

# HOMAGE TO STRETCHER BEARER

*The Human Oscillation Between  
Two Sensations of Oneness*

Gideon Tolkowsky



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*The Purpose of Intellect  
Is to Relieve Human Suffering*



# Table of Contents

Preface .....	vii
Chapter One: The Truth and the I .....	1
<i>The Philosophical and the Psychological</i> .....	5
<i>The Chasm's Historical Roots</i> .....	10
<i>A Thirst for Mattering</i> .....	17
<i>The Resonance</i> .....	19
Chapter Two: The Lion's Den.....	24
<i>Expulsion from the Garden of Eden</i> .....	26
<i>The Little Questions</i> .....	28
<i>Time and Sequential Thinking</i> .....	32
<i>The Polytheism to Monotheism Transformation</i> .....	38
Chapter Three: The Form-Substance Divorce.....	49
<i>Anything Goes</i> .....	54
<i>The Divorce in Philosophy, Art, History,</i> <i>Computer Science</i> .....	59
<i>A Monstrous Climax</i> .....	65
Chapter Four: Words .....	71
<i>Prose and Poetry</i> .....	75
<i>Language and Creation</i> .....	80
<i>The Spiritual Big Bang</i> .....	84
Chapter Five: Patterns .....	96
<i>The Art of Reduction</i> .....	98
<i>Unity of Contrasts</i> .....	103
<i>Cyclicity and Change</i> .....	107

<i>Mythology and Patterns</i> .....	111
<i>The Mythology of Science</i> .....	115
<i>Determinism</i> .....	121
Chapter Six: The Two Onenesses .....	128
Chapter Seven: Ethical and Ethicless .....	140
<i>Choosing Between the Two Regimes</i> .....	153
<i>The Catapults</i> .....	161
Chapter Eight: Making Sense .....	171
<i>Ethics and Sensibility</i> .....	175
<i>A Sense of History</i> .....	184
<i>Reversal of Time Arrow</i> .....	189
<i>Post-Modern Ideophobia</i> .....	198
Chapter Nine: Synthesis .....	203
<i>Love-Hate Relationship</i> .....	210
<i>Bird of Prayer</i> .....	212
<i>A Balancing Act</i> .....	223
Epilogue: The Stretcher Bearer .....	231



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“Moses” by Gustave Doré



## Preface

A book, like a musical piece, begins with a theme. It then blossoms, with variations on the theme following one another like petals that unfold, each revealing yet another facet of the melody. It is not until it is rich with variations, with multi-shaded echoes of the main theme, that a book may be considered complete.

This book's theme is encapsulated in the two figures – the cross-legged meditating sage and the prophet-with-a-temper descending from Mount Sinai, carrying the commandments in stone. Both figures radiate a deep sense of presence of an abstraction that well transcends the here and now. Yet, as gripping as this sensation is, it is incredibly different between the two images. One conveys serenity and pacification of the self, the other conveys firm governance of will. One suggests a break-away, the other a tightening relationship. While both represent an awe-inspiring, bigger-than-life sense of wholeness, they are nevertheless different as different can be. One makes us ponder and muse. The other pokes us to think and comprehend.

At times we think and at times we ponder. While thinking, we crisply apply our mind to our daily toils, toss and debate with ourselves life's

cabbages and kings. While pondering, we tenderly gaze at the little dots that drift and float in mid-air on a sunny day, and we willingly surrender. Then, at the end of both thinking and pondering lanes, there always awaits us a mental state in which we gravitate toward an abstract sensation of wholeness, an all-encompassing perception of reality. We undergo a process of reduction, whereby all the bits and pieces of concrete thought and of hazy ponder are set aside, and a mental vortex swirls us into a singular place. There, we find ourselves staring straight into the eyes of pure, intact not-knowing. Both think and ponder, consider and muse, boil down to not-knowing. One big cloud of not-knowing dawns on us and engulfs us with a sensation of wholeness, which has no horizon. While knowing has its boundaries, not-knowing does not. It is whole, uniform and boundless.

Yet, there is not just one, single sense of wholeness at the end of the lane. There are actually two of them. At the end of the pondering lane we are ambushed by a mystical sensation of wholeness, whose color is whitish, whose touch is foggy, whose sound is silence, and whose command is “empty thyself.” In contrast, at the end of the thinking lane there awaits us a “thinking” wholeness, whose color is stern, whose touch is parental, whose sound is language, and whose command is “behave yourself.” At times we gravitate toward “voidish” wholeness and at times toward the – let us call it – “intellectual” wholeness.

Why these two sensations of wholeness? What

are their respective origins? Or, is their origin one and the same? What functions do they serve in us? Do we need them both? Do we *have* to choose between them? Do we have to commit to one, or, alternatively, can we nurture both within ourselves? Is there a synergy between the two? Can we, by cultivating both, achieve a sum that is greater than its two parts? These questions make our book's theme. From it, there follow the variations.

The variations will carry us through a journey. It will start on reasonably firm ground, as journeys do. It will then, very quickly in fact, venture into substantially swampier ground, where the crocodiles roam and poison-tipped arrows dash out of nowhere – also as journeys do, or at least the worthy ones. While at the heart of wilderness, we will register the observation that neither of the two sensations of wholeness by itself offers us complete coverage of our inner needs. We apparently need them both, or else – so would the simplistic yet not unreasonable argument go – we would not actually gravitate toward both while accompanied by a sense of relieving awe. Each of the two sensations of wholeness offers us its own indigenous merchandise. One offers refuge from a constantly hurricaned world, the other offers guidance along the world's flooded roads.

Voidish wholeness holds the promise of reducing the full complexities of life into the very bare necessities, into plain, minimalistic simplicity, rid of both responsibility and authority. It does not require us to commit, nor to be dependent; no give

and take; just shed off our self and merge with infinite, peaceful uniformity. We wear our white cotton gown, grab our primitive walking stick, and hit the road. An ideal refuge it is indeed.

The other, intellectual wholeness, offers us a give-and-take relationship. It is a channel for negotiating our way toward a better life, by humbly accepting the unfathomable and incomprehensible wisdom and potency of some grand patriarch, or matriarch, for that matter. Rather than nullify our aspirations, the intellectual sense of wholeness holds a promise for us to attain them. It is a relationship-driven sensation of wholeness. If we do this, we get that – for better and worse. While the void has no interest in relationships, the intellect craves them – as it has an insatiable need for audience, feedback, and judgment.

Evidently, the two sensations of wholeness offer two distinctly different strategies for coping. We clearly need them both. Committing to either one would leave us with a deep sense of want. On one hand, we need to be able to nullify, even if temporarily, our desires and requests, while ridding ourselves of the pestering by an ever-aspiring self. On the other hand, we do have our aspirations, as well as our responsibilities. And, above all, we entertain a priceless hope that we can negotiate a better life for ourselves and others around us.

What, then, do we do? How do we reconcile both strategies? Being human, we are maestros of adaptation, and in our infinite capacity to adapt, we seek a way to eat the cake and have it. We just

have to find a way to be at both places, in both think and ponder lanes. There ought to be a way for us to hold the stick at both ends.

Indeed, there is one. We *oscillate*. We constantly oscillate between the two sensations of wholeness, between void and intellect, between caress and hope. The void offers us a soothing shelter, yet no guiding map. The intellect, in turn, points at targets we can strive to reach, alongside directions for how to get there, but the journey is bound to be burdensome. Not surprisingly, each of the two strategies, each of the two sensations of wholeness, offers upside at a price. Being in need of both systems, and aware of both costs, we oscillate.

We hop back and forth between the two sensations of wholeness. At times, the hopping is pacific, like the gentle quiver of a boat on a quiet, breezy lake. At other times, it assumes the energy of a dazzling rollercoaster. Like many other forms of inner oscillation, this one too leaves us prey to an aggravating sense of indecisiveness. It is as if we cannot make up our mind. What *is* it that we want? Do we aspire to be one with the void? Or, do we strive to find and follow the guidance? These are very different slates for aligning with that which awaits us at the end of both think and ponder lanes, that which we always end up swirling and gravitating towards – a sense of wholeness.

In this book, we will submit that the oscillation along the axis of dual wholeness is *not* a fault in the way we are designed. It is not a product of a crack in our inner structure. It is not bad thinking,

or excessive baggage that we carry with us in our travel through life. It is in fact part of our travel bare necessities, alongside toothbrush and comb. It resides at the core of our inner structure. We *need* both sensations of wholeness. We thrive on both “onenesses”, to use a convenient code-name. And our capacity to oscillate between the two is nothing less than a remarkable quality nature has blessed us with. Hence no need for grievance over presumed indecisiveness.

Meanwhile, in a seemingly separate and unrelated corner of our inner life, yet another tension brews, often reaching unmanageable proportions. It is the tension between two different worldviews, both having remote historical roots yet still potent as ever before. One worldview describes the universe as an infinitely wide and alarmingly diluted space, with us occupying a marginal place in it, not really *matter*ing to it one way or another. The other is the good old view of a human-centric universe, a universe in whose center we reside, like a spider that sits at the hub of its net by virtue of having woven it itself. It is a universe where we not only matter but, in fact, the way we handle ourselves makes all the difference in the world and to the world.

Apparently, the former, infinity-prone worldview is gaining the upper hand in our time. It is the way of science, and of current philosophical strands. The common denominator to them all is human non-centricity; that is to say – the cosmos is infinite, infinity has no center, so, by definition, we

cannot be at, let alone actually *be*, the center of the universe. This worldview is, by and large, the presently reigning view. It belongs to a winning dynasty, so far. It is the way of quantification, of fact-finding and fact-processing, of acrobatic analytical philosophizing, of multiplicity of worlds and variety of rules that govern them, of a universe made of an endless collection of realities – some presumably real and some presumably virtual. It is a worldview by which anything goes. No location is more central than other, no strand of life enjoys a preferable status to other, and, unavoidably, no idea is more correct than other.

The other worldview, the human-centric view, is consistently losing ground. It is the shadow dynasty, currently occupying the opposition benches. The view by which the cosmos is a hierarchical pyramid, at the pinnacle of which resides humanity, is distinctly unpopular. The coalition benches are taken by a “flat” worldview, composed of one, whole, complete eco-system, each of its parts being just as crucial as the other. Take one out, and the whole structure is at risk of self-destruction. The human element holds no preferred status. It is not more valuable to the well-being of the entire system than any other element. In fact, it is even considered alarmingly harmful to the system. Gaia, to use this representative term, is gaining currency. In contrast, humanism – let us use this term to describe the human-centric worldview – is on the retreat. Dryly put, its budgets are gone.

This *de facto* victory of the human non-centric

view perhaps leaves us very knowledgeable and well qualified for life's job market, in the general sense of the term; but it also leaves us lonely, anxious, lacking solid ground under our feet. To give this statement a somewhat Russian flavor – Pushkin,<sup>1</sup> sadly, is gone.

Much ink has been poured over much paper in an attempt to characterize the two worldviews, at times to differentiate between them and at times to reconcile them. In vain, though. The chasm between the two remains wider than ever. We will not attempt to eliminate it. This would be way out of our league. Rather, in this book we will argue that these two worldviews are inherently and distinctly separate, unbridgeable, always have been and always will be. They both come with the territory, the territory being our very nature, our very composition. Both are with us, just like think and ponder capacities, which are both wired into our system.

Furthermore, *we will argue that the roots of the human-centric and the human non-centric systems are in the two perceptions of wholeness that we possess.* We will correlate the two onenesses with the two worldviews. We will attempt to show that these are both mirror images of one and the same duality. We will submit that the voidish oneness is human non-centric, correlated with the infinite and homogeneous view of the cosmos. In contrast, so we will argue,

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<sup>1</sup> The great nineteenth century Russian poet, symbolizing – more than any other writer – the “great Russian soul.”

the intellectual sense of oneness is human-centric by nature, going hand in hand with the view of a cosmic spider net at the hub of which rests the weaving spider – us.

We will then suggest that this duality that flourishes within us is a strength rather than a weakness. It is not paralyzing indecisiveness. It is fertile soil. Therefore, so we will ambitiously advocate, Pushkin *can* be brought back to the table. We will herald that reconciliation between the two worldviews is possible; not unification, but reconciliation, by way of leveraging the two against each other, thus making the best of what our nature offers us – the capacity to experience both onenesses and to oscillate between them. These will be the variations on this book's theme.

From our very infancy, we are taught to pursue lines of thinking and of argumentation in a “linear” fashion. We are taught to pierce through our life dilemmas by analyzing a situation, developing an opinion about it, and living by our opinion. If we are lucky, we are also taught that life is not always that simple, that sometimes there are conflicting answers to questions, and that we just have to live with this annoying reality and make the best of it. We are taught that the essence of maturity is learning to accept conflicting answers, learning to live with dichotomies. We are told that duality is a necessary evil, and that living with it equals being wise. In short, we are taught that parallel adoption of differing, certainly of conflicting views of the world we live in is counter-intellectual,

counter-proper-thinking, yet it is one of those weaknesses that we, feeble humans, possess and must learn to accept.

This book takes an opposite view. We will argue here that the two sensations of wholeness, the void type, which at the end of the day boils down to a state of not-knowing, and the intellectual type, which at the end of the day *also* boils down to a deep sense of not-knowing, alongside the dichotomies they bring about, are both vital assets. An oscillation between the two is *not* a necessary-evil-slash-a-sign-of-maturity-slash-sign-of-human-feebleness. We will argue that the acceptance of both onenesses, and the capacity to oscillate between them, represents a precious gift given to us by our evolution. This capacity can be put to effective work in tackling some of the more profound dilemmas that bog us down throughout life.

Lastly for this opening, whenever lost, the reader may wish to turn to the table at the end of the book, which summarizes the key distinctions we will make throughout the book between the two sensations of wholeness. Unless, of course, the reader fancies that admittedly agreeable sense of tickle often associated with being lost.

CHAPTER ONE

# The Truth and the I

Our book is about the two onenesses. This is our theme, from which will follow variations. Variations being what they are, they must start cautiously. That is to say, they must begin with gentle deviations from the main theme. They had better not gallop away from the theme too abruptly, so as to maintain continuity and, with it, harmony. Differently put, variations had better start at the beginning.

Following this prudent convention, our variations on the theme will begin with an attempt to identify the roots of the two sensations of wholeness. We will endeavor to fixate them in our inner composition, anchor them in the bottom of our soul. We will legitimize their coexistence and, by doing so, we will, it is hoped, put in place a sufficiently firm foothold for the variations that will subsequently follow.

The two onenesses are not products of our own thinking capacity. We did not invent them, as such. They do not result from conscious, head-scratching, attention-consuming mental efforts of ours. Rather, they are products of our inner structure, of the way we are. In the normal course of

thinking and pondering, we do not “figure out” the two onenesses. We just gravitate toward them, simply by letting ourselves go, or letting ourselves be carried on the waves of awe. So much so, that it is almost impossible to surrender to thought, or to ponder, without being at some point overtaken by that swirl of gravity that throws us into a place where oneness dwells. At times we gravitate into the empty void, at other times into dense intellectual elation. Both are as overwhelming. By the same token, both are hardly avoidable. We do not choose to gravitate. It just happens.

There are probably many different factors that direct this flow of inner traffic that bustles within us, to one destination or to the other. There is an entire array of green and red traffic lights, alongside some amber lights of indecisiveness, that flicker in our mind and direct us to this oneness or to the other, by a traffic program the logic of which we can hardly comprehend. Whether we find ourselves in a state of thinking, or in a state of pondering, is hardly a matter of conscious choice.

The internal traffic lights that direct us to this or that state of mind come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. They vary. They reflect our mental state of the moment, our physical state, and external circumstances. In short, there exists a very rich menu of traffic lights directing us throughout the narrow, winding lanes leading to the two onenesses – so much so that we will make no attempt here to catalogue and categorize this array.

One observation that we can make, though,

about how and why we navigate toward each of the two onenesses, is the following: We are generally directed at the voidish experience of wholeness when we are overwhelmed by a necessity to escape, to rest, to find shelter in a safe haven. And we are directed toward an intellectual experience of wholeness when we are overtaken by a craving for help and guidance. Soothing shelter, and a firm guiding hand, are two basic needs of ours, while constantly seeking satisfaction in the bosom of one sense of wholeness or another.

The first, voidish oneness involves our desire to assimilate in the world, to dissipate into its infinity, *to be the world*, thus removing our self away from the bore sight of those avid snipers called facts of life. The other, intellectual sense of wholeness involves an act perhaps best described in the Book of Psalms: "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from where shall my help come?"

On the face of it, these latter words certainly have the look and sound of an outward-directed cry, of an attempt to reach out for the world around us. They give rise to an image of us standing up, turning our look to the distant horizon and hawkishly scouting for the white cavalry. However, if observed more closely, these words actually stand for an act of *distinction* between ourselves and the world. They reflect a state of mind of setting oneself aside from the world. *Here* am I, *there* are the facts of life, and I need guidance on how to tackle them. In this sense, it is an inward-looking exercise. Rather than seek to merge with the world, to be

the world, it is an act based on recognition of the independence and sovereignty of the self from the world.

Furthermore, “lifting our eyes to the mountains” is a product of internal deliberation, which often ends up in exhausting the self’s resources and in reaching a state of complete not-knowing-what-to-do. It is then, while engulfed in this sense of being lost, that we turn to an omnipotent entity that is external to us, in search of answers and instructions. By lifting our eyes to the mountains, we rely on a *relationship* with the world, rather than on becoming one and the same with it.

Unlike the intellectual scouting for the white cavalry, turning to voidish oneness involves complete not-wishing. In fact, not-wishing is a prerequisite for merging with this particular oneness. Only by not-wishing can the self be nullified and merge with the infinite void. This stands in deep contrast to “turning to the mountains,” which is definitely an act of wishing. It is actually the ultimate form of wishing – “turning to the mountains” is a prayer. It is a most intimate and transparent way of expressing our wishes and, if we are *really* needy, if the going is really tough – of revealing what it is that we are willing to give in return. To the void, this is completely alien terminology. To intellectual wholeness, this is its core business.

The two onenesses coexist within us. They are chronically distinct from each other and, by definition, can never unite. Our voidish sense of oneness involves a yearning to annihilate whatever it

is that separates us from the world around us, so that we can merge with it, become one. Our intellectual sense of oneness recognizes an ever-present partition that stands between us and the world, an invisible yet firm envelope in which the self is wrapped, which separates our inner world from outside reality. Differently put, our intellectual sense of oneness involves vehement defense of our sovereignty. It is interested in a *relationship* between us and the “whole.” Not a merger, but an arm’s length relationship.

The two onenesses therefore serve two distinctly different functions for us. We clearly need them both. We need refuge, as much as we need guidance. Luckily, we have been blessed with access to both. What do we do, then, in the face of this generous offering? How do we reconcile the two? And, which would even be better – how do we exploit them both? How do we make the best of the access that we have to these two, distinctly different sensations of “wholeness”? How do we capitalize on the two strategies for relief?

The answer is that we *oscillate* between the two. We drink from both these fountains of life, ever hopping from one to the other. This oscillation is a pillar of our inner structure, and of this book.

### The Philosophical and the Psychological

Our oscillation between the two states of oneness constantly vibrates our inner cords, like a violinist’s bow vibrating the instrument’s strings. It reflects

a tension, as bows and strings do. One manner to describe this perpetual tension is by way of the diametrical relationship between our philosophical view of the world and our psychological view. Now, careful, please. We seem to be leaving *terra firma* behind us and venturing into *terra incognita*. The crocodiles' elongated jaws are beginning to peek out of the water.

Here is the thing: Every dilemma that stands in our way can be approached either philosophically or psychologically. Essentially, these are two different facets of the same coin. Every question can be phrased philosophically as well as psychologically. Every answer can be sought in the philosophical as well as in the psychological domain. We can ask "what is the purpose of life?" or we can ask "why do I question my right to live?" We can answer "the purpose of life is unknown to us," or we can answer "tell me about your parents." These two dialogues – one philosophical and the other psychological – can go on and on, on two parallel tracks, two lines that will never meet. They just cannot meet. They have nothing in common. Yet both exercises are just as adequate. Both are just as compatible with our nature. Both are just as responsive to our inquisitive mind and yearning emotional structure. This distinction may apply to practically every session of questions and answers we can think of. Every question may be posed, and replied to, either philosophically or psychologically.

The two strategies are wide apart. The philosophical approach attempts to solve the riddle of

the universe<sup>1</sup> by asking “what is truth?” The psychological approach attempts to untangle the knot by asking “who am I?” We philosophically divide the world into “truth” and “not truth.” We psychologically divide it into “I” and “not I.” There is an eternal resonance, if not struggle, between the two dividing criteria, “truth” and “I.” We can just *feel* that the two differ from each other as different can be. In fact, they practically have nothing in common. Yet they are both critical to our making sense of things. They are both critical to our well-being. We have a genuine need to find truth, as well as to sustain the “I.” We therefore oscillate, and occasionally vacillate, between the philosophical and the psychological.

Philosophers like to be “scientific” about their art form. A philosophical worldview generally seeks objectivity, or elimination of the self from the discussion. This is the very nature of the beast. This is, presumably, what will turn it “scientific.” “Truth” is almost synonymous with “objectivity,” even with “selflessness.” Now, the ever-critical reader may be loudly protesting here. Are there not philosophical theories that advocate subjectivity? Are there not philosophical schools that question whether a tree has really fallen in the forest if we have not actually *seen* it falling? Similarly, are there not scientific theories that teach us about the impact the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Riddle of the Universe* is the title of Ernst Haeckel’s 1900 book, in which he advocated a holistic approach to nature.

observer has on the observation, and on measured results?<sup>1</sup> Indeed, such theories not only exist but have become increasingly popular in all avenues of intellect and mental creativity in the last century. Yet, there is an important distinction to be made here. All these “subjectivist” theories apply identical principles to the subjective observer, or doer, regardless of whether this person is you, or me, or someone else. These philosophical and scientific views advocate subjectivity. They trumpet the impact the self bears on the world, yet they do so regardless of who the self is. They make no distinction between a hypothetical self and the “I.” They do not care if the self is me, you, or her. They do not really deal with the “I” as such. While there are over seven billion selves on the face of Earth, and while there is just one “I,” these theories make no distinction between the two breeds.

But then, psychological views are categorically different. They see all the difference in the world between the relationship the “I” has with the world and other relationships – of the “you” or of the “he,” with the world. The former, the “I” relationship, is not merely subjective. It is “I”-centered. There is a big difference between the two notions. The psychological view is specifically interested in

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<sup>1</sup> For instance, Werner Heisenberg’s Principle of Uncertainty, introduced in the mid-1920s, by which the mere measurement of one physical parameter (such as location of an object) alters another parameter (such as the object’s momentum). This implies that the observer impacts the observed.

the relationship between the one and single “I” and the “not I” – which is everything else. It sets the “I” – not the “you” or the “her” – apart from the world. In its eyes, there exists only *one* “I.”

The philosophical view, in contrast, treats all the “I”s in the world the same way. It actually strips them of their “I-ship” and leaves them in the form of net, synthetic self. One might say that the philosophical view is so objective, that it even treats subjectivity objectively...by meticulously arguing that all people, all observations, all deeds, are equally subjective. At the end of the day, this is what makes the philosophical sense of wholeness so profoundly different from the psychological one. The philosophical involves merger of the self with the world, to the extent of turning them one and the same. The psychological involves a relationship between two separable entities – the “I,” and all else.

This is essentially the same as what differentiates “voidish oneness” from “intellectual oneness.” The former is extrovert – or outward looking; the latter is introvert – inward looking. One places the self on equal footing with all other facts of life. The other makes room for an “I” that is profoundly different and entirely separate from everything else, utterly singular, a one and only “I.” Hardly a sufficiently large market for a professional therapist to make a living, mind you. It is a market of one... unlike the market of billions of “selves,” which provides ample living to the therapeutic profession.

We constantly sway between the truth and the singular self, between “truth” and “I.” With

this sway, as we will further advocate, there also comes an oscillation between careless freedom and moral responsibility. We will submit that there is much commonality between these two vibratory wave patterns – the truth/I oscillation, and that of freedom/responsibility. The common denominator is that they are both directly related to the tension between the two onenesses. Both the truth/I and the free/responsible dualities mirror the tension between the two onenesses, an argument into which we will further delve.

### **The Chasm's Historical Roots**

With this line of argumentation in mind, let us now take yet another, admittedly adventurous big step forward. We will add poison-tipped arrows to the crocodiles that have already begun to surface all around us. Let us attempt to briefly explore the historical roots of the split between the philosophical and the psychological, the voidish and the intellectual sense of wholeness. Let us find out how we got here, historically. There is nothing like wide open crocodile jaws and near-miss poison arrows to encourage a person to start wondering how he/she got here.

Generally in life, finding out how we got to a place does have practical value as, more often than not, it contains clues as to how to proceed from here. History gives us maps. True, history's maps do contain some mapping errors. They also contain some white blobs, *terra incognita* – unknown

territory – as the old mapmakers used to call them. Yet, *terra incognita* becomes so much less intimidating if surrounded by *terra cognita*...even if it contains some mapping errors.

Let us then place our inner oscillation in a historical context. Any transition from the bottomless depths of the human soul to the boundless provinces of history is no trivial matter. Yet, surprisingly enough, the two territories have more in common than one might initially suspect. The commonality is in the place occupied by *ideas*, in history as well as in our soul.

History is a fabric. It is a fabric woven of strings of ideas, drawn out of the depths of the human psyche. As they come to the light of day, these strings compose patterns that constantly shape, and are being shaped by, the actual course of events. When pulled, those threads of ideas disclose their cross links with one another, often revealing a web of cultural patterns richer and more diverse than ever suspected, thus telling a compelling story. Let us now pinch one of these threads and observe which other threads begin to vibrate with it. Let us pinch the thread that leads to humankind's location in the universe.

In a historical perspective, our inner oscillation between the two onenesses is a reflection of humankind's oscillation between two different views regarding its place in the universe: The human-centric view, placing us at center stage; and the human non-centric view; which puts us in the balcony, with side seats. Each has its pluses and minuses.

Center stage requires that we participate. The balcony enables us to get up whenever we wish, and write a lethal review in the newspaper's art section the next day.

So, here's the thing: We essentially oscillate between two periods in history and the ideologies that were woven into them. We oscillate between the benefits that both periods offered to us, unwilling to give up neither the attention that comes with center stage, nor the fun of being an independent side-looker from the balcony. If put in historical terms – on one hand, there is the joy of having been liberated from Medieval tyranny by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment; on the other hand, there is an elegy that sweeps our heart, a cry over the loss of humankind's centric place in the universe. It was the very liberation brought by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment that also deprived us of being the center of attention.

The Medieval view placed *our* world, with ourselves in it, at the center of the universe. Not just physically, but also spiritually. We mattered. Our deeds counted. And there was someone up there watching us and responding to our behavior, for better and worse. There was a director to the show, and we played the central roles.

But not all was good. There was pressure building up within the cosmic container erected around humankind. As large as the container was, it was oppressive. Little room was left in it for liberty. It was a rigidly structured worldview, chaining the human spirit to the hub of the universe, leaving

very little room to maneuver. We were prisoners in our own play.

Significant pressure was indeed building up during the Medieval Age. It was as if a djinn was packed in the lamp, impatiently yearning for a redeeming rub. It was the Renaissance that brought the desperately needed rub. And when the rub came, the liberalized human spirit quickly took the window of opportunity and erupted in a swirling dance of defiance against a hitherto rigid, oppressive and stagnant order.

The Renaissance, and even more so the Enlightenment, challenged the human-centric view of the universe. It launched a process of removing our world, ourselves included, away from the center of the universe. It did so physically, as well as spiritually. This was a priceless relief. So much so that the Medieval Age remained engraved in our collective memory as the Dark Age, while everything after that has been associated with light and enlightenment.

However, there was a snag. While the Renaissance's and the Enlightenment's explicit message to us was "liberty," the implicit message to us was, and has remained so since, much less flattering. The implicit, not-openly-spoken-of message to us has been not to overrate ourselves. Alas, we are not that important. There are zillions of worlds like ours out there, quite possibly with zillions of living beings inhabiting them, some of whom are perhaps impressively intelligent. We may not be alone, regretfully. We may not even be the most

“advanced” species, whatever “advanced” means. Disturbingly, we may not even be the Director’s favorites. Rumor had it that He might even be fed up with us, to the extent of willing to bet on some other team of young, gifted and un-spoilt actors.

In short, our world was no longer unique and maybe, just maybe, neither were we. We were like an only child suddenly witnessing his or her parents bringing home a newborn baby from the hospital. The feelings are mixed, as an understatement. And our case has been much worse: Not merely one baby entering our home, but an infinite number of them, coming from an infinity of birth wards out there. This is hardly a recipe for existential happiness.

It was a tough deal. It turned out that the then-novel and revolutionary picture of the universe painted by Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo – with Earth, and Humankind, no longer at its center – may have been philosophically correct and enlightening (“truth”), but it was psychologically devastating (“I”). What better illustration do we need of the tension between the two?

The knowledge of multiplicity of worlds is certainly enlightening. It opens up a vast array of possibilities, in space and time. And, frankly, the sense of humility it inspires in us, by way of reminding us that the universe is not all about us, can become quite handy at times. It has a humble touch to it, which is generally useful. Yet the advertising of a multiplicity of worlds is also painful. It leaves us alienation-stricken and incredibly lonely. It deprives

us of the special status we enjoyed in the good old days, when the universe revolved around us and where we *mattered*. It reminds us of the days when our parents' attention was undividedly centered on us; and the dog, perhaps, but they did seem to care for us more.

Nevertheless, side by side with the dethroning of the Medieval, human-centric worldview, we acquired freedom; well, some of us acquired some freedom, which is not to be underestimated. We were no longer, or less so, subjected to the arbitrary will of a supreme deity, and, which is a considerably more pronounced cause for joy, to the will of this deity's self-nominated representatives on earth. We got some rights, which are ours to stay, from cradle to grave, no matter who says what. We also got democracy, some of us. There is no denial that the Enlightenment put some beef on our hitherto skinny bones, literally and metaphorically.

However, while the Enlightenment gave us the priceless gift of liberty, it deprived us of hope for "designer redemption." That is to say, it took away the promise of personalized, unconditional care. Alongside growing up and leaving home, we became responsible for ourselves. This gave us an open-ended future. We had to actually make up our own mind about what we want to be when we grow up. Little counseling was available. In the same vein, the Enlightenment also took away from us the grand "if/then" scheme of things. In the good old Medieval system, we knew that if we did this, we would get that. There was a well-developed,

one might say overly developed system of reward and punishment for everything we did. There was a set of directions, rules of the game, which, while having their own serious limitations, did promise to us the comfort that comes with some degree of certainty. We had a certain amount of control over the wild beast galloping out there. In the good old days we were able to make choices, with some level of guarantee that if we made the *right* choices then we would reap some rose-cheeked fruit. This suddenly became a rare commodity.

The Enlightenment left us with a sense of taking part in a play without an ending. Certainly not a known ending. In an enlightened day and age, we have to write our life story on the fly. It is entirely up to us. We are free. We can turn the play into a comedy, a tragedy, or anything else we fancy. This is a huge gift, at times exhilarating but at other times also very frightening, as huge gifts go. We *really* don't like plays without an ending; we mean, *really*. We have paid good money for the ticket, and we are entitled to sit and watch a whole play, from beginning to end, without being required during intermission to pay extra cash for the remaining acts, or, even worse – to actually write them! The *least* we would expect to have is an ending chapter that is sealed in a box, with an “open in case of emergency” sign on it.

We are therefore left with a deep sense of deprivation. We do deserve a complete story, even if we end up leaving it in the box, unused. We do want to have one, just in case. We oscillate, this time

between blessed liberty and “ending chapter in the box just in case.”

### A Thirst for Mattering

So, we find ourselves in a theme park, with all sorts of sways and other oscillating structures around us. Some are for little kids – small, smoothly swaying, unthreatening. Other are devilishly frightening, for adults only. We will climb some of them later. At this stage, let us attempt to characterize the main theme of our inner park, as follows:

We live under the influence of two world systems, human-centric and human non-centric.<sup>1</sup> Apparently, neither of the two world systems is satisfactory by itself, and we find it ever more difficult to bridge the two. The twentieth century brought this chasm to unbearable proportions, leaving us, at the opening of the third millennium, at a complete loss as to how to conduct ourselves and what heritage we wish to leave, and can leave, to posterity. The human non-centric worldview has made us enlightened, but unable to explain why we have a special status in the universe, why we matter, and,

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<sup>1</sup> Galileo Galilei titled his famous manuscript *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. In fear of being censored by the Church, Galileo described both systems in parallel, the Medieval one (Earth as center of the universe) and the new one (Earth revolves around the Sun). In order to evade accusations of rebellious advocacy, he assigned to the two theories equal weight, leaving it to the reader to choose.

therefore, why free will, particularly when applied to ethical choices, makes a difference. After all, the absolute predictability of the planets' orbits in the sky, as combined with our fringe location in the universe, is not exactly the best incentive in the world for heralding free will. The Enlightenment placed us truly off-off-off-Broadway, even much off-er. Why bother to exercise free will, then? We have to painfully admit that, after having made a long and thorny journey throughout history, between one worldview and another, we are faced with a reality where none of the two systems is satisfactory by itself. We consequently have to continue to oscillate between the two, and we aggravate. No bridge at sight.

We aggravate because our craving for a complete, unified shelter, under the roof of which the "truth" and the "I" can peacefully coexist, remains unfulfilled. We have absolutely no idea how to consolidate the prevailing textbook description of the world we live in, a world which would remain not even a trifle different if we were not here at all, with our insatiable thirst for mattering. In the absence of a conciliatory strategy, our oscillation between the two world systems continues, at times rhythmically and at times erratically. It depends on which theme park facility we pick, which, in turn, depends on how desperate we are. On a nice sunny day we may take the gentle swan ride on the pond. On a rough day, we take the scariest roller-coaster in the park. But, desperate or not, we oscillate between a human non-centric view that abides

with philosophical truth, and a human-centric view that serves the psychological “I.”

### The Resonance

In recognition of the hopelessness of uniting the two onenesses, let us adopt a somewhat Machiavellian strategy. Rather than beat this duality, let us join it, and exploit it. Let us attempt to use the motive power,<sup>1</sup> the energy of the oscillatory sway in our inner theme park, to our benefit. Let us turn it into a potent instrument, and let us do so boldly. Let us use it to tackle the trickiest questions mind can buy.

Now, it so happens that, thankfully, we do not need to start at the beginning. Some of the work has already been done for us, by none other than Mother Nature. Whether we recognize it or not, it is in fact by way of oscillation that we regularly tackle numerous questions we face, big ones and little ones. The way nature has fabricated us, we do not necessarily “gradually advance” in deciphering the unknowns that riddle our lives. When faced with a dilemma, we often oscillate, back and forth, from one answer to its opposite, until the vibrations of our body and soul crack the secret, like

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<sup>1</sup> Paraphrasing the title of a landmark book by early nineteenth century French physicist Sadi Carnot, *The Motive Power of Fire*. In this book, Carnot discussed how heat can be transformed to mechanical work, such as in a steam engine. The analogy of heat that is transformed to work is quite appealing in other connotations, including ours here.

a low bass note that cracks glass. This is the way we often do things. Think of it. More often than not, we debate with ourselves, we weigh the pros and cons and we sway between alternative answers, until, at some point, often some morning, we wake up and know the answer. Our internal debate is over and we know what we have to do. We then sense that the answer has been with us forever. The inner debate that has previously tormented us suddenly seems utterly redundant.

Instead of going through an orderly process of if/then steps, one logically following the other in a linear fashion, we very often go through a cyclical motion, a sway, which is anything but linear and orderly. This is not a fault of ours. It is a gift of nature. It is a very effective mechanism. It is this very gift of nature that can be applied to the captivating oscillation between our two sensations of wholeness.

We humans have been blessed with the capacity to apply our mind to the “truth” and to the “I” simultaneously. This takes us a significant way up the evolutionary scale beyond mere consciousness. The ability to resonate between extrovert and introvert perceptions, to actually *be* in the two places simultaneously, or almost simultaneously, is certainly a notch or two higher on the evolutionary scale than the ability to perceive the self, which is self-consciousness, or self-awareness. This dual ability is clearly a significant evolutionary leap.

Think about it. This dual capacity is far from trivial. One moment we detach ourselves from

the “I” and scan our whereabouts, all around us, seeking “truth” while quieting all murmurs that are sounded behind our back by the never-dormant “I.” We just gaze at the world, as if neutralizing our own existence, trying to grasp the landscape, be one with it, *be* the landscape. Then, the next moment, we turn our look inside. Doors closed, shutters down, we focus on the murmurs. We *do not* merge with the outside world. On the contrary. We seek to differentiate ourselves from the outside world, from the “truth.” We then attempt to develop a dialogue with whatever is out there, to make it notice us, to negotiate with it. We temporarily lose interest in “truth.” It is now all about *us*. It is all about the “I.”

This capacity that we possess, to *be* the world and then *not be* the world, to switch from one modus to the other at the flash of a second, is quite amazing. By way of association – is *this* perhaps what dear Hamlet meant to convey to us, when he inquired whether to be or not to be? Did he mean to say that life’s eternal dilemma is whether we should *be* one with the world, or *not be* one with it? Extrovert or introvert? Merge with the world, or make oneself distinct from the world and converse with it? Well, this may or may not be what old Will really meant his hero to say, but we must admit it is an intriguing possibility.

The energized hopping between “being the world” and “not being the world” has its momentum. It feeds on itself, as oscillations often do. Each hop builds on the one that preceded it. Each vibratory

cycle enhances the one that follows it. Every hop from “truth” to “I,” and every hop back, energizes the next hopping cycle. By doing so they get us, hoppers, ever closer to the answer we are in search of. The secret, then, to unlocking the full battery of capabilities that we possess may very well nest in this amplification effect, in the resonance between the two mental states.<sup>1</sup> We should be aware of this capacity, and exploit it; which is yet another reason why we should not detach the two onenesses, the “truth” and the “I,” from each other. We should not choose between them. We should leave them both on our menu.

Metaphorically speaking, there are zillions of stars in the sky and zillions of cells in our brain. We tend to treat them as independent systems, with a zero-sum relationship between them. We tend to think of the choice between the two as an either/or choice. We are either philosophical or psychological; either extrovert or introvert; either counting the stars or playing our neural circuitry; either seeking shelter in voidish oneness or seeking guidance in intellectual oneness. This is how we tend to view these two skill sets – either/or.

But it does not have to be this way. We do have the ability to correlate the two systems, to leverage their coexistence. We have the ability to make

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<sup>1</sup> Our use here of the metaphor of “resonance” may rely on how a laser device works. A laser beam extracts its vigor from the resonance it undergoes as it travels back and forth between two mirrors that face each other.

## HOMAGE TO STRETCHER BEARER

constructive use of the resonance between the philosophical and the psychological, the “truth” and the “I.” We can resonate between extrovert and introvert, and be good at it. The amplificatory power of the resonance may actually carry us to unprecedented achievements.

CHAPTER TWO  
**The Lion's Den**

Armed with the malleiform argument about the synergy between “truth” and “I,” we will venture into the lion’s den. Many creatures, large and small, occupy the lion’s den. Many questions are to be found there, some twittering and some howling, some fast asleep while others energetically pace back and forth. But then, the power of oscillation enables us to approach them all, including, importantly, the lion itself. Well, perhaps cautiously approach it while it is off duty, but then a lion is a lion, never to be underestimated.

We walk through life accompanied by an insolent little whisperer riding our shoulder who, like Pinocchio’s Cricket, constantly reminds us that we really don’t understand what’s going on. When we think of it, this description is not a bad way to summarize the gargantuan perplexity that follows us wherever we go, wakes up with us in the morning and goes to sleep with us at night. This perplexity, this sense of awe, may really boil down to the simple, yet huge question that constantly looms in front of us: *What’s going on?* We mean, what *is* going on? Admit it. No other question is deeper, more profound, more intriguing, and more