "experience is more eloquent than metaphysics" ...

And what is that experience, an experience which so thoroughly is missed even by the mentioned elite chattering class ?

Well, let us recall Heidegger who observed that Western philosophy has forgotten about Being, ever since Plato. And we may add to it the yet sharper comment of Alfred North Whitehead, according to whom Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato ...

Indeed, the experience, direct experience, in fact, about which the mentioned elite chattering class seems to know very little, if anything at all, is that of Being which, of course, must inevitably underlie both Doing and Having, and also Knowing and Understanding ...

And when it comes to Being, all that erudite chattering can at best do is merely to point to the Moon ...

However, in doing so, it should be extremely careful not to end up looking at its own finger, or even worse, looking at some false Moon ...

And needless to say, it is so easy to start chasing some such false Moon ...

After all, Being is not reducible to, let alone replaceable by, Doing, Having, or even Knowing and Understanding ...

Indeed, Doing, Having, Knowing and Understanding are so much within the realms of Time and Space, while Being reaches far beyond these realms, and in fact, it may simply be that the essence of Being is ways outside of these realms ...

And as if this would not be enough in one's venture towards ontological fundamentals, one can recall that Hindu Cosmology considers Being, or Manifest Creation as a particular, special aspect, one that is not all. Indeed, it is claimed that Manifest Creation periodically withdraws into the Unmanifest, where it remains for unknown ages, before it becomes manifest again for a while ...

And, needless to say, Being is even less reducible to such clearly and highly relative concepts as evil, good, happiness, suffering, injustice, and so on ...

And then, merely for amusement, may we kindly ask :

Who is suffering, who is happy, who feels the injustice, who enjoys the good ?

Is it our bodies, emotions or minds which experience any of the above ?

Or may also other no less important entities related to us be involved in such experiences ?

And can any of that be taken without considering the context ?

The context which is certainly not reducible - and thus as an elementary matter of wisdom, should not be reduced - to one or another individual, cultural, civilizational, or for that matter, anthropocentric set of assumptions ?

The context which, as such, is unique and common to all and to everything, since it is the wholeness, the inevitable wholeness of it, which alone characterizes it ?

In regard of anthropocentrism, it may be amusing to recall that Gurdjieff, a teacher famous in certain Western intellectual circles around the time of the First World War and for a while later, had as one of his more strange ideas that we humans on Planet Earth have the role to feed the Moon ...

So much for any attempt to hold consciously, or not, to any kind of anthropocentric assumption on the context within which good and evil are supposed to be seen ...

It is, of course, highly tempting as a human individual to focus on the immense multiplicity in creation, and thus on the corresponding countless boundaries that separate various entities in that multiplicity. And then, one of the most obvious and vitally important such boundaries one cannot help seeing is, so to say, one's own skin, with one being inside of it, and everything and everybody else being on the outside ...

And right from our first conscious days, we cannot help noticing that the part outside of our skin is typically indifferent to us. Certainly, it can on occasion be so good to us. However, so often it is simply deadly dangerous ...

So it comes to pass that we have a strong tendency to see the context relevant to our individual existence as defined so much by this separation given by our own skin ...

And then, needless to say, good and evil, and the rest, become quite automatically defined in terms which appear to us as clearly and inevitably obvious. And we do no longer care much about whether,

indeed, we were meant for nothing else but to feed the Moon ...

The rest, quite inevitably, can so easily become reduced to an endless chattering of an elite class ...

And chattering, no matter of which kind, is not quite the same as Being ...

Being, of which European philosophy has forgotten for more than two millennia, and instead, produced a rather vast footnote to the teachings of the last philosopher among us who was focusing on it, namely, Plato ...

It was reported that Saint Thomas Aquinas, before reaching the age of fifty, and shortly before his death, suddenly stopped for good his intense and prolific writing activities, and stated that all of it was merely so much chaff and straw, while the glory of God kept shining in all its splendour, a splendour which could never be contained in - and needed not any kind of - verbal or written expression ...

And if by now, in Western tradition, it is so strange and hard to reconnect with Being, then perhaps, we can start to wake up to the unprecedented fact of the ongoing considerable shifts of the boundaries between known realms and unknown ones, shifts which can, and do, give a completely new and so much more lively perception of, and meaning to Being ...

Saint Anselm considered that one had to believe, in order to understand ...

Not much later, Saint Abelard stated the opposite order of things, namely that, one had to understand, in order to be able to believe. He also taught that doubting leads to questioning, and questioning leads to understanding, a process which, of course, keeps going on, iteration after iteration ...

Well, the erudite chattering of an elite class seems - willingly or not, consciously or not - to oscillate between the approaches of Anselm and Abelard, and does so, however, by trying to eliminate all doubt, although it never manages to do so ...

There is, however, no awareness that doubt simply cannot be overcome as a result from any such oscillations ...

Instead, one should try to go deeper into ontology, and more near towards the roots of Being, and why not, perhaps even further ...

One simply cannot help feeling a deep sympathy when reading testimonies of long ongoing intimate personal struggles, such as for instance in the above citation from Simone Weil, or those found in quite some detail in C-S ...

And it is so much of a pity to see such struggles taking place in our own time, yet constricted to one or another static, rigid, and never seriously questioned ancient type conceptual setup ...

The significant emergence of modern atheism or agnosticism is itself an effect of the deeply - even if often less consciously so - felt inadequacy of archaic conceptual setups, an inadequacy brought about to a large extent by the emergence of undreamt of conceptual and practical realities produced by modern science and technology. Yet the more true and relevant consequences of these realities do not seem to reach deep and consequentially enough in the awareness of members of the elite chattering class ...

After all, C P Snow's two cultures have during the last half a century only grown further and further apart. And on the scientific-technological side, the chattering is not so much about fundamental onto-

logical issues, while on the other side, science and technology may often be perceived as not much more than a necessary, or rather, merely convenient evil, one that one approaches with feelings like when one must go to a dentist ...

As a consequence, neither of the two sides connects that truly unprecedented and massively consequential departure in modern times, brought about by science and technology, with fundamental ontological issues ...

The side which feels about it like going to the dentist is deeply convinced that science is just about irrelevant with respect to spirituality. And to buttress that view, it tends to look at this unprecedented modern venture with a certain arrogant superiority. And its members seem to do so as if trying to compensate for an ever lingering feeling of sour grapes, feeling caused by the fact that, already back at primary or secondary school, they had to realize that they were not good enough to embark upon that venture ...

Well, it is reported that on the door of Plato's Academy it was written "Those who do not know Geometry, need not enter." And we should remember that Geometry in the times of Plato was by far the most perfect science. Consequently, in our times, the side in the two culture divide which detests going to the dentist, should have the same warning written perhaps upon their own doors, with General Relativity, Quantum Theory, and why not, Mathematical Theories like Category Theory, and so on, replacing the word Geometry ...

And if Plato is seen as being too old to take his mentioned injunction as still being normative, well, we can recall Einstein's related view, namely that

"Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind."

As for the other side of the two cultures, they simply do not bother much about spiritual issues. And thus again they also miss, this time by mere default, to make the mentioned connection ...

Yes, the unintended, undesirable and unforeseen consequences of more than two millennia of having forgotten about Being, and about the yet more fundamental possible realms, cannot so easily be avoided ...

And it can even less be avoided, as long as one is simply not aware of any such consequences, as long as one is simply ignorant about them ...

There are, indeed, various deeper and deeper levels of ignorance ...

A first level is when, like in the case of a typical Westerner, one does not know, say, the Chinese language, but one is fully aware of that fact, therefore, one can, if one wishes so, get out of that ignorance by learning that language. In this way one is not condemned for ever more to that specific ignorance, and one is free to get out of it.

A second and deeper level of ignorance is when one does not know about something, and on top of it, one does not know about one's respective ignorance, thus one is twice ignorant. Of course, such a state can be an eternal trap, unless somehow one happens to find out about one's respective ignorance, and thus one graduates to the lesser first level ignorance.

Yet so often, one may be in a third level ignorance which is the case of already being in the second level one, to which is added the hostility one manifests towards ever considering that one is already in a second level ignorance. Such a hostility will then prevent one to graduate to the lesser, second level



ignorance, even when one may benefit from the good fortune of being faced with the fact of being already in a second level ignorance ...

And one can only wonder whether there may be even more deep levels of ignorance ...

Well, the reality of two cultures seems to have pushed us into at least a second level ignorance, and an ignorance about nothing less than Being ...

And how to reconnect with Being, and furthermore, with possibly yet deeper realms ?

Detachment will oblige God to love you, says Meister Eckhart ...

And what is, then, that miraculous detachment ?

Well, certainly it is not only, and not even mainly, about detaching oneself from all that happens to be outside of one's own skin ...

On the contrary, it may be even more, and first of all, a detachment from what a Freud would call "Id, Ego and Super-Ego" ...

In Hassidic teaching, for instance, that detachment is called in Hebrew "bitul", or "nullification", or perhaps, "emptying oneself" ...

A medical doctor, for instance, when faces a patient and tries to establish the diagnosis, has to do so on what may be called absolute terms, that is, in such a way as to be as near as possible to the real situation of the patient, and as such, unrelated to anything or anybody else. And then, it is of course so much better if such a medical doctor does not bring in that process any personal aspects of his or her own, except of course the best of his or her knowledge, experience and understanding, and in addition possibly may also consult another medical doctor.

Such an approach may, therefore, assume quite a lot of "nullification" ...  
And in the proper pursuit of so many other professions the same may, needless to say, be useful ...

Whatever the meaning of such "nullification" may be, one thing is quite clear : Meister Eckhart's detachment has very little to do with any kind of erudite chattering of one or another elite class ...  
And such chattering may at most serve as the finger pointing to the Moon ...

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