The Phoenix of Metaphysics (Part 2)

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Just to very briefly recap, we've been talking in particular about epistemology and ontology as the areas of philosophy that explore the whole question of knowledge and what knowledge is trustworthy. Ontology is the area of philosophy that explores the question of what actually is real and what is not real.

We described briefly what came gradually over years, centuries really, to become the dominant worldview given to us by classical science. We described that we're very much believing in an independently existing reality and the possibility of objectively, clearly, fully even knowing that reality, that truth. There was a growing tendency to regard that world or sense that world as definitively and provenly meaningless, purposeless, lacking in divinity and dimensionality, and composed only of materiality. Those are some of its drifts and more extreme but still common tendencies.

Then we described very briefly the revolutions in physics at the turn of the 20th century, particularly relativity theories and quantum physics, and how that really severely brought into question the whole idea of an independently existing reality which we could know clearly, definitively, objectively as it is. This stimulated certain reflections on the nature of science in general, but particularly on the limits of the scientific method and also the relationship of science with truth—that whole endeavor.

There were other critiques of, or rather other reasons for the critique or the questioning, really, of science and its relationship with truth. There was a whole philosophical movement—or we can trace a whole philosophical movement—that again questions the possibility of knowing reality, of having a privileged perspective, or attaining the perspective, the way of looking, the way of conceiving, that achieves reality in post-modernism and other philosophical trends.

On top of all that, we pointed out that even though many philosophers would profess allegiance to that kind of non-realist stance, what leaks out very often is some or other kind of realist stance. Very often a secular existentialist and materialist view of reality, somewhat in some senses nihilistic, leaks out despite their positing and claiming to not have a position about reality or a claim about reality or the possibility of attaining truth.

Unpacking all that is the need to realize that what we bring in terms of framework, approach, language, history, culture, assumption and motivation—why I want this thing to be true, why I want the universe to be this way, why I want human nature to be like this—all those considerations need to be brought into this whole difficult soup, really, around epistemology and ontology. That applies whatever one's inclinations and wishes are.

We pointed out further that, to a certain extent at least, epistemology is personal. What convinces one person and what leads them to trust certain knowledge, certain insights, is different from another person who gains conviction by another pathway or another revelation or another consideration.

We also pointed out more generally that if you keep asking questions about epistemology—well, why do you trust that? Well, why do you believe that then? Why do you believe that?—and you just keep going, eventually asking questions, eventually one will come to the fact, one will realize the fact that we're all holding, whatever one's position, at some point we recognize that we hold some kind of unproven assumption. We're basing our epistemology and ontology on something that can't be proved.

Whether we consider all this a kind of cataclysmic earthquake in the whole enterprise of human understanding, a fracturing of the vessels that hold that human enterprise, or if one thinks such language is much too hysterical and views it much more as some difficulties here where we have to tone down our claims a little bit regarding truth—however one regards it, one still has to open to these considerations and digest them and respond to them. Of course there are many possible responses.

The realization, the deep realization of radical emptiness, the thorough and comprehensive emptiness of all phenomena and all things at all levels, is difficult to attain, difficult to hold onto, and quite sophisticated and subtle as a knowledge. Even that has its own epistemological blind spots and assumptions. Even that insight into emptiness rests on certain unproven assumptions—it has to, whatever they are. But that's one option here: to develop that understanding of emptiness and hold that stance of the middle way of the Buddha Dharma.

Another response, of course, is just to shrug and ignore all this debate and all this fracturing and all this rug-pulling that developed certainly over the 20th century, and just get on with things and ignore it. What that usually entails—and it's important to point this out—is that when we shrug, and it's a position that's popular in some Western philosophy, contemporary philosophy starting in the 20th century, we effectively say, "Well, this is unprovable. Ontology and epistemology will come to no end, won't come to an end, and therefore we're not going to indulge in them. Any indulging in those kinds of areas of exploration, and certainly any claims, all of that is a kind of human hubris and arrogance."

But effectively, practically speaking, often—I'm thinking of philosophers like Richard Rorty—what happens in such a statement is it effectively manifests as a kind of shrug, and in that shrug, one goes back to one's default positions. Hence, as we pointed out with Rorty, the leaking out of a quite secularist anti-religious agenda. So all this talk about no privileged point of view, but there's a denigrating of the religious that leaks out at the sides of his writing. What also leaks out is this belief and assertion that the fundamental reality of things is the purposeless movement of atoms in a meaningless universe.

We can say, "Oh yes, the philosophical problems here are too enormous. There's too much arrogance involved in claiming any progress towards truth or understanding ontologically, epistemologically. We put it aside and we regard ourselves as liberated from all that." But what often happens is that there is a

kind of deflation of the being, of the soul in some ways. What was supposed to open up more territory for conversation actually ends up shrinking it. The default views, the indoctrinated views, the dominant, common views of whatever society end up just keeping their reign. Nothing has really changed there. But that's—I don't know if we call it an option, but it's certainly a choice that some people make in regard to all this, either consciously or unconsciously.

A third option we talked about is the imaginal middle way, that kind of poetic sensibility. We talked about Yeats and the open-ended, infinite, hermeneutic possibilities that Corbin emphasized in his reading of the imaginal.

both Abrahamic scriptures and sacred books, but also of this world and the events in this world and the events in history, and similarly in some Kabbalistic teachings and the Zohar.

I should point out—I'm pretty sure I've said this before, though I'm not sure when; it could have been just a couple of talks ago—but it strikes me as so important because of the pain it can cause in some people's souls from not understanding it, that it's worth repeating. Sometimes when I teach about deep emptiness and the whole notion of ways of looking, and there are just ways of looking, some people feel a great grief. They're attracted to that teaching, they explore it to a certain extent, often a fairly deep extent, but they reach a point where it seems to them: "Okay, so the sense of sacredness is something that I get just when I look in a certain way that sees sacredness. And I can look in another way that doesn't see sacredness. So sacredness takes a secondary status to the mind that sees in this way, that adopts this way of looking as opposed to that way of looking."

In that, as I said, there can be a lot of grief because the person—something in the soul—wants that sacredness and wants it to be something trustworthy, something less manufactured by the whims of the observing mind.

But going deeper into this whole process of exploring fabrication and ways of looking—if we just talk about emptiness right now—one actually realizes that the mind that looks, the mind that chooses to look in this way or that way, or is adopting this or that way of looking, the consciousness and the conceptual frame of conception, none of that awareness has inherent existence. It too is fabricated in the fabrication of the world and the fabrication of perception.

So subject and object, consciousness and appearance, awareness and world mutually entail each other. They mutually involve each other. They're fabricated together. Neither one, in a way, is more fundamental. They both melt into each other and rely on each other—two vacuums leaning on each other. Empty, empty, empty. They participate in each other.

That seeing, to me—that level of seeing—opens up in the breakdown of concept. We can't really, it's hard to even talk about or explain it in some way that logically makes sense or causally makes sense. But with it, there is an insight, a felt insight into the participation of self and awareness and consciousness and

mind and way of looking. In that participation, the mystery, that participation, there is, to me, a profound sacredness. I would say to anyone who really tastes that deeply, it can't help but resurrect—if one has dismissed or let go of a sense of sacredness—it can't help but resurrect it, re-establish it, bring it back to aliveness and to the fore in some very deep, mysterious way.

So that position of deep emptiness also entails sacredness. It implies and involves a sense of sacredness in the deep mystery of what it means. Similarly, I would say that what we were calling that poetic sensibility or that imaginal way also implies sacredness. This is there in all the elements of the imaginal that we talked about: the divinity, the dimensionality, the eternality, the reverence, the grace, the humility—all these and other elements are part of the sense of sacredness.

So both the profound and radical middle way of Dharma teachings on emptiness and the imaginal middle way involve and invoke and elicit and open us to a sense of sacredness. Of course, there are some people who talk about artistic sensibility and poetic sensibility, and they're using it in a different way, and it perhaps doesn't, for them, involve sacredness. It certainly did for Yeats, whom we quoted, and it does in the way that we're using those terms.

So, three possibilities: shrugging; the penetrating into deep emptiness and the sophistication, subtlety and profundity of those insights; and the entertaining and exploration of the imaginal way, that poetic sensibility, the opening up of perception in sensing the soul.

Another possibility that I mentioned at the end of the last part of the talk was that with the imaginal way, there is room—we could say there's room—to move towards more of a stance of reification, more of a stance of believing or holding something to be a reality. And there are many different ways this can happen. As I mentioned, I started opening up that end of things in the final talks of the Mirrored Gates series.

But there are other ways, and there's one I just want to focus on right now—another subset of ways that would fall into that category of, rather than holding this precise middle way line in one way or another, actually falling into a category of entertaining the possibility of more reification. And that is to intuit or posit or deduce or entertain the idea of some kind of higher truth that integrates and makes sense of the paradoxes that we experience in our phenomenal world in the normal state of consciousness, and makes sense of what seems nonsensical there.

For instance, some of the quantum physics observations: the seeming impossibility of knowing objectively how a thing really is before we observe it, the problem of our observation always seeming to be determining what happens, and the apparent emptiness of things. All that could be made sense of—and those paradoxes and gaps and fractures in our knowledge or our different perspectives can be made sense of and integrated and made whole at a higher level of truth.

I've touched on this briefly—I can't remember where, just very briefly—and I gave the analogy of those

old disco balls. I can't remember if they have another name. Some of you will remember. They're three-dimensional balls hanging from a dance floor ceiling, and they've got little tessellated pieces of mirror on them so that when the dance hall lights shine on them, they sort of iridescently radiate in different directions.

So that truth is really like that, or this higher truth, or this more absolute truth, is really like a disco ball in the sense that it exists as a real entity in itself, in this three-dimensional way, but we're only able to shine certain lights on it from certain angles at certain times, for the most part, in our usual state of consciousness and understanding. And so it will just reflect at different times this color light in that direction, that color light in the other direction. But in itself it is a reality. So there's a kind of emptiness there, but at another level it's not really empty.

The metaphor of cartography offers another illuminating perspective. Different map-making systems—I can't recall their exact names, though I know one is called MacArthur—reveal how we might understand this phenomenon. When you examine various maps, you'll notice that the relative sizes of countries appear vastly different across different projection systems. On some maps, Africa appears absolutely enormous compared to Europe, while on other mapping systems, Europe appears much larger in proportion. The distances between countries vary dramatically as well.

The fundamental challenge here is again dimensional. The three-dimensional Earth—the actual globe—exists with its true relative sizes and distances. But when we attempt to represent this spherical reality in two dimensions, we must inevitably make compromises, sacrificing accuracy in one aspect to preserve it in another. Neither style of map construction is without fault; both are, at best, partial representations, and in certain ways, misleading. Yet the reality remains what it is. These maps represent our best attempts to capture in two dimensions what actually exists independently and objectively in three dimensions.

Both metaphors come from Sanford Drop's writing, though I'm uncertain of their original source. Such ideas suggest that reality might indeed function this way. Perhaps through philosophy, meditation, or scientific progress, we can discern, extrapolate, or conclude something about the nature of a reality that, in our ordinary state of consciousness and understanding, we cannot directly perceive.

This kind of thinking appears with some frequency. I was recently reading something by Ouspensky that addressed the fourth dimension in mathematical terms. Though I didn't read the entire article, he made a fascinating observation about spiritual phenomena. When people conduct séances, attempt to contact spirits after death, or report ghostly apparitions, they invariably assume that these spirits, if they exist, inhabit the same temporal dimension we do—the same framework of time that we experience as moving from past to present to future.

Ouspensky suggested that a spirit or being after death might exist or experience time in a fundamentally different way, not belonging to the same temporal dimension we inhabit. He illustrated this with the

analogy of a flat world—imagine a completely two-dimensional realm, like the surface of a piece of paper or a lake, inhabited by flat beings who can only move, sense, and conceive in two dimensions.

If a three-dimensional being were to dive into their lake or pass a pen through their paper world, these two-dimensional inhabitants would be completely baffled by the sudden appearance and disappearance of phenomena that seem to violate all their laws of physics. Picture someone diving through the surface of a lake—as their body passes through that surface, the cross-sectional shape would constantly change: wider in some parts, doubled with arms and legs, then singular again, expanding and contracting. All these transformations would appear inexplicably mysterious to the flat-world beings.

Yet from a three-dimensional perspective, everything makes perfect sense, following ordinary three-dimensional laws. For beings who have grown up inhabiting only a two-dimensional world, equipped with only two-dimensional apparatus, such phenomena would be utterly incomprehensible.

The implication is that higher dimensions might explain all kinds of phenomena we experience as problematic, paradoxical, nonsensical, partial, or contradictory. This idea is actually implicit in our dharma discussions, though perhaps I haven't emphasized it sufficiently. When we speak of sensing the soul, or when we explore eternality, we encounter something similar to what Ouspensky described.

The angel is eternal—timeless—occupying an entirely different dimension or realm of time. As we've established, these realities are always present, always occurring.

This imaginal sense, it's always already happening. Or as Salo said, it never happened, but it always is.

So the angel is actually eternal. The appearance is, if you like, a refraction of the angel into time, into our experience, our dimension of temporality, our dimension of anything else. Or the appearance in time is a kind of echo, an imperfect echo, or let's say a three-dimensional echo of something that's four-dimensional, but take that very loosely—an echo, a manifestation in our limited sense of dimensions, a manifestation of something that has more dimensions, including that different temporal dimension.

I mentioned the philosopher J.N. Findlay, who would undertake a careful, phenomenological look at our reality—our reality of seeming to exist in a world of solid objects that we can't walk through and that behave in certain ways. He would look at that whole experience of ours and pick up on the places where it doesn't quite make sense, where it doesn't quite add up, or where different perspectives that are contradictory and paradoxical seem to both be right somehow, and neither completely right.

In his careful, rigorous phenomenological analysis of everyday experience, he draws out those paradoxes and then proposes that they are resolved with the solution of other worlds that exist in other dimensions, so to speak. Here we don't just mean physical dimensions—length, breadth, height, or time. We're really talking about other levels of worlds. And then, as I mentioned when I quoted him the other day, this exploration of the idea, or deduction of the idea, of what he would call a mystical absolute world in which all these paradoxes are kind of integrated and made sense of.

So these worlds that he proposes—and I've talked about this before in the context of Kabbalistic teaching or some Dharma teachings or other teachings from mystical Islam—this idea of levels of worlds, multiple worlds at different levels, is quite a common one. These worlds are in a sense tiered and represent different degrees or stages between our sense of things at our level, at our limited dimensionality, in stages between that and this more mystical absolute that kind of unifies, integrates, makes sense of all these paradoxes that we encounter.

All of those that I've mentioned—also, like the deep emptiness, like the imaginal middle way—they are characterized not just by an implication of sacredness, but by a sense of sacredness. There's something intrinsically sacred in those notions of other dimensions and what they explain there and how they relate to ours.

But of course, also many of you will know from modern physics that beginning with Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity in 1905, the idea of four dimensions being the more accurate, more useful model of things rather than three dimensions became really prevalent. So physicists almost always talk about space-time as opposed to three dimensions of space and then time. It's put together in four dimensions.

As the twentieth century went on, there were all kinds of other theories, and certain developments invoked multiple dimensions. Nine, ten, eleven, thirteen became a very popular number, and then I just read about twenty-six dimensions. So this whole idea of other dimensions, the postulation of other dimensions explaining and making sense of what we experience—in this case through experiments in science—is common in physics as well. It holds sway in physics as well, though how many dimensions exactly and how they work is a different story. But the idea that there are more dimensions is pretty mainstream.

Can we prove that? Is that provable? We're back to that question of epistemology and ontology again. The answer, having said what we said before, is never finally. Because just like Newton's theory, which worked so well and seemed to be proven by its predictive power, its efficacy, its correspondence with observation, was eventually, after a few hundred years, dislodged completely—to be regarded as at best incomplete, at worst just wrong—by Einstein's theory.

So if that can happen then, it can actually happen with any physical theory, no matter how well it ties in to observed experimental data, no matter how many predictions it makes that turn out to be true when we do experiments. There's always the possibility that one day another theory will come along that will make a prediction that initial theory didn't make, and it will turn out to be validated, and it will have a very different idea of what's going on, and very different mathematics, and very different laws.

So can we prove that about other dimensions in physics? No, never finally. But what they seem to offer, and again why they're so dominant and popular and established in physics, is that they do provide beautiful, elegant and coherent explanations of phenomena that we perceive in our world and in our laboratories. Or they almost provide those explanations, because none of them have been completely

worked out. There are many of these different kinds of theories.

I suppose that you'd have to ask a physicist whether they consider that sacred or not, and I'm sure you'd get probably a mix of different answers. I read recently about something I barely understood, but which was intriguing to me. Again, this was reported by Lee Smolin in his book, I think it's called Three Roads to Quantum Gravity. It's something called the anti-de Sitter space-time or the scale-invariant conformal field theory. That's a bit of a mouthful. I don't really know what it means. But as I understood it, it involves basically the idea that there are other dimensions of space-time that obey certain geometries—so more than just the four that we're used to, there are higher dimensions that obey certain geometries.

The intriguing thing to me was the correspondence between those two different dimensions. There is a physicist Juan Maldacena and lots of other people exploring this. So this other higher world, let's say, with these other dimensions—he says that in some cases, quantum phenomena in the original theory, in the theory of our dimensions, translate into gravitational phenomena in the higher dimensional space. In other words, there's some kind of mathematical correspondence between these two kinds of world. One has more dimensions and a certain kind of geometry, and the other one is our world, or a certain take on our world.

Two theories which so far have been extremely difficult to unite—both extremely successful, quantum theory and Einstein's theory of general relativity, the theory of gravity—physicists have struggled to unite those two theories. They seem contradictory, attempts break down. So there's a lot of work going on into uniting those two theories.

What's interesting with this postulation and this mathematical model of another world is that these two seemingly incommensurable theories kind of mirror or correspond to each other across the dimensions. Solutions to Einstein's equations in the higher dimensional space-time give approximations to quantum phenomena in the lower dimensional space-time. Even something like heating up a gas of particles in the lower dimensional space-time corresponds to forming a black hole in the higher dimensional world. Pretty far out.

I don't understand it, and he gives some other examples, but it doesn't really matter. The point is this attempt to make sense of, make coherent and integrate things that don't seem integratable at our level of perception, level of understanding, level of conception and reasoning.

There's been quite a lot of objection in physics over the last hundred-plus years that some of these kind of really outlandish sounding physical theories—and we could string off a whole list, including the one I just briefly mentioned—are not remotely testable. There's no way one could come up with an experiment that would test whether it's possibly true. There's no way to find out is reality like that or not. Testable experimental predictions seem nowhere on the horizon at the present time.

So a sharp criticism that comes from some quarters—some physicists and some non-physicists—is that

this isn't even science anymore. You do all that and you make your neat, lovely, beautiful, elegant mathematics work and this implies that and that fits together with this and that resolves that problem. But it's not science if it's not testable. That's not science, it's metaphysics. And here that word metaphysics is used in a very derogatory way to mean abstract speculation that is not subject to empirical observation, not subject to being able to be perceived and verified that way.

But if you think back over the history of both philosophical ideas and then scientific ideas, there were many, many theories that were untestable at the time. Many theories that became testable sometimes many years later, maybe sometimes hundreds of years later. At the time when they were proposed and considered and explored and put forth, there wasn't any hope that they would ever be testable, and they were just regarded as metaphysics. But what was regarded as metaphysics became actually the bread and butter of experimental science.

So are these physical theories that postulate other dimensions and all the rest of it that don't seem remotely testable—are they metaphysics in that derogatory sense, or are they not metaphysics?

In relation to the whole area of metaphysics, again Joel Weinsheimer, in this book on Gadamer, reports a sort of development in the twentieth century where there was this denigration of metaphysics and ridiculing of metaphysics in that sense. There was this movement towards what's called positivism—where you only trust as knowledge or only even waste your time thinking about and working on understanding what can be empirically observed, what's open to perception or obvious logical deduction.

This grew to its heights in the early twentieth century with the philosophies of positivism and logical positivism. Positivism is the kind of philosophy that all knowledge must be based on perception. It rejects any claims of metaphysical speculation. Knowledge is only empirical or, as I say, very simple logical deduction, which is almost tautology at times. For example, "all bachelors are unmarried"—correct. We can approve that as knowledge. So it's in support of what they call the positive sciences over things like metaphysics, religion, which they dismissed as just nonsense and a waste of time. This pursuit and claim of attempted dominance of what they would regard as definite certain knowledge arrived at in those ways.

But Joel Weinsheimer has a short passage in the book just tracing the history there. In the 1920s, with what's called the Vienna Circle in philosophy, really this kind of positivism reached its height. But he said time went by, and by 1975, he said, philosopher John Wisdom can speak of positivism only as a dead horse. But he dates the demise of this anti-metaphysicalism thirty years earlier.

This animosity against metaphysical meaninglessness, he writes in a book called Philosophy and its Plays, "had very many eminent followers, but they had all given up these extreme positions at the latest by about 1945." I remember Hempel, this philosopher, in the mid-thirties reporting it was customary in the Vienna Circle to interject "metaphysical!" if any member lapsed into a meaningless statement, a so-called

meaningless statement, and that this happened so often it had to be shortened to "M." So you can imagine sitting around talking philosophy and then sort of pouncing on each other with "M, M," by virtue of someone believing that someone else had sinned by saying something or suggesting something that was possibly not strictly positivist and therefore metaphysical.

But he goes on: by 1945 this was a thing of the past. There was a cooling of this anti-metaphysical passion and a discrediting of some of the fundamental ideas and suppositions of the Vienna Circle and that whole positivist philosophy.

Charles Taylor, the philosopher, wrote: "Once we awaken from our positivist slumbers, we realize that none of these features that pertain to areas of our experience that are not strictly in the realm of natural science and physics—we realize none of these features, absent from the human sciences, hold of natural science either."

Let me explain this, because part of the agenda of the positivists was to reduce all knowledge, or the range of all knowledge, to the scope and model of physical science. That was their template. Everything had to conform—sociology had to replace religion, for example, and even sociology had to be modeled on the physical sciences. This remains a strong current today. The idea was that natural science—meaning physics and related fields—constitutes the only valid knowledge, the only kind worth pursuing. Anything that seemed absent from these domains, including many psychologies, some sociologies, and certainly religion and spirituality, was relegated to the rubbish heap of nonsense and uselessness.

But Taylor observes that these different domains "turn out to be methodologically at one, not for the positivist reason that there is no rational place for hermeneutics, no rational place for this kind of open interpretation of things, but for the radically opposed reason that all sciences are equally hermeneutic." As we explored earlier, this stringent idea of direct correspondence between scientific laws and truth has collapsed, or at least opened up and been shaken loose. We begin to realize that in all domains and directions of human endeavor for knowledge, for truth, to contact and represent reality involves some kind of epistemological and ontological latitude, some element of interpretation.

By the 1980s, those who would dispute the universal scope of human hermeneutics found themselves on the defensive. There was truly a turning of the tides—though it might turn again at some point. This marked the demise of anti-metaphysics.

Interestingly, if you read about the processes, aspirations, and guiding principles of leading physicists, you find that many of them—often the most prominent, forward-thinking, and successful—say they trust and encourage others to trust the beauty in mathematical theory to lead them. Rather than following laboratory observations and trying to piece them together sensibly, they follow their intuitive sense of the beauty of mathematical concepts, the elegance within them, trusting this to open new ideas, conceptions, and models.

Dirac famously said, "It must be beautiful"—speaking of whatever theory we develop to describe nature. The mathematics must be beautiful. If it's not, it can't be right. You can hear in that intuition the eros for beauty, for elegance, for simplicity and coherence and integration and innovation. There's a soul calling, the eros of the soul for that beauty, which mirrors our movement of soul-making. As we've said before, beauty and image go together. Beauty and soul-making are so intertwined we could almost replace one with the other—the same principles would apply in terms of what it is and how we respond to it.

Einstein shared this perspective. At a lecture in Oxford in 1933, speaking quietly and confidently, he urged theoreticians not to try discovering fundamental laws simply by responding to new experimental findings—the orthodox method—but to take their inspiration from mathematics and beauty.

One of the threads running through this talk is opening up our conception and approach to epistemology and ontology, examining what might be possible there. We're looking at the scientific method with all its gifts and what it has enabled for humanity, considering how it was initially conceived and presented, and the picture of it that we largely bought into. This was a picture of both science and the scientific method as a kind of pristine, untainted model of epistemology and ontology. That model came to dominate and influence all thinking, even our intuitive sensing of questions around ontology, epistemology, cosmology, and metaphysics generally. Science and the scientific method came to be thought of as the pinnacle of what represents a good, solid, clean, sensible approach to knowing, knowledge, and reality.

But as we unearth what's actually involved in the scientific method—as different philosophers and scientists have examined it throughout the twentieth century—we get the sense that it's not quite what it seems. We come to realize that questions of epistemology and ontology are actually more complex than they might appear, more complex than perhaps has been handed to us as the legacy of classical scientific method.

In its dominance as a model of good epistemological approach, other approaches were denigrated—they either fell by the wayside, were overpowered, or were openly ridiculed and dismissed. Among them was this whole idea of metaphysics in the sense of speculative, abstract thinking or conceptions that cannot be tested by replicable experimental observation.

But perhaps metaphysics never really went away. Perhaps it's been resurrected. Where, anyway, is the boundary between so-called metaphysics and physics, between metaphysical thinking and methodology and the methodology of theoretical physics?

When we examine it more closely, we can see that science—both in terms of its method and its aims—is not quite what many of us grew up believing it was or were taught that it was. It's not as unscrupulously clean or pure or tight as a method. Its conceptual foundations, the ways of thinking about things and building upon those foundations, are not always as clean-cut as presented to us.

None of this is to deny the benefits, wonders, and gifts of science, or to banish it somehow—if that were

even possible. It's simply to point out that the scientific project, in both its methods and aspirations, involves elements that we might not have fully recognized or acknowledged.

methods and its aims and goals is not quite as simple or clear-cut or clean as it was taught to us that it is, and as many people would like to still believe that it is or still do believe that it is.

And this has implications—all this has implications on how we think about knowledge, how we conceive, again, of ontology, epistemology, of what is legitimate, for instance, with regard to sensing the soul and imaginal practice and other areas of human exploration. All this has implications on our sense of ourselves, our sense of things, our sense of what avenues are open to us and what kind of bases they need and how trustworthy they are.

So one of the really interesting things to me is the fact that so much that is helpful, interesting, and generative of further exploration—further noble exploration—can actually come out of what is not true. This is evidenced many times in the history of science.

So, for example, going back to Newton again, he forged ahead with his explorations of mechanics and gravity, and he based it on those dogmatic, essentially dogmatic assertions and assumptions of absolute space and time. His colleagues, his contemporary colleagues, thought he was bonkers. And they objected to these two ideas of absolute space and time. They thought it was completely absurd. And yet, based on those assumptions, he built his whole edifice of Newtonian mechanics and the theories of gravitation. And they were immensely, as I said, successful in terms of their material predictions and very helpful in all kinds of ways.

Later, as I said, they were proven untrue by experiments. Absolute space and absolute time are not held by scientists to be realities anymore. Yet, based on those false assumptions, dogmatic assertions, basically, that turned out to be wrong, this whole incredible opening up and blossoming of human knowledge and human capability came. Einstein's theory came as the two relativity theories undermined the ideas of absolute space and time once and for all, and then even more at a whole other level since then with quantum theories of space-time. It's a whole other level of kind of exploding the notions of an absolute space and absolute time.

But, as Lee Smolin points out in regard to that interesting historical trajectory there with those notions, he says absolute space and time was what was required to make progress at that time in history, at that time in Western history and the history of thought. And to see this was perhaps Newton's greatest achievement. And he brought in these notions. They were unpopular. They were regarded as ridiculous. They turned out, way after his death, to be not true. But based on these untrue, unpopular notions, all kinds of benefits and discoveries emerged.

Now, this to me suggests a parallel or analogous kind of legitimacy and usefulness of, at times, adopting in soul-making practice various assumptions or working logoi or conceptions that are either definitively not

true, unproven or unprovable. So again, it's like the whole way we're working is not closed as tightly as the usual image that's presented to us of scientific methodology would seem to indicate.

Again, the fact, with regard to Newton, the fact that Newton's theories proved so accurate in their predictions and helpful made people assume that they were true, that those assumptions of absolute space and absolute time were true, and that the whole theory was true, until several hundred years later and those experiments and results around Einstein's relativity theories. So there's an assumption of truth just because of efficacy and predictive power and helpfulness. But the truth wasn't there, and yet all this could come out of it.

So with regard to the soul-making logos or different logos, different conceptions within the soul-making paradigm, different perceptions that we have, what does that imply? Might there be, as I said, legitimacy and fecundity and usefulness sometimes in just entertaining certain ideas, or building ideas, drawing ideas together, as I described in some earlier talks? Some of them may be definitively untrue. Some of them may be just—who knows—they're kind of in the realm of kind of metaphysics that's just about speculations, unverifiable, and yet can be immensely fruitful in what they open up, what they lead to, just as Newton's conceptual notions would form the basis of his whole architecture were.

Again, I'll just add those couple of sentences from J.M. Findlay: "Self-contradictory and empty notions play a vast part in human experience and attitude." And we might add, given what I've just said, that false notions, unproven notions, unprovable notions, can all actually be very fruitful in all kinds of ways.

And maybe, and I've said this before in the past, maybe we need ideas, we need concepts, we need conceptual frameworks. They orient us, they shape experience, they inspire us, they open avenues of sense and sensibility and perception and concept. In other words, ideas spawn other ideas, just as these ideas in Newton of absolute space and absolute time—on top of those ideas, with those ideas as a basis, further ideas came which were fruitful. And concepts and conceptual frameworks, no matter, as I said, whether they're sometimes untrue, unproven, unprovable, can in themselves be soul-making, or can be generative and supportive of soul-making.

Perhaps we need that kind of speculation, we need that kind of freedom with ideas. But ideas and conceptual frameworks are indispensable. It's part of humanity's soul to reach out, to grapple, to build, to speculate, to construct, to demolish, to sculpt these structures of ideas. And for our purposes, on that, or in that, wrapped up in all kinds of soul-making, all kinds of beauty, all kinds of opening for the soul.

Harold Fish wrote, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the language which he discovers for signifying what is otherwise unsignifiable." Man does not live by bread alone, but by the language which he discovers for signifying what is otherwise unsignifiable. So in the face of the endless mystery of being, of the cosmos, of human being, what is otherwise unsignifiable—in the face of that, we live by the bread also of, he says, language. I would widen it to concept and conceptual framework. These nourish us. They open out possibilities. Like a scaffolding allows us to reach, to build things and to climb and reach places

that we wouldn't otherwise be able to reach—vantage points. I can imagine going up a scaffolding and you can see you have a different view from that height.

So there's this need—I think there's a soul need—and soul-making needs conceptual frameworks. The question of what kind of ideas and where they stand in relation to truth or falsity, or proverness or unproverness, maybe that latitude may be wider than we have been taught to believe, have come to believe through this dominance of the classical scientific paradigm and its presentation of ontology and epistemology.

There's this need for the soul, for soul-making. There's a need for conceptual frameworks and ideas like that. But again, as I mentioned before, we need ideas. Maybe they don't need to be true, or maybe they're unprovable. Some of them, what we bring into the cauldron, the crucible of soul-making...

But still, I would say that although there might be this latitude, there is some constraint on it. Or maybe there needs to be some constraint on what kind of ideas and what their relationship is to ordinary perception, to our usual notions of reality, to what we take as truth or untruth. So that there is some rigor to a certain extent to the material in the cauldron. Or to the cauldron itself has some rigor—maybe that's a better way to say it. Some resistance, some constraint of solid material, if you like.

So that the ideas that we entertain, the conceptual frameworks in terms of soul-making, they're not just willy-nilly ideas. They're not just random ideas. A, they need to be generative of soul-making, but B, they're wrestling at least a little bit or somewhat in relationship with what we take to be true. They have some relationship with notions of truth. They're not completely divorced from that.

So they do have a connection with our experience and what we observe phenomenologically. There is some kind of connection with correspondence with what might be truth or reality. There is some kind of coherence of these ideas. So if there's more resistance there in the ideas, so it's not just willy-nilly, it's not just like moving air, there's some solidity and resistance so that this crucible is like molding clay. There's some solidity there, and in molding that solidity again, there's a kind of middle way there—more latitude than we might think with concepts and ideas and conceptual frameworks, and yet not completely so free as to become kind of just whimsical, ungrounded, airy, because then out of pure air a crucible cannot be built.

So again, there are two extremes, and somewhere in the middle, which is quite broad, there's fertile ground. Part of the fertility comes from a certain tussle and resistance, a kind of obligation to tether our ideation and what ideas we're experimenting with—tether it to notions of reality and truth, no matter how problematic the whole areas of truth and ideation are; to tether it to some kind of epistemology and ontology, no matter how open and complex and puzzling those areas are. It doesn't mean necessarily working it all out completely in some very finished product of philosophy—after all, no one has done that yet with any ontology or epistemology.

But I hope you get this point about this middle way that involves some sense of resistance while still having much more range and latitude and possibility than we might have thought if our thinking was completely dominated by what was presented to us as this model, this best way of thinking, this only way of thinking about ontology and epistemology and ideas that are entertainable.

So, for example, in the soul-making paradigm, some of the ideas that we've put out there, suggested or mentioned, alluded to at different times. For instance, the very—or the seemingly simple, most axiomatic proposition—the soul loves souls, taking that as a sort of very basic foundational idea which generates, spawns really a whole structure, a whole conceptual framework of soul-making. Or ideas like the possibility that our soul-making is God's soul-making, that we participate in the soul-making of divinity.

These are ideas that, again, they may not be proved, they may not even ever be provable, but they may be very fertile in different ways. Or as a variation on that, the idea I just mentioned, that our soul-making may be at times regarded as a kind of infinite jñāna. Jñāna—this word for gnosis. Buddha nature's ultimate knowing. A word that was amplified a lot in Mahāyāna, and particularly in Vajrayāna context.

What it implies, that word, or what it can imply in some circles, is that it's a kind of knowing that's able to fully see the emptiness of all things at the same time as it perceives appearances. And the subject and the object are not separate. The world that is perceived is not other than the mind, the Buddha nature mind, Dharmakāya that perceives it. They're all part of the same thing. And in the perception of the world, the temporal world, the perception is of divinity. So this Buddha nature perceives divinity everywhere. But in one and the same knowing, it can both know the unfabricated, the timeless, that which is beyond concept, the thorough emptiness, and the forms, the divine forms, and the temporal.

And that knowing might include embodied kind of knowing, other kinds of knowing, desire, the whole soul-making process. Our soul-making is a participation in that soul-making of the divinity, in the divinity's infinite jñāna, which is not a final process. It too is organic and grows with the soul-making dynamic. In that way also, our soul-making includes both this love and eros and attraction that we can have towards the unfabricated, as well as towards the perception of forms, this world, the world of matter.

An idea like that can come, or will come, I think. Some kind of idea like that will come, I think, just inevitably at some point, organically, out of the whole soul-making dynamic. As the eros with regard to our perceptions is allowed to infuse and inseminate them, expand the perception, expand the ideation, the eros-psyche-logos dynamic, we will begin at some point to experience the divinity of our own eros, of our own psyche, of the ideas that move in our mind, of what we see. And then an idea like I've just described—that our soul-making is participating in the infinite jñāna, or the soul-making of the Buddha nature, or of God, or whatever—that idea will arise naturally. I mean, I've mentioned it quite a few times over recent years.

Conversely, that idea might itself form a seed that stimulates the possibility, and opens, supports the

possibility of that kind of perception of our process being divine that way and participating that way. And that idea and that perception together then may fertilize the whole soul-making dynamic further, crystallizing or growing, fermenting around that seed idea, and all kinds of other possibilities open.

So these ideas can be fertile, generative, opening. The whole idea of an angel out ahead, to borrow Corbin's phrase that we use quite a few times—of some image that is intimately related to me, sort of other than me, sort of part of me, me and not me, calling me, a telos, calling me, pulling me, attracting me, itself somehow timeless. Or the idea of eternality itself.

and timelessness as an element of the imaginal. All these ideas can be profoundly fertile. And they are, as I've mentioned, ideas that can come to us from our experience, or be suggested by what you hear one of us say, or read elsewhere, or hear someone else articulate. But importantly, they also arise from experience itself. In doing so, they can open up soul-making and support its deepening.

Conversely, these are precisely the kinds of ideas that, if we don't obstruct the soul-making process, I would expect to arise naturally—variations on these themes gaining substance and power in consciousness, in the soul. Through their relationship with our experience, you can see what I mean by the openness of ideas. We need not wait for something to be proven truth or reality, just as that example from physics with Newton's ideas demonstrates. Immense progress, opening, discovery, and technological creation—creations both material and conceptual—emerged from two ideas, absolute space and time, that eventually proved untrue.

Yet there remains some rigor involved in determining which ideas merit our engagement. While we needn't wait for them to be verified as true, these ideas must maintain some coherence within our larger conceptual framework. They must also remain contingent on our phenomenological observation—what actually occurs in our experience. Something unfolds in our process, in our perception and meditation, that suggests these ideas.

Consider, for instance, an idea that may have originated with Pseudo-Dionysius. He writes: "For this beauty, this ideal beauty, causes the existence of everything." In his metaphysical and spiritual system, there exists a transcendent absolute ideal of beauty, and he declares this beauty the source of all things. From this ideal emerges the existence of everything—beauty as source, as cause of all things.

He continues: "It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty. And there it is ahead of all as goal, as the beloved, as the cause towards which all things move, since it is the longing for beauty which actually brings them into being. It is a model to which they conform."

This presents a radically different understanding of causality than we typically encounter today. Yet perhaps this idea, even hearing this brief passage written centuries ago, stirs something in the soul and speaks to something deep within us. The idea itself, topsy-turvy as it appears compared to our usual

thinking, can attract the soul and prove fertile in terms of what it accomplishes when we take it on, when we entertain it as a concept of causality.

On a human level, we can employ this idea in soul-making, as other paradigms do—for example, the Diamond Approach. The Ridhwan School holds that even the apparently ugly manifestations of our human nature, our choices and behaviors, are actually rooted in impulses toward beauty that have become distorted. Our pathologies, our kilesas—greed, aversion, and the rest—are actually grounded in the soul's deeper love of beauty. That was the initial stimulus, the seed, the original momentum. Only through conditions and the soul's avidya, its fundamental delusion, do these impulses get directed toward distorted manifestations of beauty, toward fixations of imagination rather than the truly imaginal.

We can entertain this more limited psychological idea about what actually drives our motivations, choices, and perceptions. But what would it mean to allow this idea to expand through the opening of soul-making to encompass the whole of nature, the entire cosmos? Is this possible? Through rigorous wrestling with ideas, could we allow this concept to open for us—even if unprovable—and become generative and powerful in the soul?

Or perhaps through meditation itself, through sensing the soul and allowing the soul-making dynamic to unfold in practice, our seeing and ideation naturally open until this perception of beauty-driven causality becomes something we actually sense. It becomes an immediate, tangible, palpable, striking sense of the universe and the cosmos we inhabit.

We could continue with countless other ideas—I've merely outlined four or five that readily come to mind. Over the years we've offered many possible ideas and concepts, and there are many more. But the essential point is this: it's possible to build upon ideas that are unproven, unprovable, and that may someday prove untrue. This happened in physics and likely continues to happen in physics and science generally. It certainly can occur in the realms of psychology, spiritual work, and soul-making.

These ideas can be fertile and supportive of soul-making without necessarily being true. Returning to the larger questions of ontology and epistemology, and dipping again into contemporary physics... Lee Smolin, the theoretical physicist working on quantum gravity and theories integrating gravity with the quantum world, reflects on recent decades and...

And voices a realization that dawned on him and other physicists over the last thirty years or so. Looking back, he says, it is clear that the assumption that a unified theory of physics—a unified theory of everything, or even just a unified theory of quantum physics and gravity—would be unique was no more than that: an assumption. There was this idea that if we could unify these different theories and arrive at a grand theory of everything, then that must be true. That must be it. Because there would probably be only one such theory.

But this notion—that there would be only one—he's realizing is merely an assumption. "There is no

mathematical or philosophical principle," he continues, "which guarantees there to be only one mathematically consistent theory of nature." This returns us to the coherence principle: just because you can find a coherent theory, it doesn't mean there's only one of them.

For hypothetical worlds having one or two spatial dimensions rather than three—this is what physicists sometimes do, reducing their theories to make them more manageable mathematically—"we have constructed lots of consistent quantum theories, including some which have gravity, a fact which should lead us to doubt the assumption that mathematical consistency in itself allows only one theory of nature."

Elsewhere, Smolin introduces what he calls the hypothesis of duality. He presents this in the context of different theories—string theory, which posits that the ultimate building blocks of matter are strings rather than particles, waves, or fields, and field theory, which presents ultimate reality as electromagnetic fields, gravitational fields, or some kind of unified field of which all forces are manifestations.

"There is a possibility," he writes, "that both the string picture and the field picture are just different ways of looking at the same thing. They would then be equally fundamental and no experiment could decide between them. This possibility excites many theorists as it challenges some of our deepest instincts about how to think about physics. It is called the hypothesis of duality."

He emphasizes that this hypothesis differs from the wave-particle duality of quantum theory. It's a scaled-up version applying to whole theories and conceptual frameworks rather than just one kind of entity. Instead of asking whether something is a wave or a particle, we're considering whether whole theoretical edifices might be different ways of looking at the same reality.

"Like the principles of relativity and quantum theory," he explains, "the hypothesis of duality tells us that two seemingly different phenomena are just two ways of describing the same thing. If true, it has profound implications for our understanding of physics." He suggests that by embracing this hypothesis, several problems that have clouded physics for almost two centuries may be resolved, and this idea remains a major driving force behind current research.

No doubt some physicists find this exciting while others find it deeply disturbing. But again, this brings us back to these different meta-strategies and meta-conceptions regarding ontology and epistemology—how knowledge should proceed and can proceed.

When Smolin suggests there's no guarantee of only one consistent theory of nature, when he introduces this hypothesis of duality—that two different theories might be different ways of looking at the same thing—this could be akin to what I mentioned earlier regarding mystical absolutes. Consider two different cartographical representations of the globe: the Mercator projection and the polar projection. Because of our limitations in representing three-dimensional reality on a two-dimensional map, these systems offer different ways of representing the same globe, each with their strengths and limitations.

Similarly, our normal three-dimensional perspective trying to capture multi-dimensional reality in

physics might require these multiple mapping systems. The globe itself, reality itself, nature itself, the cosmos itself exists in a certain way. Or consider those disco balls I mentioned, or the Necker cube—those two-dimensional representations that flip between different three-dimensional perspectives when we perceive them.

But here we're discussing whole conceptual structures, whole conceptual frameworks that, like the Necker cube perspectives, cannot be entertained simultaneously but between which we can flip. This goes beyond single ideas to encompass entire worldviews.

An example of contradictory single ideas would be our approach to sensing with soul: the perception that we project images—that images emerge from our minds, that we create them—versus the idea that the image projects us, that we are in fact an emanation or projection of the image. This latter idea is much less popular, but these two contradictory concepts can be held together. In the Soul-making Dharma, we speak of "create and discover," the imaginal middle way, attempting to harness the complementarity and paradoxical nature of these opposing ideas.

But they're single ideas. Here we're talking about whole frameworks, whole conceptual frameworks.

So these ideas that Lee Smolin is discussing for physics—that there's no guarantee of only one consistent theory, and this hypothesis of duality with regard to whole theories—do they imply this notion of similarity between maps trying to represent something at higher dimensions that actually is real in higher dimensions? Or do they represent a manifestation of the whole emptiness, ways of looking paradigm, where ultimately there's this profound mutual involvement, profound mutual participation of subject and object, mind and matter?

It may be that many physicists don't like that idea because their whole project from when they were young was to try and discover what reality is in an objective sense. So the idea that mind is involved in that way may not sit well with their inclinations.

It might be that these two ideas—the one of the absolutes and the one of emptiness, ways of looking—there are ways of conceiving where they're not actually that different anyway.

If we expand this consideration beyond the realm of just physics and again extend to include other antinomies—meaning insoluble dichotomies that are part of our experience of the world and our consideration of the world—and open up the philosophy of that without shirking from them as Kant did, and Hegel and J.N. Findlay and many others.

For example, the whole antinomy or paradox between free will and determinism. We sense that we have free will as human beings. And at the same time, we can also sense and see and understand, and in many cases seem like we can prove or show that our responses and our choices are determined biologically, culturally, in terms of conditioning.

How do we integrate those two positions—the belief in free will and the belief in determinism? If I just choose one over the other, I lose quite a lot. If I really just believe in free will, it doesn't leave much room for compassionate understanding—for instance, crimes or what's motivating a criminal, or when we fall short of our ideals ethically. When I just believe in determinism and leave no room for anything else—everything's just biologically conditioned or culturally conditioned or whatever—it leaves no room for free will.

What does that feel like? What kind of life does that form a basis for? What kind of sense of life? Kind of soulless, with actually very little meaning possible in life. Very little nobility. In that way too, also lacking in compassion. Lacking in wisdom as well.

Or the whole conundrum of mind and matter—how does consciousness meet matter? How does consciousness know about matter? How is there this quantum leap between that which doesn't have awareness and that which does have awareness? How can they contact each other? How can one arise from the other? Are they two? If they're two, how do they connect? If they're one, how is it possible that this one came out of that one?

As I said, there are these different approaches. We have the approach of emptiness, ways of looking. We have this approach of the mystical absolutes, akin to the analogy of the different cartographical representations.

You get certain philosophers who fall in one camp. For example, Hegel and J.M. Findlay, Samford Drob, who favor the idea of a real or true mystical absolute. It exists as it is. We cannot normally intuit that mystical absolute because our conception and perception doesn't tend to work at that level for the most part. We cannot see in those extra dimensions. We cannot think and conceive in those extra dimensions. But it is a real and true thing, and sometimes through reasoning and careful thinking and deduction, we can intuit that mystical absolute, that real truth in super dimensions. Or through meditation, we can intuit, open to, get a glimpse and a taste of that real, true mystical absolute.

In that absolute, there is a kind of coincidentia oppositorum—the Latin phrase with a long history in Western philosophy and alchemy. The idea of the coincidence, the kind of interdependence and interpenetration of things which seem opposite to each other. So for example, free will and determinism, mind and matter. There are philosophers that favor that approach and that whole idea, working toward that postulate.

Then there are other philosophers, probably much more common these days, who favor a kind of ultimate truth of things as a fractured, incomplete finitude of our human being and our human knowledge and the world itself. Slavoj Žižek has this notion of the parallax gap. Parallax is two perspectives on the same object. Actually there's parallax between your two eyes. If you close one eye and then close the other eye, if you look at an object a few feet in front of you and just close one eye and close the other eye, you'll see it moves. The apparent placement of the object moves when you close one eye compared with the other eye.

So each eye is getting a parallax view.

Rather than, as happens in our biology, the brain integrating those views when we have both eyes open, he, along with many contemporary philosophers in the postmodern vein or stimulated by postmodern thought, suggests there is no ultimately reconcilable view.

There is no absolute that synthesizes this kind of coincidentia oppositorum. There's just parallax. We live in a fractured world. We are incomplete. Our knowledge is incomplete. Our vision is incomplete. It is that way. There's this gap between different perceptions, conceptions, and conceptual frameworks. There is no hard reality to which they refer. There is no truth. There is no synthesis. There is nothing in another dimension that we can hope to mystically open to.

But again, going back to something I talked about earlier, I would ask: what's the psychology that's going on underneath that kind of position? When someone insists on either one or the other—that there is this mystical absolute or there isn't—what are the motivations?

So what is going on in Slavoj Žižek's soul, if you like? What are his motivations for insisting on that position? And that kind of finitude—to borrow a term that I think came from Heidegger—that kind of fracturedness, he talks about a kind of nothingness, and that nothingness is, in a way, the ultimate reality. There's just this gap, this parallax gap. If I quote Sanford Robb writing about Žižek, he said: "Reality for Žižek is the irreducible gap between oppositions. They're the incommensurate views of his parallax."

And again, what's going on psychologically? What's the motivations for wanting this kind of world, this kind of postulate about reality? Because he's still making a postulate about reality. There's still a metaphysics there. He's saying the truth is there's no hard reality and there's just this fracturedness, this gap, this nothingness, this irreconcilable difference. What's fashion? You know, how much human beings are conditioned by fashion. As I was mentioning when I talked about reading some of the philosophy articles and books from a certain period in the late 20th century and how they almost start with what reads like an almost fearful proclamation of one's sort of guilt-freeness with regard to... What's fashion? What's intimidation? What's career moves? What other kinds of motivation are more to do with the way we want to fabricate self, other, world? Why? What's going on?

So these are all, to me, really interesting questions. And not that we can ever always get to the bottom of that, because whatever system we have for deciding or looking at the questions of motivation, psychology, and soul, they're also going to be based on other concepts and assumptions and systems—systems of psychology, which are very, very different. You know, what motivates people from the point of view of Freudian is very different than what motivates people from the point of view of a Jungian or a Skinnerian or whatever. Or from our point of view, for that matter.

So I don't know Žižek's work intimately at all. Sometimes when I read a little, it sounds a little bit similar to the emptiness, ways of looking thing that I've offered and laid out, but I don't think it is really. Again, as

with several of the other philosophers I mentioned, there's very often a sort of hard reality being smuggled back in one way or another. And again, there's a difference in tone and the kind of world painted and the picture of humanity painted by that whole view of reality.

So it has the flavor, to me, what Žižek is propounding, has the flavor of that kind of tragic existentialist view of reality. But for him, that tragic existentialist view is, he would say, necessary for society to get on and live together and prosper and to have human freedom, etc. There's an argument a bit like Richard Rorty. He said we need to keep the conversation open and keep it happening.

But, as I said, so often that kind of view itself, rather than opening things up for people, there's a way that it can actually harden. There can be underlying agendas and opinions about reality and there's a way that the whole thing can become just a kind of shrug with regard to truth and with regard to the possibility of passionately pursuing questions of ontology and epistemology and truth.

So I don't know if I'm reading it rightly, but if you compare that kind of tone and feel and direction and kind of soul-scape, cosmos-scape, if you like, with what it does potentially to that passion, to that eros, with regard to ontology, epistemology and truth—if you compare that with a quote from Goethe, which I'm really, as I said, not sure if I'm interpreting it right, but I'll read it anyway.

People say, he says, that between two opposed opinions, truth lies in the middle. Not at all. A problem lies in between—invisible, eternally active life contemplated in peace.

A problem lies in between two opposed opinions. Invisible, eternally active life contemplated in peace.

Might he mean that in regard to these seemingly irreconcilable differences of view, of theory, of conceptual framework, of these lacunae and problems in our whole approach to and wish for and relationship with truth and reality, that there can still be a kind of open-ended eros and inquiry regarding truth and reality? Contemplate it in peace, so we don't need to start wars over this kind of thing.

Maybe—again, I may be stretching what he says in a direction he didn't mean it—but that peace can also include agitation. Just as the artist in their creative work can be okay with what Picasso called "the anxiety in the creative process and the agitation in the creative process." Maybe also as thinkers, as philosophers, as explorers of truth, as wanderers in both spellings of the word—with an O and with an A—wanderers in the cosmos, our peaceful contemplation of these things can be filled with eros and passion and agitation.

There's a certain level of stirring up the soul. We want to know, we're gripping, we're following threads, we have to hold on—it's complicated, it's confusing. So there may be a certain agitation there at times. At other times there can just be very easeful, fluid exploration of these things, fluid moving between considering and entertaining different conceptual frameworks.

But perhaps in what Goethe is saying is: no cheap answers, no cheap shrugging. In the face of no cheap answers, perhaps this open-ended eros and inquiry is possible for us. Perhaps the cosmos itself is

beckoning us to that, ongoingly, forever.

I remember learning to swim. My father teaching me to swim. He would, in the shallow bit of the sea, stand sort of ten feet away when I was young—my brother and sister as well. And he'd say, "Swim to me." So we would swim. And he would—I'm pretty sure, though he would absolutely deny it—I'm pretty sure then he would just slowly walk backwards, so that I just had to swim further and further and would sort of improve my swimming. I kept saying, "You're moving backwards!" He said, "No, I'm not, I'm not."

But maybe there's something of that in the cosmos—the cosmos itself as meta-angel out ahead, in its mysteries, in the conundra it presents us, in what it allows us to glimpse, in what it reveals, and then that presents other conundra, other problems, other seemingly irreconcilable dichotomies and paradoxes. And we're drawn onwards by the cosmos, by our eros, by our love, by our curiosity, by our soul.

Maybe too—just adding a piece to something I mentioned earlier—maybe in all these questions about, considerations about ontology and epistemology and metaphysics and what's justifiable and what's legitimate and all that, maybe we also need to expand our notions and categories of epistemology, our notions and categories of ontology.

Usually, if you just think about it, when we think about epistemological categories, we think about either you know something or you believe something. In other words, in terms of ideas and perceptions that we can trust. So generally, epistemology: either you know it or you believe it.

We notice with the imaginal how much it can give freedom and strength. I've given a few examples—how imaginal images and the way they calm and touch the soul and open the soul can give great freedom and profound freedom and strength with regard to, say, dying young. But that whole category of imaginal experience doesn't really fit simply into either of those categories of knowing or belief.

I have some image of something or some sense of sensing the soul of the cosmos. And am I then insisting on that as a truth in the way that we usually consider the word knowledge—I know this, this constitutes knowledge, it's a truth? No. Neither is it belief in the usual sense.

So usually we have these two categories—knowing and belief—when we think about epistemology, when the layperson thinks about epistemology. The knowing category is further categorized into either correct knowing, accurate knowing, or incorrect—you're deluded. And then if there's not knowing, there's belief. And either when there's knowing or belief, that can give you power.

For the soul, it can give you a sense of something that the soul is trusting. And that thing and that trust has tremendous power and gives the soul, in this case, lots of support.

It may be that, wrapped up in the imaginal, the whole coherence of the conceptual framework may be a factor in the epistemological strength and efficacy of the image. I've alluded to this again as well—how important the conceptual frameworks are, that they are coherent, supportive, rigorous, that they make

sense, that they lead onward, meaning they lead to more soul-making, and they're also in contact with our experience and with the rest of the ideations.

Or it may be that the whole imaginal perception, what comes to us through the imaginal, is more like art. The whole relationship is more like art.

Someone might say to me or to someone else, "Oh, you had an experience, you had an image or you had a vision or whatever it is, and that makes the difference. That's why you feel peaceful with dying young or okay with it or whatever it is." But underlying their comment is probably an assumption that because of that experience, you now think or believe you know something. You know something about reality that makes your dying or death in general okay, or that you believe something.

Again, they put it into those two more common epistemological categories, even though they don't think this way—those two epistemological categories that have become the only ones left to us in the current dominant worldview. But the effect of the imaginal experience is actually more like the effect of art. So it's neither knowledge in that limited usual sense, nor is it belief. It's a third epistemological category, most akin to the way art works when it profoundly moves us, when it profoundly touches the soul, gives us reassurance, gives us orientation in life and meaning, something we would stake our lives on, even though it doesn't fall into these two currently more usual epistemological categories: knowing or belief. It's something else.

So again, we go back to that Yeats quote about belief, and whether that's really the appropriate word, the appropriate concept for what happens with regard to poetic sensibility, artistic sensibility, and imaginal sensing—sensing the soul.

Finally, can all these possibilities remain open? The possibility of some kind of mystical absolute that's real and true, but exists at levels or dimensions beyond our usual conception and perception. The whole emptiness ways of looking idea. The whole imaginal middle way. The pursuit—the erotic pursuit in science, in philosophy, in psychology—our erotic pursuit of truth. The idea that we need to step back and actually think about other epistemological categories beyond the ones that we've just been handed by history and by our culture, by certain developments of Western culture over the years.

Is it possible that all these possibilities remain open, that they remain viable, that they're avenues we can walk down, travel down, explore? Open roads that we remain alive to, and they remain alive as directions, frameworks to entertain and explore?

I'm not suggesting this openness because I'm a nice guy and I don't like argument and I'm trying to appease everyone and have everything be really calm and peaceful. That's not why I'm saying that. All of them involve problems, involve limits, involve danger—if that's not too dramatic a term—intellectual danger.

There's a line from Leonard Cohen: "There's a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in." And we

can apply that to conceptual frameworks. All these conceptual frameworks have cracks, for many of the reasons I've traced in this talk. But there's always a crack. There's always a hole in the foundation that's sort of patched together. There's always a crack that will appear. It's where the light gets in. It's where the growth gets in.

I would say the problems with regard to ontology and epistemology are ultimately insoluble, many of them. Humanity will never reach some final conclusion that's proven and satisfying, that doesn't have a crack in it. But those cracks in conceptual frameworks, those holes, those patchings over—that's actually part of the deal and partly what spurs us onwards, what draws us onwards, what allows other containers, which too will have cracks, so that there is growth there. There's a dynamic that's possible if we can relate to this in the right way.

It needs our openness—openness of mind, openness of heart and soul. It needs our eros, it needs our participation. We need to participate in this whole conundrum.

Something I've mentioned before: we tend to relate to these questions of ontology and epistemology in terms of wanting to know the truth. And I think that remains an important motivation and stimulus for that movement. But given everything I've said in this talk and previous talks, it may be that our eros and inquiry into truth and reality may not actually yield truth—yield some kind of final truth that we have then finished with, for the reasons that I've said. It may not deliver us to that truth.

But it may open up for us and yield all kinds of other gifts, some of which will be enormously helpful in different ways, all kinds of other discoveries and creations, just as with the example of Newton and his theories. And it may lead to soul-making.

So our inquiries into and wrestlings with ontology and epistemology can be considered not just in terms of the goal of truth, but of soul-making too. You understand? Why choose this ontology? Why even wrestle with these questions? Yes, in regard to truth, but also because of the soul-making.

So an individual idea, an individual logos or concept may itself be soul-making or supportive of soul-making. A whole conceptual framework—out of many different conceptual frameworks we can entertain—may or may not be soul-making. And the whole movement of inquiry into ontology and epistemology and truth, the legitimization of metaphysics or not—that whole inquiry itself may or may not be soul-making depending on how we're approaching it.

But we can expand the consciousness of our motivations so it's wider than just wanting to know the truth. We can actually realize that part of what's wrapped up in this is what delivers soul-making and what doesn't. And of course that may change not only in different periods in history and culture and place, but also right now in my practice.

Not everyone is going to get really passionately interested and even obsessed with these kinds of questions of ontology and epistemology. There are huge differences in souls and what they're drawn to and what

they're drawn to at different times. But still, if I quote Harold Fish again—or actually expand on his quote, alter it slightly—you know, remember he said, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by the language which he discovers for signifying what is otherwise unsignifiable."

So human beings do not live by bread alone, but by the concepts and conceptual frameworks which they create and discover for signifying what is otherwise unsignifiable. That they create and discover to represent, to navigate, to orient, to open, to explore, to make coherent sense of the mystery of things—the mystery of being, the mystery of reality, and a human being's relationship with that in terms of epistemology and all else.

So this is something—whether or not we become really involved in the nitty-gritty of these philosophical questions, some will, some won't—still the importance of conceptual frameworks that have some rigor, some constraint, but also that we're open to create and discover. And mediated by that is the soul-making, or really as part of that is the soul-making. That is part of soul-making.

Again, to repeat something I've said in previous talks: to think that I can just throw away metaphysics, throw away and ignore, shrug and walk away from ontology, epistemology, metaphysical speculation—to think that I can avoid that in some kind of pure, non-conceptual relationship with the universe, with existence, to think that I can rid myself of all that—that's delusion.

It comes in, and we don't necessarily need to buy the limited old model that went with classical science and scientism. There are a lot of holes in that. There's an expansion possible there. And to enter into and open up to that expansion will support and nourish and give lifeblood to the whole exploration of sensing with soul and to our whole sense of existence.

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