

The Forget-Me-Not Letters: IV

Pseudo-Tiresias

1 Prelude

The first time I got properly high was in a boyfriend's bed. We watched *Clue*. I cannot recall any of it, except seeing suits and ties shuffle around to the whirring of the projector and the wet-warmth of his lips playing around my areola. He is the only person who I genuinely believe has ever been attracted to the whole of me: my person, my body, my being. It was almost reverent, deifying. I was something divine. Early in the morning, sleepless, I turned and saw him cradled in my arm and beheld like a vision: all of my senses as though projected onto a great screen, and me like some good Cartesian seated in the theatre. And then I fell back into another audience: my imagination of that screen, which was my perception, projected onto a yet vaster darkness, and down again I fell until perception was utterly remote—an image of an image of an image of an image and so on spiraling down infinitely like some wedge-shaped core of darkness driving down from my eyes into the heart of my being.¹ Perception is an endless pit. Sight is dark. Hearing is dark. Touch is dark. We merely grope. Reality lies infinitely far from awareness. Consciousness only plays with the polished objects of thought.

2 On Idealism & Panpsychism

In the last letter, I discussed the notion of *anima*, and I thought it might be wise now to refute any accusations of panpsychism or idealism. I am essentially a physicalist, but if I may be so bold, I'm not so sure I can easily be given any label on the grounds that I fundamentally reject any knowledge of the elementary substance of the world. We cannot know what the world is made of. It would constitute a superstructural truth and is therefore inaccessible. Any label will be circular: the stuff that makes up the world is *just* that which makes up the world. This substance is not "like" anything which it constitutes; it does not have physical or mental qualities. It is beyond all such description. All knowledge we have access to is relational; knowledge ends where there can be no relation; thus, having access to no other worlds, we cannot know the fundamental properties of this one.² Under the rippling of fields or whatever we may yet find deeper, there is only inexplicable, undifferentiated being.

I can appreciate that the only knowledge which we have access to is experience, a mental object, so we can only assume the existence of a physical world from them and it may be more "elegant," albeit unintuitive, to treat the world as universally conscious;

1. To be clear, I think of this experience as just a glorified daydream or even a minor hallucination. Even in the moment I thought to myself that this was just a fancy trick of the mind. I'm not trying to say that I had some actual vision of reality or anything like that. I haven't yet deluded myself that much. Presumably, my brain just cooked up a semi-dream about something I'd already been thinking about.

2. When I say "world," I'm not talking about planets or dimensions or universes or anything like that. I mean literally everything which has being.

however, idealism would have to do a lot of work to explain the origin and regularity of these experiences. I won't hold my breath. The hard problem of consciousness is not a hard problem: when or if all the complexities of the human brain are accounted for, the problem will more or less dissolve. If idealism does magically work out, then my little region of the *mēns universālis*, *pabhassara citta*, or whatever will eat its words.

My notion of *anima* is just a fun, little way to metaphorically speak about the fluid, relational, and transient nature of this world. I use it in two ways: one, to talk about all of existence, and two, to talk specifically about life on Earth and humanity's position therein. This is the reason for my potentially confusing description of this vitality as pervading all things followed by my immediate statement of preference for green and growing things over metal and stone, both of which should be equally characterized by the first usage. View the second usage of *anima* as a sort of microscopic (or ecological) version of the idea I put forward in the first and second letters: that we must understand ourselves in relation, not in isolation; in cooperation, not in competition. We are not individuated beings striving against one another but the many billion limbs of one great being. Here, I was trying perhaps too poetically to emphasize the importance of viewing ourselves as inseparable from all life on Earth, bound up in its health and its sickness. It has become popular these days to view humanity and our technology as positioned opposite to nature and life. We want to become metal, artificial and deathless, but we fail to appreciate that we cannot in any way escape the end of all things. We can prolong life, make remote that final reckoning, but it will come through all our kicking and screaming.³ Consider undifferentiated being: our life and our death are unitary. If we value one, we must value the other, "like hands joined together, like the end and the way."⁴

3 An Interrogation of Suffering

Suffering is not pain. I would rather feel the pain of climbing a mountain in order to experience the joy of seeing its peak than any immediate sweetness, given for mere participation, mere breathing. Accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and expression of something beyond pain or pleasure—this is inhibited by suffering. I do not want the cessation of pain; only that which is unchosen, occlusive; that which drives us deeper into ignorance. I want that everyone may appreciate the richness of existence. I want that we may love ourselves for what we are.

4 An Interrogation of Love

Faith is love and love is faith. The actual being of the world is totally remote—we see it as though from a far shore, with facts carried on sparse vessels of experience. We subconsciously interpret the vague notions we receive from our senses into the world as it is presented to our awareness: full of color and brilliance. We do not, cannot, see the world as it is. The limits of our perception are what keep us human. Out there, really, is only a maelstrom of meaninglessness. Yet, we want to, we try to, we yearn to love that which lies outside us. I want to love another. All I want is to love another.

3. And we should prolong life through medicine and technology, in so far as doing so reduces suffering. However, we have to learn how to go into death without suffering.

4. Le Guin, Ursula. *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Ace Books, 1969.

In the first letter, I said that love must genuinely appreciate its object: we cannot love an image, an idea of someone. Thus, we cannot love the people which we construct from our experiences. I cannot love that boyfriend with whom I lay in bed only for the senses of him which reached me across that intractable distance. The purest form of love, the only love which takes its object for what it truly is, the only love which may honestly reach across that immense darkness is faith.

Faith is luminous. It is not-mind. It reifies the our bond with that which lies beyond being. In so far as we may choose anything, being only a walking phantom, a flickering image which the brain projects onto itself, we must choose faith.

Faith is empty, absent. The Divine, which is the object of Faith, cannot merely be present in the world. If we choose to love Yahweh, Allah, Krishna, and so on only as something which has a perceived presence in the world then we are loving an image, an aggregate of experiences, something which might reward us or punish us or even be indifferent but to which we have some relation. We cannot have a relation to the Divine, in the ordinary sense. Pure love is performed in total remoteness to its object. Yet, the Divine is not only a contraction, a void, a lack of relation, an emptiness which underlies being but both being and emptiness, becoming and unbecoming, form and void. Each of us shares that same Ground with the Divine: under our bodies is an absence, an unbeing, a soul which lies beyond suffering.

I love that man I lay with not only for my experiences of him but also for the absence of him between those experiences which constitute fundamentally our being together. Our meeting and our parting. Our kisses and the breaths between. I love that which I may touch and that which I cannot. We share that one soul.