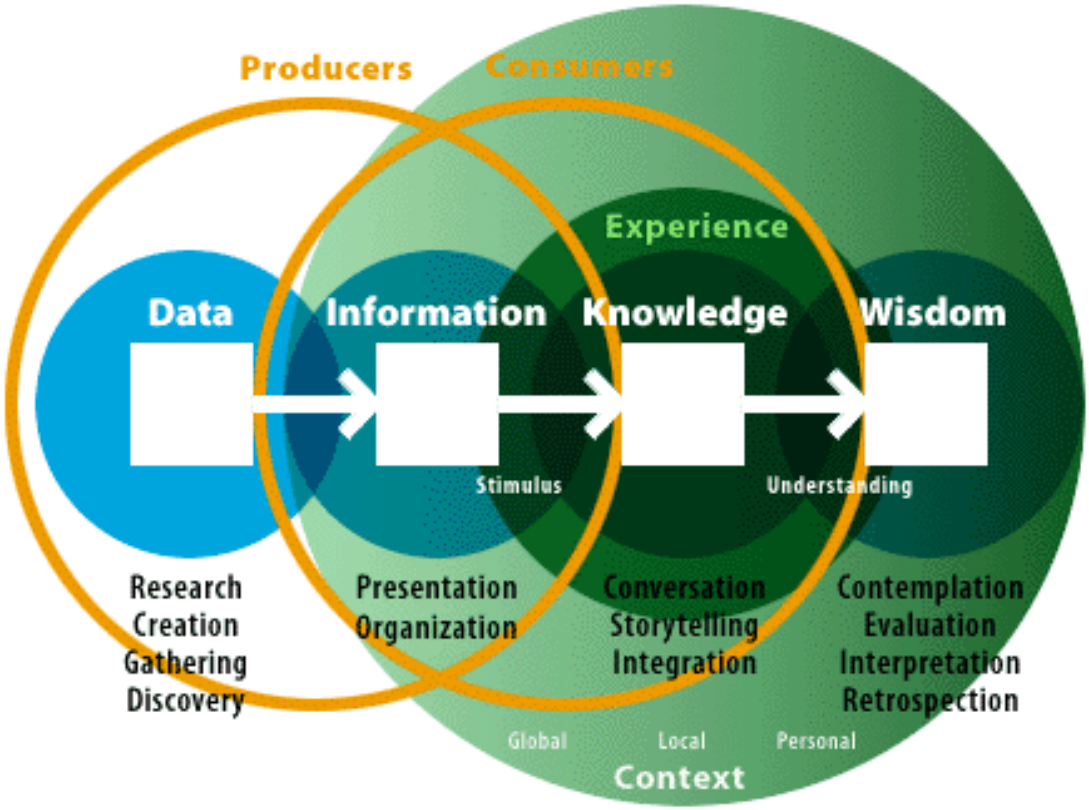
W – Some "Words of Wisdom" about a Wiser Worldview

Dear: In this chapter, I want to show you at least some possible pathways to get to the area on Shedroff's map labeled with the word 'Wisdom'.[1]



To start, maybe I should explain why I put "words of wisdom" in quotation marks in the title of this chapter. My reason is that the phrase "words of wisdom" is close to being an oxymoron: wisdom is rarely found in words, sometimes wisdom can be found in stories, but most commonly, wisdom is in doing – as is, unfortunately, much stupidity. Later in this chapter, I'll try to explain what I mean with some examples. Yet, scraping the bottom of the barrel, maybe there are a few pieces of advice that I can find and want to pass on to you, which as you might expect by now, I'll pass on in the form of warnings. For example, Dear: *please be wary of words*.

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[1] Copied from http://www.nathan.com/thoughts/unified/index.html. The figure is contained in an article by Nathan Shedroff entitled "Information Interaction Design: A Unified Field Theory of Design."

BE WARY OF WORDS!

In earlier chapters I already warned you about misusing words and I tried to explain what I meant by showing you some examples. But as still other examples, consider the words related to 'wise', such as 'wisely', 'wiser', 'wisest', and 'wisdom'.

Definitions for 'Wise'

As you can find in your dictionary, 'wise' (from the Indo-European base-word *weid,* meaning "to see or know") means

> **1.** having or showing good judgment; sagacious; prudent; discreet
> **2.** promoted by wisdom; judicious; sound… **3.** having information; informed…
> **4.** learned; erudite **5.** shrewd; crafty; cunning…

Further, in its listings of synonyms and antonyms, my dictionary gives for 'wise' the explanation: "*wise* implies the ability to judge and deal with persons, situations, etc. rightly, based on a broad range of knowledge, experience, and understanding." It lists the antonyms for 'wise': "foolish, stupid". (How about 'wacky'?!) The meaning for these antonyms, I suppose, is that unwise people deal with persons, situations, etc. wrongly.

To my mind, however, the above definitions contain at least three major problems:

1) They don't adequately convey the idea that there's a huge difference between information and knowledge, and then again, between knowledge (and experience and understanding) and wisdom, as Shedroff tried to indicate in his figure shown on the previous page. As examples, an enormous amount of information is available on the internet, maybe 10% of it conveys knowledge, probably less than 1% demonstrates understanding, and I'd bet that less than 0.01% conveys any wisdom!

2) More importantly, the above definitions of 'wise' don't provide much (if any) guidance about how to gain wisdom: I know many people with a "broad range of knowledge, experience, and understanding" who behave foolishly. My daughter recently identified another such person [☹].

3) The above definitions neglect to emphasize that it's meaningless to say that "wise" people show "good" judgment and judge "rightly" (or that "unwise" people judge "wrongly") – unless objectives are known. That is, as I've tried to show you many times, value judgments (e.g., judgments about "right" *vs.* "wrong", "good" *vs.* "bad", etc.) have meaning only relative to some objective – and therefore depend on one's worldview.

"Wacky" Religious Ideas about 'Wisdom'

I therefore conclude that my dictionary's definition of 'wise' is "politically correct" but woefully inadequate. I deride it by calling it "politically correct", because it's capable of incorporating some asinine ideas about 'wisdom' contained in the "holy books" of various religions. Below, I'll show you a few examples of such "wackiness".

- The silliness in the *Upanishads* (one part of the "holy books" of Hinduism, which are called "the Vedas"), which in the *Theme of the Mundaka* states:[2]

  > Knowledge is of things, acts, and relations, but wisdom is of Brahman [God] alone… To become one with him is the only wisdom.

  I call this "silliness", Dear, not only because, in the worldview of Hindus, God is everything and therefore it's impossible not to be "one with God" (yet, unless it's claimed that everyone is wise, obviously this "oneness" is insufficient to produce wisdom!) but also because, more importantly, it's wrong: if you accept some version of the idea (which humanity has always known and Socrates summarized well) that "right" means helping knowledge expand and if "wise" means acting "rightly", then realizing that you're one with the universe isn't sufficient for you to act wisely. Thus, instead of helping humanity, a "wise" Hindu can waste his or her life sitting in a "lotus position" chanting "OM"!

- The junk in Judaism[3] that's repeated in the *Old Testament* at *Job 28,* 28, *Psalm 111*, and *Proverbs 9,* 10 and that starts with:

  > The fear of the LORD is [the beginning of] wisdom…

  I call this "junk", Dear, because our instincts teach us that fear of something real should stimulate flight or fight (or "fencing off"); in contrast, fear of the LORD should stimulate laughter (or a search for psychiatric help) – although the Jewish clerics did learn (consistent with the example set by the Egyptian and Persian clerics whom they mimicked) that the people's "fear of the LORD" did generate a tremendous booty for the clerics! In that regard, it's interesting that my dictionary includes in its definition of 'wise' the meaning "shrewd; crafty; cunning…" In contrast, at least the Hindu clerics taught that "He who knows the joy of Brahman… is free from fear."[4]

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[2] This is from "The Wisdom of the Hindu Mystics *The Upanishads* Breath of the Eternal", a selection and translation by Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (Signet, New York, 1957, p. 42).

[3] As I showed you a little in **Ix** and will show you more in **Yx**, Judaism (incorporating Zoroastrianism in myths from throughout the Mideast) started in the 5th BCE, when the Jews were in Babylon; therefore, Hinduism is much older than the religion concocted by Ezra and colleagues and now called Judaism.

[4] From the same source as given in Footnote #2, in the *Taittiriya*, p. 58.

- The foolishness in the *New Testament* at *James 1,* 5 that states:

  If any of you falls short in wisdom, he should ask God for it, and it will be given him.

  Wouldn't that be great if it were true?! But, Dear, I'm sorry to report that the only "wisdom" available from the gods of all clerics is that – surprise, surprise – in their opinion it's wise to keep their collection plates filled.

- The nonsense in the *Quran*, stated over and over again, that it (the *Quran*) is "the Book and the wisdom." But how could it be 'wisdom' when it advocates the worldview of Muhammad, who knew less about this universe and our place within it than a modern child? He did, however, know how to profit from the murderous rampages of his followers, dictating at **The Accessions, 8**.41:

  And know that whatever thing you gain, a fifth [20%!] of it is for Allah [i.e., for Muhammad]…

  Recall again: "shrewd; crafty; cunning".

- And finally in this list, there's the ignorance of the Mormon "profit" Joseph Smith, who states in his *History* (*1,* 11) that he gained wisdom by following the prescription advocated in the Bible at *James 1,* 5 (quoted above). And sure enough "it came to pass" (☹) that Smith gained the "wisdom" of how to keep his collection plates filled. For example, in *The Doctrine and Covenants* (*58,* 35), he states:

  It is wisdom in me that my servant Martin Harris should be an example unto the church, in laying his moneys before the bishop of the church.

  Ah yes, a very good example indeed! Again recall: "shrewd; crafty; cunning".

But "political correctness" aside, I consider my dictionary's definition for 'wise' to be "inadequate" for two main reasons. First is its failure (already mentioned) to inform the reader that wisdom (the ability to make 'good' judgments and judge 'rightly') depends on one's objectives (such as the objective of the clerics in keeping their collection plates filled) and therefore depends on one's worldview. And second is the definition's failure to guide the reader toward wisdom by describing a wise or wiser worldview!

Of course, I wouldn't expect the authors of any popular dictionary created in our society to be sufficiently courageous to suggest a wise worldview (after all, the publisher wants to maximize sales!), but I can imagine that, in a hundred-or-so years from now, dictionary definitions of 'wise' will be something similar to:

wise implies the ability to judge and deal with persons, situations, etc. rightly, based on a broad range of knowledge, experience, and understanding *toward the goals of expanding knowledge and understanding, to intelligently solve human problems.*

Some Reverse Acronyms for 'WISE' & 'WISDOM'

Anyway, Dear, for years when I walked and came to the letter 'W', I wrestled with what 'wise' and related words mean. And as I'm wont to do (especially when my mind wanders!), I played the game of pretending such words were acronyms and then tried to decipher the "meaning" or "source" of each acronym – just as I showed you, in an earlier chapter, that I had decided that, when people say "Thank God", they mean (or should mean!) "Thank [Human] Greatness On Demand." And just in case you ever become as weird as your old grandfather (Earth forbid!), let me show you some of the "reverse acronyms" that I've already explored.[5]

- If you read the *Wisdom of Solomon* in the Bible's *Apocrypha*, then maybe you'll see why I REJECT the author's idea of both 'wise' and 'wisdom', which appear to be the following acronyms: WISE = Wishing Intensely for Supernatural's Existence; WISDOM = Wishing Intensely for a Supernatural Deity's Oppression of Mankind.

- If you've read Somerset Maugham's book *The Razor's Edge* (and if not, I recommend you do), then maybe you'll understand my "reverse acronym" for his idea about a wiser way: WISER = Walking between Insecurity and Security on the Edge of a Razor, (or WISER = When an Individual's Search is Enough Reward).

- If you read some of Alan Watts' books (and I recommend you do), such as *Cloud-Hidden, Whereabouts Unknown,* then maybe you'll understand my unscrambling his idea of WISELY = Waltzing between Insecurity and Security, Effortlessly, Laughing and Yelping!

- In turn, I played with deciphering the acronym WISEST, such as Wrestling Instinctively, Savoring Existence, and Seeking Truth (or WISEST = Working Imaginatively and Sincerely in Education, Science, and Technology).

Finally, after years of searching, I finally found what appears to be the most sensible interpretation for the acronym WISDOM: What I Sometimes Do and Occasionally Mean.

Grandfather!

What?

That's crummy.

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[5] Dear, the game of "undoing acronyms" isn't so silly as it may at first seem: many English words were, at first, just acronyms, such as radar (from RAdio Detecting And Ranging), snafu (Situation Normal All Fouled Up – at least in the "G-rated version"), and many more (which you can find on the internet by searching for "reverse acronyms").

What's crummy?

Your suggestion for what WISDOM means.

Why?

Well, if your gonna play a silly game, pretending that 'WISDOM' is an acronym, then at least make it a decent one.

Well, It Seems like a Decent One to Me.

Oh, my, isn't that cute.

Well It's Such a Darn Obvious Meaning.

Well I Say it's Dubious – and Ostensibly Meaningless.

Oooo… Smart-aleck, insolent child. Would Insolence Suggest Decipherment of Other Meanings?

Well, without taking "years" to figure them out, how about WISDOM being:

- When an Individual Seeks to Discover Other Models
- When an Individual Selects Doubt Over Mysticism
- When an Individual Strives Diligently to Overcome Mediocrity
- When an Individual Strives Deliberately to Observe Moderation
- When an Individual Sees that Domination of Others is a Mistake
- When an Individual's Success Depends On Means
- When Individuals Suffer Defeats from their Own Mistakes
- When Individuals Shelve Dogmatic Opinions and Myopia
- When Individuals Select to Defend Others who are Maligned
- When Individuals See that 'Democracy' is Other than 'Majority-rule'
- When Institutions Select Directors On Merit
- When Institutions and States Defend Options for Minorities
- When Institutions and States Decry Oppression of Mankind
- When Institutional Decisions are Open and Manifest
- When Ignorance Self Destructs in its Own Myopia
- When Intellectual Stupor is Driven Out of the Mainstream
- When Intellectual Slavery Dies of its Own Malaise
- When Intellectual Superiority Dominates Over Muscle
- When Independent Scientists Describe Opinions and Models
- When Independent Science Dominates Over Mysticism
- When Inquires in Science Define Outlooks for Man
- When Ideas Stop Demeaning Our Minds
- When Ideas are Selected based on Data, Observations, and Methods

- When Ideas Serve the Development of Mankind
- When Intelligent Survival Defines Our Morals
- When Intelligent Survival Determines Our Measures, or
- Worldviews in which Intelligence's Survival is the Dominant Objective of Mankind.

Child: you're just playing with words. A Word Is Supposed to be Defined Objectively not Manufactured.

Oh Sure. You say that, because you noticed that I'm winning, and for you, Winning Is Something Done – Occasionally and Marginally.

Ha! How about: WISDOM being When I Secretly Desire Oodles of Money, or When Ideas of Sex Dominate Our Minds, or Worshipping in Ignorance Society's Deities in an Ostentatious Manner?

That's not wisdom; it's dumb. WISDOM isn't When Idiots and Similar Dimwits Offer Mediocrity.

Oh, so, Wisdom Isn't Supposed to be Dumb Or Mindless, or When Ignorant Superstitions Dominate One's Mind? How about WISDOM being Walking in Isolation in a Serene Desert Often Meditating?

Well, that's better, but still better is to see that WISDOM is What I Say, Do, Or Mean.

Child: that's cheating! You're just copying me. I already said WISDOM is What I Sometimes Do and Occasionally Mean.

It's fair; I changed it some, and Winning Is Sometimes Determined by Our Methods.

Well, who wants to play a game when Words Inside Sentences Define their Own Meaning?

What I Say Does Opine Meaning.

Opine? Gimme a break, child! *Opine* means "to hold or express an opinion, 'think', or 'suppose'." I say that We Insist on Solid Definitions of Our Meanings.

Wittgenstein Insists that Service Defines Our Meaning.

Wittgenstein? What does a little skunk like you know about Wittgenstein? Wittgenstein's Idiotic Stuff Destroys One's Mind!

Well I Strenuously Disagree with the Opinion Mentioned.

Well I Select a Dictionary's Overt Meaning."

And that's Why I Soundly Defeat an Old Man.

Child: WISDOM isn't When Insolence and Stubbornness Dominate Over Maturity.

Why Is Such a Description Overly Mean?

Well I Say Define Or Malign.

Well I Say Defend and Offer to Mend.

Ha! If you wanna Win I Suggest you Don't Open your Mouth.

Ha, yourself, I say Winning Is Studious Deliberation with an Open Mind.

When I Stop, Don't Offer More.

When I Stop, Don't Offend More!

Child! You're heading for a Well-deserved, Incipient Spanking from your Dad Or Mom.

You're Wallowing In Seductive Dreams Old Man.

Child…

And Would I be Seriously Deluded Or Mistaken, I Wonder, if I Supposed, Dear, that Other Messages weren't so clear to you? But taking a risk, let me try to convey these "other messages" to you, even using words.

For example, you might now be experiencing one reason to be wary of words: the propensity of one's (left) brain to try to make connections. For example, notice that, in the word game illustrated above, if there were only 10-or-so words that start with the letter W and that you considered using, 10-or-so words that start with the letter I, and so on through S, D, O, and M, then your brain would search through 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 x 10 = 10^6 = a million different combinations, trying to make connections! And whereas there are many more than 10 words available per letter (e.g., if you can think of 100 for each, then there are 10^{12} = a trillion potential connections!), then unless you force your mind to stop searching, you could literally spend the rest of your life searching for "the meaning" of WISDOM!

And in case you are having trouble getting your mind to stop searching for the connections (and I wouldn't be surprised if this propensity to try to make connections drives some people crazy), then let me suggest some methods to try to stop. One method (which in the one that I just finished using, myself) is to meditate. If after reading an earlier chapter (**B**) you've practiced the method of quieting your left brain (e.g., by feeling yourself breath, counting "one, two" when you inhale and "three, four" while you exhale, gently but forcefully repressing all other thoughts), and if your result is similar to mine (that pictures appear in your brain), then after you finish your meditation (especially if it puts you to sleep, as it frequently does for me), then I suspect that similar will also happen for you: your left brain will no longer be searching for connections in some silly word game.

But if you haven't yet taught yourself how to meditate, Dear, and if the attempt to make connections is "really getting to you", then engage your mind in some other absorbing activity or distraction: watch a stimulating movie, call up a "certain someone" to talk, get someone to play a game of tennis (or whatever) with you, or similar. But probably don't continue reading (especially this book), because, it quite likely will be so boring that your left brain will drift off, to try to make more connections!

And still another method is a shock treatment. For example, Dear, if you don't stop trying to make connections, if you don't get busy studying for that exam, then you're gonna fail the course, you'll not make it through college, you'll never be able to get a job, you'll be homeless, hungry, and hopeless, and you're just not gonna make it. So, kid, move on – NOW!

Some Examples of "Improper Language"

Meanwhile, Dear, another reason to be wary of words (besides avoiding being hung up searching for connections) is that some words can create dreams, fantasies, and hallucinations in one's mind, especially the minds of children (and other immature people). Wilson[6] summarized it well:

> You don't need to take drugs to hallucinate; improper language can fill your world with phantoms and spooks of many kinds.

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[6] I found this quotation in Aiken's collection (which I've referenced before, many times). Aiken gives as the source: Robert Anton Wilson, *Chaos and Beyond: The Best of Trajectories,* 1994.

In his Florida State University Ph.D. thesis, Julio Varela describes more completely some of the problems caused by words:[7]

> In *The Ticket That Exploded*, Burroughs speculates that word viruses may once have been healthy neural cells, but now are parasitic organisms that invade and damage the central nervous system… The novel portrays language as an infectious agent, penetrating consciousness, often causing unspeakable horror and death. Words come to represent everything that is alien or artificial to the human organism. Modern man has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that forces you to talk. That organism is the word. In the beginning was the word.
>
> Burroughs asserted that as parasitic organisms, word viruses impose "image and soundtrack…" on susceptible hosts, against the will of the subjects. Summarizing Burroughs, Shaviro states: "Our bodies are never ourselves, our words and texts never really our own. They aren't 'us', but the forces which crush us, the norms to which we have been subjected… A virus has no morals… and similarly the language virus has no meanings… It is not 'I' who speaks, but the virus inside me. "

Thereby, Dear, I hope you see some of the evil perpetrated by the clerics who wrote the "holy books" of their religions to manipulate immature minds with words that invoke horrible images, e.g., about Hell, for example:

In the New Testament

> *Matthew 5,* 30: And if your right hand causes you to sin [the clerics' Jesus reportedly said], cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into Hell.
>
> *Matthew 13,* 42: They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [Is this what the clerics' Jesus meant by loving one's enemies?!]

In the Quran

> *The Women 4***,** 56: (As for) those who disbelieve in Our communications, We [God or Allah] shall make them enter fire; so oft as their skins are thoroughly burned, We will change them for other skins, that they may taste the chastisement…
>
> *The Believer 40***,** 70: Those who reject the Book and that with which We have sent Our Apostle [Muhammad]… they shall soon come to know, when the fetters and the chains shall be on their necks; they shall be dragged into boiling water, then in the fire shall they be burned…

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[7] At http://etd.lib.fsu.edu/theses/available/etd-03032004-150920/unrestricted/02-JAV-text(2-3-04).pdf.

The Pilgrimage 22, 19: These are two adversaries who dispute about their Lord; then (as to) those who disbelieve, for them are cut out garments of fire, boiling water shall be poured over their heads. With it shall be melted what is in their bellies and (their) skins as well. And for them are whips of iron. Whenever they will desire to go forth from it, from grief, they shall be turned back into it, and taste the chastisement of burning.

In the Book of Mormon:

1 Nephi 14, 3: And that great pit, which hath been digged [dug?!] for them by that great and abominable church [the Catholic Church] which was founded by the devil and his children, that he might lead away the souls of men down to Hell – yea, that great pit which hath been digged [?!] for the destruction of men shall be filled by those who digged [☹] it, unto their utter destruction, saith the Lamb of God; not the destruction of the soul, save it be the casting of it into that Hell which hath no end.

2 Nephi 1, 13: O that ye would awake; awake from a deep asleep, yea, even from the sleep of Hell, and shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound, which are the chains which bind the children of men, that they are carried away captive down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.

My first response to such horrible writing is to remember something that Thomas Paine (one of the founders of our government) wrote in his book *The Age of Reason*: "Any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be true." That's not necessarily correct, of course, but it's a much healthier sentiment than the sentiments expressed by the clerics against their critics. And although I expect that there's no need, maybe I should add the following.

Dear: If there's any chance you "believe" all the nonsense that the damnable clerics have written about Hell, and if you're then concerned that your grandmother and I are headed for Hell (to be tortured for eternity), then please remember: it's all just words. There isn't a scrap of data supporting the idea that Hell exists, whereas there's a huge amount of data supporting the idea that Hell was concocted by clerics to increase their cash flow.

Therefore, Dear, what I hope you'll do (rather than pay attention to the clerics' words that manipulate images of eternal torture) is recall words (such as the following)[8] that are more trustworthy – because no cleric is standing nearby with his collection plate extended:

[8] From the poem *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll in his book *Through the Looking Glass.*

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

That is, regardless of all the gyring and gimbling of the slithy toves who preach nonsense about Hell (for their own profit), be assured that, when brillig comes, your grandmother and I will be all mimsy in the borogoves where the mome raths outgrabe.

The Needs for "Reality Checks"

Stated differently, please make frequent "reality checks" both of individual words and their groupings. As I've written before, you may realize the reality behind words such as 'flying', 'pink', 'elephants', and 'invisible', but an alarm bell should go off in your brain when someone groups them into a statement such as: "all invisible flying elephants are pink".

An even louder alarm should sound in your brain when someone tells you that, if you don't believe that the giant Jabberwock in the sky rides on invisible flying pink elephants (or whatever), then you're headed for Hell. Instead, Dear, maybe you can find a little humor in such nonsense. For example, if one accepts the definition of Hell given in the movie *Platoon* (which was close to: "Hell is a place where reason doesn't stand a chance"), then anyone who preaches anything about "Hellfire and Damnation" at least has some experience with what he's talking about!

More generally, Dear, please take care to understand the meanings of all symbols, including words. Please never forget that all words are just a series of hisses, grunts, and other sounds (clicking, ticking, blowing, etc.) that communities of people (similar to other animals) adopt by convention and custom to try to communicate. But similar to other animals, we can communicate without words. As examples, in our society, an open hand that moves as if scooping air toward you means "Come here", a hand held up firmly with palm facing out means "Stop", and a hand held vertically in preparation for a handshake means "See, I have no weapons to hurt you."

Obviously, though, communications can be more efficient and effective using words rather than hand signals. Further, it's easy to argue the case that our abilities to use words is why humans developed more than other animals.

This development, however, depends on the fundamental proviso that there be agreement about the meaning of the symbols called words. Please, Dear, never forget that, if words are to have meaning, if we are to communicate using symbolic hisses and grunts, then not only must there be some process or thing in reality to which our words correspond but also there must be agreement about the reality to which our hisses and grunts refer.

"Base Words" Can't Be Defined Using Words

As a result of the requirement for efficient and effective communications with words that they refer to something real, there's a group of words that can't be defined in terms of other words. As I've written in earlier chapters, I call them "base words". They have meaning only relative to the reality they represent.

In most cases, these "base words" refer to reality detected by our senses. From this reality, we then invent new words such as 'existence' – by which we mean, first, that there's something in our environment that we can detect with at least one of our senses. For example, when you kick a tree and it hurts your foot, then you have confirmation that the tree "exists".

Then, however, major questions can arise (and have arisen) dealing with base words such as "existence". For example, what about those things that we can't detect with our senses? Do they exist? What about those "things" that we just think about? Do they exist? In earlier chapters, I went into some of the pointless effort that has been expended trying to answer such question, such as all the erroneous "proofs" of the "existence" of "God". As I tried to show you in Chapter **R** (entitled "Reason *versus* Reality"), such "proofs" are erroneous (all the expended efforts were pointless), because it's impossible to generate new information *via* deduction: to gain new information, new data must be collected. For example, the only way to demonstrate that some god exists is to generate some new information, i.e., collect some evidence (or data).

If you want to see more such silliness, Dear, you might want to look at some of the writings by the philosopher, bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753), who convinced himself that nothing exists unless it's thought about. But if, instead, you want to avoid all such nonsense, then I recommend you do the obvious: define what you mean by the words that you use and don't engage in discussions that involve inadequately defined words.

For example, Dear, suppose someone asks you (echoing Berkeley): "If a tree falls in a forest, and if no one sees or hears the tree fall, or in any other way detects that it fell, then did the tree fall? Does the tree exist?" What I would recommend is that, if you choose to respond to someone who asks such a question (but don't forget: "You don't have to answer the phone!"), then respond with something similar to: "You tell me that a tree fell in a forest and that no one heard, saw, or any way detected that it fell. Before we continue, first show me the data that support your claim that a tree fell."

The critically important point, Dear, is to remember that any hypothesis about the existence of anything is, first and foremost, a hypothesis. And as I've repeatedly stated, there are a number of totally obvious conditions that any statement must meet before it can be classified as a hypothesis (rather than as just another speculation, e.g., about the existence of invisible flying pink elephants). Two of the most important conditions for a statement to be classified as a hypothesis are that it must succinctly summarize a substantial quantity of reliable data and that it must provide predictions that can be tested. Therefore, relative to any proposed hypothesis that a particular tree fell in the forest, first demand the data.

If adequate and adequately reliable data are supplied, then when the bothersome fellow returns with the data and says, "Well, now do you think that the tree exists?", then if you want, respond with something similar to the following. "If these data are reliable, then they would support the hypothesis that the tree under consideration does exist. From the hypothesis of the tree's existence, the prediction follows that, if you should go into the forest, you'll find evidence that the tree fell (or, as appropriate, that someone covered up the evidence that the tree fell). I therefore suggest that, before this conversation continues, you head off into the forest and see if the prediction of the hypothesis of the tree's existence can be validated."

If you can't easily disengage from such silly people, Dear, I'd suggest that, whenever anyone makes any statement about the existence of anything, you should do similar: first, ask about the data that are allegedly summarized by such an "existence hypothesis", and then, determine the predictive capability of the hypothesis. For example, if someone says something similar to "I know that God exists", then first ask him how he "knows" (i.e., what data does the hypothesis allegedly summarize), and then ask him "So what? What testable predictions follow from your hypothesis?"

Similar reactions are appropriate if someone attempts to engage you in a discussion about "free will" (arguing either that "free will" exists or that it doesn't). If you choose to answer that phone, Dear (although I'd recommend that you don't!), then you might want to respond by badgering the person about definitions until he either gives up or realizes that he doesn't know what he's talking about: "What do you mean 'free will'? What do you mean 'independent agent' – independent from what? How can anyone be independent from one's 'nature'?…", and so on.[9] Alternatively, you might want to respond by forcing him to adopt a different analogy:

> Well, I don't know what you mean by "free will", but I'll describe how I make decisions, and then you can invent whatever phrase you want (maybe "encumbered will" or "partial independence" or "rational judgment") to describe it. Thus, to make decisions, what I do is like taking a running jump across a stream, onto the opposite bank, into the future. How I run is of course influenced by my nature and my nurture, but then, when I'm about to leap across the stream into the future, I do my best to assess all possible outcomes of my decision, using my brain as best I can, and then, I choose what seems most likely to yield my objectives. What do you do?

Anyway, Dear, in general, please be wary if anyone attempts to define 'reality' or 'existence' in terms of words. That's putting the cart in front of the horse: focus on what's real; meaningful words are symbols for something real; reality isn't just another symbol!

Some Examples of Misuse of Words in Organized Religions

Failure to understand that words are just symbols is the foolish foundation of all "supernatural worldviews". Some examples follow.

- As I showed you in the excursion **Ix**, the "genesis myth" of the ancient Egyptians begins as follows [to which I've added some italics and the notes in brackets]:

> In the beginning, before there was any land of Egypt, all was darkness, and there was nothing but a great waste of water called *Nun*. The power of *Nun* [although why a "great waste of water" would have "power" isn't explained] was such that there arose out of the darkness a great shining egg, and this was *Re* [the sun god]. Now, *Re* was all-powerful, and he could take many forms. [The author was obviously very impressed with "power"!] His [Re's] power and the secret of it lay in his hidden name… *if he [Re] spoke other names, that which he named came into being.* "I am *Khepera* at the dawn, and *Re* at noon, and *Tem* in the evening," he said. And the sun rose and passed across the sky and set for the first time. Then he named *Shu*, and the first winds blew; he named *Tefnut,* the spitter, and the first rain fell. Next he named *Geb*, and the earth came into being; he named the goddess *Nut*, and she was the sky arched over the earth with her feet on one

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[9] My daughter recently relayed to me how Ed Lorenz would commonly (and wisely) respond to comments about "free will" (from his book *The Essence of Chaos*): "We must wholeheartedly believe in free will. If free will is a reality, we shall have made the correct choice. If it is not, we shall still not have made an incorrect choice, because we shall not have made any choice at all, not having a free will to do so."

> horizon and her hands on the other; he named *Hapi*, and the great River Nile flowed through Egypt and made it fruitful. After this *Re* named all things that are upon the earth, and they grew. Last of all he named mankind, and there were men and women in the land of Egypt.

- Similar meaningless words occur, of course, in the first of the two genesis myths in the Bible (and I wrote "of course", because as I showed you in **Ix**, the two genesis myths in the Bible are revisions of earlier Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Persian myths). The first starts with the familiar lines:

> In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of god moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light, and there was light…"

- Unsurprisingly, similar is in the Quran (*The Believer 40,* 68), and I wrote 'unsurprisingly", because similar to Judaism, Christianity, and Mormonism, Islam is just another revision to earlier religions (especially Zoroastrianism):

> He it is [i.e., Allah or God is he] Who gives life and brings death, so when He decrees an affair, He only says to it: "Be" – and it is.

- But possibly nothing surpasses the silliness of the "genesis myth" in the New Testament, which states (*John 1,*1):

> When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was.
>
> (Or, in the King James Version: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.)

Nietzsche ridiculed such silliness by writing: "In the beginning was nonsense, and the nonsense was with God, and the nonsense was God." What a pity for humanity that, when the first ignorant cleric started preaching such nonsense, some kid (similar to a certain argumentative grandchild!) didn't say:

> But, but… how could that be? Words are just symbols. How could a symbol for anything have any meaning before the thing exists? Sure: you can name a baby before it's born, or even before it's conceived, but that's because you already have a pretty good idea what a baby is. But if I told you that I was going to bring a ‡∞°#¶ into the world, you wouldn't have the faintest idea of what I was talking about! So, how could some god say: "Let there be light"? If light didn't already exist, then there wouldn't be any meaning for the word 'light'. Similarly for naming the wind or the rain or the world: before any of them existed, such words would have been totally meaningless. Whoever wrote '"Be' – and it is" was totally clueless: if I told him to "be" a ‡∞°#¶, he'd have to respond: "Say what?" And even more ignorant is the idiot who wrote: "In the beginning was the Word… and the Word was God". If "in the beginning" there was nothing except "the Word", then it would have been a symbol for absolutely nothing; so, if "the Word was God", then the only consistent conclusion is that God is a symbol for absolutely nothing!

Actually, though, at least a partial reconciliation can be found between the views of the kid who, it's assumed, said the above and of the cleric who wrote: "In the beginning was the Word…"

Try to Avoid "Semantic Arguments"

One way to describe the above-mentioned partial reconciliation is by showing how Hegel's "dialectic" can be applied (which, as you might recall, Dear, means finding a synthesis of a thesis and its antithesis). But here, because the argument is basically over words (i.e., a "semantic argument"), I'll describe how a potential reconciliation can be found by straightening out some terminology. And since I'm certain that during your life, you'll encounter many arguments that are "just semantics", I'll begin my demonstration by once again encouraging you to be careful of words – especially of words translated from other languages!

Be Wary of Potential Translation Errors

To illustrate my concern, let me remind you of two glaring and astounding translation errors that led to my grandchildren being indoctrinated with supernatural nonsense.

Thus, first, the entire construct called Judaism (and therefore, Christianity, Islam, and Mormonism) rests on the alleged "miracle" performed by God parting the Red Sea, enabling Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt – most of God's other alleged "miracles" having been matched by "miracles" performed by Egyptian priests! [Sure they were.]

But, Dear, as I showed you in **Ix** and as you can find on the internet, there is a "slight glitch" in the fable about Moses parting the Red Sea: everywhere in the Bible (and in the Quran and the Book of Mormon) where it states "Red Sea", this translation error should be corrected to read "Reed Sea"! Further (as I also mentioned in **Ix**), possibly the Reed Sea being referenced is not on Earth but the Reed Sea in the stars, i.e., a constellation that, in one of the "star myths", another constellation (which we call Orion the Hunter) mythically crosses. That is, Dear, the story about Moses crossing the Red Sea may be nothing but an ancient "astrological tale" that Ezra and co-authors of the Old Testament simply "borrowed" to bolster their story – and bolster the booty in their collection plates.

Meanwhile, the other translation error, with equally astounding (and astoundingly stupid) consequences, is at the basis of all Christian denominations, including Mormonism. Thus, a basic tenet is that the birth of Jesus was a "supernatural" event, e.g., as given at *Matthew 1,* 22:

> All this happened to fulfill what the Lord declared through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel…"

But, Dear, as I'll show you in the "excursion" **Yx** and as you can find on the internet, there's absolutely no doubt that the correct translation of this "prophecy" (which is given at *Isaiah 6,* 14 and which you can find corrected even in modern versions of the Bible, such as the New English Bible) is:

> A young woman [not a virgin!] is with child [not "will conceive"!], and she will bear a son and will call him Immanuel.

That is, in Isaiah's time (about 700 BCE), the alleged "prophecy" was that a young woman, who was then pregnant, would give birth to a boy (rather than a girl) who was to be called Emmanuel – a rather less "prophetic utterance" than that, ~700 years later, a "virgin will conceive". Thereby, the entire "supernatural" construct of Christianity (and Mormonism) collapses – because it was built on a mistranslation!

Even further, as I'll show you in **Yx**, archaeological studies have led to the realization that all the biblical stories about Moses are just that, i.e., fictional stories. In reality, none of it (none of the miracles performed by Aaron or Moses or God) ever happened! As a result, all "sacred scripture" of all the Abrahamic religions (the Bible, the Quran, the Book of Mormon, etc.) are revealed to be nothing but silly word games, with basic tenets based on mistranslations!

Be Extremely Careful with "To Be"!

But, Dear, be careful not only with words translated from other languages but also with the use of even English words – especially the word that's probably the most fundamental word of our language, i.e., the various forms of the verb "to be" (is, am, are, was, will be, etc.). Although, in an earlier chapter, I went through some of the dangers of these multiple meanings for "to be", yet because they've caused and continue to cause so many logical errors, it might be useful if I go through some of the problems again.

The problems with "to be" was emphatically summarized by Alfred Korzybski in his 1933 book *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics*:[10]

> The verb "to be" has at least four entirely different uses: 1) as an auxiliary verb, "Smith is coming", 2) as the 'is' of predication, "the apple is red", 3) as the 'is' of "existence", "I am", and 4) as the 'is' of identify, "the apple is a fruit". *The fact that four semantically entirely different words should have one sound and spelling appears as a genuine tragedy of the race* [italics added]; the more so, since the discrimination between their uses is not always easy.

You may think (as did I, when I first read this referenced article by Kish) that Korzybski's describing this "fact" (i.e., that 'is' has four entirely different meanings) as "a genuine tragedy of the [human] race" is quite an exaggeration (not only because it's usually not too difficult to deduce meanings from contexts but also because it may be a problem only for languages derived from the Latin language). Yet, the more I have thought about his assessment, the more I have tended to agree with it.

And it's not just in religions that confusion from the different meanings of 'is' can cause major problems. For example, let me again quote from your grandmother's philosophy text,[11] which in turn is quoting Bertrand Russell. I expect you'll have some difficulty with some details in this quotation, Dear, but if you'll just "go with the flow" throughout the quotation, then I expect that you'll be able to glean the essence of Russell's point.

> Hegel's argument… depends throughout upon confusing the 'is' of predication (as in "Socrates is mortal") with the 'is' of identify (as in "Socrates is the philosopher who drank the hemlock"). Owing to this confusion, [Hegel] thinks that 'Socrates' and 'mortal' must be identical. Seeing that they are different, he does not infer (as others would) that there is a mistake somewhere, but that they exhibit "identity in difference." Again, Socrates is particular, 'mortal' is universal. Therefore, [Hegel] says, since Socrates is mortal, it follows that the particular is the universal – taking the 'is' to be throughout expressive of identity.

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[10] Actually, I'm quoting this from an interesting article on the web by Bruce I. Kodish, a version of which was published in *General Semantics Bulletin,* No. 64, 1997. Kodish gives the following information for the book by Korzybski (which I haven't seen): Fourth Edition, 1958, The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, Lakeville, CT (now Englewood, NJ).

[11] *A History of Western Philosophy* by W.T. Jones, p. 984 (Harcourt, Brace, and Company, New York, 1952).

> But to say "the particular is the universal" is self-contradictory. Again Hegel does not suspect a mistake, but proceeds to synthesize particular and universal in the individual, or "concrete universal". This is an example of how, for want of care at the start, vast and imposing systems of philosophy are built upon stupid and trivial confusions, which, but for the almost incredible fact that they are unintentional, one would be tempted to characterize as puns.

"Who cares?" questions a certain grandchild. Well, Dear, maybe you would, if you studied a little more history and philosophy: as I've mentioned before, Hegel (1770–1831) was the fellow who conceived of the idea of "the dialectic" (the synthesis of a thesis and its antithesis); what Hegel advocated was subsequently called "dialectic idealism"; Marx (1818–1883) liked the idea of "the dialectic", but wanted to stick to materialism; so, he pursued "dialectic materialism", viz., Communism; confrontations between Communism and Capitalism during the 20th Century, led to an enormous waste of resources on armaments, the maiming and deaths of tens of millions of people (not only in revolutions and wars but also in the slaughter of citizens by communist leaders such as Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot); and all because Hegel didn't recognize that "to be" has multiple meanings!

Similar errors are rampant in religions. For example, as I showed you in earlier chapters (e.g., in **Ib2**), there is the silliness in the New Testament: "God is love" (in which 'is' serves to 'identify' or means 'identity'). If to that expression one adds "love exists" (or "love is real", using the 'is' of existence), then the result of the syllogism (and of not noticing that those are two different uses of 'is'!) yields: "Therefore, God exists." Sheer stupidity, yes, but the consequences of such errors have been horrendous. Thus, during the past 2,000 and more years, and continuing today, tens of millions of people have been maimed and killed in various "holy wars" (and millions of people have been tortured and murdered) all because, at root, ignorant clerics didn't (and still don't) understand that 'is' has multiple meanings![12]

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[12] Many more examples are given at http://www.rawilson.com/quantum.shtml, which is an excerpt from Robert Anton Wilson's 1990 book *Quantum Psychology,* which I haven't read but definitely should! Another example (the origin of which I don't know) was recently posted by "Occam's Laser" at the Richard Dawkins Forum (http://richarddawkins.net/forum/viewtopic.php?f=3&t=73067; see the entry at Sat Feb 21, 2009 4:47 AM, PST). The post includes the following three quotations from the Bible: *1 John 4,* 8: "God is love", *1 Corinthians 13*, 4: "Love is not jealous", and *Exodus 20,* 5: "I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God", and concludes: "Such a God cannot logically exist." I'll leave it to you, Dear, to decide if the poster is correct or if the source of the apparent inconsistency is confusion from "to be". As a hint, remember from Chapter **Ib2** that such problems can always be resolved by replacing all instances of the verb "to be" with the one of its four equivalent expressions that's actually meant. After you solve that problem, I'd encourage you to read Chad Docterman's article "Why the Christian [and Mormon] God is Impossible" at http://www.evilbible.com/Impossible.htm.

So, Dear, maybe you now see some justification in Korzybski's assessment:

> The fact that four semantically entirely different words should have one sound and spelling [i.e., the verb "to be", e.g., in the form 'is'] *appears as a genuine tragedy of the race;* the more so since the discrimination between their uses is not always easy.

In general, Dear, please be careful of your use of all words, and be especially careful to distinguish among the four uses of the "simplest" and most fundamental word in our language, i.e., 'is'!

A Partial Reconciliation?

Now, with that out of the way, I'll return to try to at least partially reconcile different understanding of: "In the beginning was the Word… and the Word was God." The clerical author (or authors) of this statement apparently misunderstood and therefore mistranslated the original Greek text. In the original (which borrowed from ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus), the word used is "the Logos", where *logo* does mean "a word" but more completely means "a word, reckoning, thought", in turn from the Greek word *legein*, which means "to speak, calculate, collect". Therefore, Dear, almost certainly, what the original author(s) of *The Gospel According to John* meant was not the nonsensical statement, "In the beginning was the Word… and the Word was God", but instead: "In the beginning was the thought (or the plan or the concept)… and the concept was God."[13]

If you wonder how such a change might at least partially resolve different interpretations or understandings, Dear, then I'd have you consider the following. For essentially everything that humans create, first there is some "plan" or "concept" or "reckoning" or "logos". As I mentioned in an earlier chapter (**U**), that's what Aristotle called "the formal cause". Therefore, what the original (Greek) author of the controversial statement was apparently doing, basically, was just echoing Aristotle, saying: "In the beginning was the logos [the reckoning, or thought, or concept, or the formal cause]… and this formal cause was God."[14]

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[13] For additional background on this phrase from the *Gospel According to John*, see the April 2008 post at my blog (at http://zenofzero.blogspot.com) entitled "Hello to Pope Benedict."

[14] Sidney Rigdon, the most likely author of the Book of Mormon and most other Mormon "holy books" obviously didn't understand this. Thus, in what's called the "JS [for Joseph Smith] Translation", the passage is changed to: "In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God." To which a most appropriate summary seems to be: "Riiiiiiight."

Playing Word Games!

Now, I wrote that the above synthesis may partially reconcile the different ideas promoted by the kid and the cleric (for now the statement would probably make some sense to the kid – and all clerics will grasp at the smallest straw of a suggestion that there's a slight possibility that their dogma makes some sense!), but I can imagine the subsequent comments from the kid (e.g., GC#2) and the cleric's responses:

Oh, so that's what it means: just that there was some cause of the creation of the universe, and you want to call that cause 'God'.

Well of course that's what it means! It just means that God created the universe according to his plan, his idea, his logos.

But how do you know it was God who did it?

Well, some things you have to accept just on faith.

Oh? Well, how do you know that God even exists?

It's obvious. The universe exists; God created the universe; therefore, God exists.

Well, now, there, go easy. All you've done is introduce the word God. I mean, you could have just as well said: "The universe exists; ‡∞°#¶ created the universe; therefore, ‡∞°#¶ exists."

Fine. But if you don't mind, I prefer to use the word God rather than ‡∞°#¶ .

Well, okay – but the verb's tense is wrong. You should say: "The universe exists; ‡∞°#¶ created the universe; therefore, ‡∞°#¶ existed."

Fine. But whereas God is immortal, he still exists.

That's quite an assumption! And yet you assume, no doubt, that all the other "immortal gods" (Marduk, Re, Ahura Mazda, Zeus, etc.) are now dead!

Yes, because obviously they weren't true, immortal gods.

Well, I grant you that what you say is now at least self-consistent, but there's still a major problem.

Well, tell me what your problem is; maybe I can solve it for you.

Well, I'd be glad if you could. Basically the problem is that your application of the scientific method is incomplete. In it's most transparent form, your scheme is this:

Data:	*The universe exists.*
Assumption #1:	*The universe was created.*
Definition:	*‡∞°#¶ created the universe.*
Assumption #2:	*The creator of the universe is immortal.*
Hypothesis:	*‡∞°#¶ exists,* which summarizes the data and the assumptions, using the definition.

Fine – except, again, rather than use your symbol ‡∞°#¶ , I prefer the word God. So, what's your problem?

Well, you started with some data, you added a couple of assumptions and a definition, summarized it all with an hypothesis, and then, rather than continuing with the scientific method and testing your hypothesis, you've just adopted it – and now live your life consistent with an untested hypothesis.

It's called 'faith'; it's my belief.

Well, maybe so, but it can also be called 'stupid'. Why don't you test your assumptions? Why don't you submit your hypothesis to some tests?

Some hypotheses can't be tested. They must be accepted on faith.

Phooey. If a hypothesis can't be tested, then it's useless; throw it in the trashcan!

When you're older, you'll understand.

I'm already older, and I already understand. First, use Ockham's razor to simplify your hypothesis. Never mind the stuff about your God being immortal (an assumption for which you provided no data); go back to "The universe exists; ‡∞°#¶ created the universe; therefore, ‡∞°#¶ existed"; then, test your hypothesis: what predictions follow from your hypothesis and what data confirm your predictions?

And so no doubt you're now going to mention the data supporting the creation of the universe by the Big Bang.

Well, I'm glad you've at least have heard of it.

Of course I've heard about it! All clerics aren't cloistered in closets.

Well good! Then you know, I presume, that the hypothesis that the ‡∞°#¶ that created the universe was the Big Bang led to predictions for the distributions of hydrogen and helium in the universe and for a background cosmic radiation, and both these predictions have been validated.

Yes, of course I know that, but it doesn't perturb my faith: if the theory about the Big Bang is correct, it just means that God started this universe with a bang!

And if it's demonstrated that the cause of the Big Bang was a symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in a total void (as is sketched in the first and last chapters of a book by some old grandfather), then you'll just say that God created the universe by causing the fluctuation?

That's exactly right. That was his 'logos'. That was his plan.

And so, no matter what explanation is given for this universe (for example, if it's seen that it's 'the nature of nature' to explore all available states, which led to a precipitate from a fluctuation, which led to the Big Bang, and which then led to the universe as we know it), all of this is just God's logos?

Now you're beginning to understand.

Yah – I'm beginning to understand: whatever you don't understand, whatever is unknown, you call 'God' – it's called "the God of the gaps". Then worse, you worship what you thereby admit you don't understand. And worse still, when a sufficiently skillful huckster comes along and tells people that he knows some of the unknown, then dimwits buy into his crazy ideas: one huckster says the pharaoh needs a pyramid, and his conspiring con-artists mobilize the people on a massive construction scheme; another huckster says that the Jews are God's chosen people, and his conspiring con-artists start circumcising penises and stimulating invasions and massacres of another groups; another huckster says that Jesus died to save us from our sins, and conspiring con-artists start killing all people who say otherwise; some huckster says he's received Allah messages *via* Gabriel, and his conspiring con-artists start cutting off the arms and legs and heads of unbelievers; and some huckster says Jesus visited America, and so still another bunch of con-artist clerics start collecting money. In summary, your worldview is wacky! Your word 'God' is an abbreviation for "I dunno". Why don't you just leave it at that?

It's called belief. It's called faith.

Yah – which reminds me of what others say about 'belief' and 'faith':[15]

> Believing is easier than thinking. Hence so many more believers than thinkers. [Bruce Calvert]
>
> Many… freely confess that they believe what it makes them feel good to believe. Evidence doesn't play much of a role. They are alleviating their fear of randomness by identifying regularities that are not there. [Murray Gell-Mann]
>
> Faith is often the boast of the man who is too lazy to investigate. [F. M. Knowles]

[15] Mostly from Aiken's collection of quotations at http://www4.ncsu.edu/~aiken/.

Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to. [George Seaton]

Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence. [Richard Dawkins]

Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable… A man full of faith is simply one who has lost (or never had) the capacity for clear and realistic thought. He is not a mere ass, he is actually ill. [H.L. Mencken]

I'm afraid that again you've missed the point – as have all of those whom you've quoted.

Okay; if we've all missed the point, then please explain the point.

Well, by 'belief' and 'faith' is meant what's given in my dictionary: "belief…implies mental acceptance of something as true, even though absolute certainty may be absent; faith implies complete, unquestioning acceptance of something even in the absence of proof…" I know that these things are difficult to understand, but you've got to learn to listen to your heart, to have faith, and to believe.

Those are strange words. When I listen to my heart, all I hear is a lot of pounding.

No, no. When I say "listen to your heart" I don't mean listen with a stethoscope, I mean listen to what you know, in your heart, is true. Then, when you believe what's true, you'll have faith in this truth.

Well, it sounds as if "listen to your heart" means "rely on emotions rather than the scientific method", it sounds as if you've never heard of the idea that 'truth' in open systems (e.g., in reality) can be approached only asymptotically, and therefore it sounds as if you don't know what you mean by 'belief', 'faith', or 'truth'.

Of course I know what 'belief', 'faith', and 'truth' are! And so do you. Look: you 'believe' that the sun will rise tomorrow, don't you? And obviously you have 'faith' that the scientific method will lead you to 'truth'.

Go easy! Don't go tying to put words in my mouth. Rather than say I 'believe' that the sun will rise tomorrow, I would say that I 'expect' that it will. And the reasons for my expectation has nothing to do with my heart or my emotions: my experience has taught me that the sun normally does rise each morning, and I'm unaware of any new information that recommends that I alter this expectation. Thus, my expectation is that there's much better than 99% probability that the sun will indeed rise tomorrow. Do you have new data or predictions from a tested model that recommend I alter this expectation? For example, has a prediction from a credible astronomical theory been made that a solar eclipse will occur at dawn tomorrow, or have competent astronomers deduced that a huge asteroid will smash into the Earth tonight, causing it, for example, to stop spinning? As for my 'faith' in the scientific method leading me to 'truth', let me put it this way. Experience has taught me that I can obtain knowledge through data analyses, hypotheses formulation, and performing

experiments to test the predictions of each hypothesis. If such predictions are validated, then experience has taught me that the probability that the hypothesis is correct is approaching unity. Meanwhile, you may "think" that you can obtain knowledge in other ways, but my experience has been that all other methods lead not to knowledge but just opinions. Further, my experience has been that some of the opinions generated by other than the scientific method can be absolutely wild, such as the crazy idea that some magic man in the sky created this universe, he's waiting in the wings to judge you after you're dead, and if you don't 'believe' in this nonsense, if you don't have 'faith' in his existence, then he'll torture you for eternity in Hell. I mean, surely even you couldn't 'believe' in the 'truth' of such craziness.

What I believe is between me and God. I believe that God created the universe. BELIEF means Being Endowed with Linguistic Inspiration in Established Fact, BELIEF means Building Enough Love to Interchange Enemies for Friends, and BELIEF means Bringing Enough Light to Inspire Everyone's Faith.

Really? It seems to me that BELIEF means Being Entrapped by Linguistic Intrigue in Esoteric Fallacies, BELIEF means Bundling Errors, Lies, Insincerities, and Egregious Falsehoods, and BELIEF means Buying Even Laughable Ideas as Established Fact.

Someday you'll understand; someday you'll start to believe; someday you'll gain faith. Then you'll see that that FAITH is Forging an Attitude that Inspires Truth and Happiness, FAITH means Forgetting Antagonists and Intransigence and Trusting in Hope, FAITH means Following Angelical Inclinations Toward Humility, and FAITH means Finding Awesome Inspirations Toward Heaven.

Well, from what I see, FAITH means Fake Authority Instilling Tribal Hallucinations, FAITH means False Answers Inspiring Trite and Hubris, FAITH means Fanciful Arguments that Incite Treason and Hate, and FAITH means Forged Affidavits to Indoctrinate and Trick Humanity.

If you'll repent, I'm sure God will forgive you for your sins.

Well son-of-a-gun, I finally get it! GOD means Gobbledygook and Overt Dogma, GOD means Generating Oceans of Deceit, GOD means Glorifying Occult Dumbness, GOD means Genuflecting Over Debasement, GOD means Giddiness Over Delusions, GOD means Getting Opium Delivered, GOD means Grasping Onto Delivery, GOD means Gleefully Ordering Debauchery, GOD means Genitals Overtly Damaged, GOD means Groveling Ordained Decisively, GOD means Greatness Overtly Destroyed, GOD means Genius Ordered Damned… all Generating the Odor of Dung, and all for the clerics Getting Oodles of Dollars.

Sorry, Dear, I know I get carried away, but sometimes I have great difficulty constraining my revulsion at worldviews promoted in organized religions. E. Haldeman-Julius apparently found himself in a similar state, writing:

> A God of love, a God of wrath, a God of jealousy, a God of bigotry, a God of vulgar tirades, a God of cheating and lying – yes, the Christian [and Jewish, Muslim, and Mormon] God is given all of these characteristics, and isn't it a wretched mess to be offered to men in this twentieth century? The beginning of wisdom, the beginning of Humanism, the beginning of progress is the rejection of this absurd, extravagantly impossible myth of a God.

Maybe you can examine the subject with less emotion, Dear, but the minds of your grandchildren haven't been polluted with religious garbage!

ALL ORGANIZED RELIGIONS ARE ORGANIZED IGNORANCE

If you can examine the subject with less emotion than I, Dear, then maybe you can see two amazing features at the bases of all organized religions: 1) misunderstandings of the nature (or the fundamental function) of words and 2) failures to appreciate that all organized religions are just primitive science. Below, I'll try to show you what I mean, starting with:

Misunderstandings of the Nature of Words.

As I've already written, all words are just symbols uses to communicate – even in communications with ourselves; i.e., in thinking! Words are just abbreviations. When I use the word 'you', for example, it's an abbreviation for… [And I'm not going to finish that sentence, Dear, because obviously it could go on, and on, and on!] And what "you" are now doing in school (at least, what you're supposed to be doing!) is learning meanings for thousands of abbreviations: a triangle is… (that is, the word 'triangle' will be used as an abbreviation to mean…), 'energy' is… 'geostrophic' means… and so on. Throughout your life, you'll be confronted with the continuing challenge to learn the meaning of these abbreviations called words, until when you're as old as certain people, maybe you, too, will give up!

For example, I've pretty much given up trying to learn anything more about microbiology. Sometimes I glance at some of the literature, but then it hits me: Whoa! What do all these words mean?! But actually, it doesn't really bother me much, because just as in any branch of science, I know that, if I had the desire and adequate dictionaries, I could replace all the unknown words – all those abbreviations – with their meanings. Oh, okay, 'cyanobacteria' means a class of bacteria that photosynthesizes and evolves oxygen, similar to plants, and sometimes called "blue-green algae". Gotcha!

And actually, Dear, it's not just in any branch of science that any word can be "unabbreviated"; you can do the same in any meaningful communication. To illustrate – and to show you what I meant when, earlier, I wrote wisdom is rarely found in words, sometimes wisdom can be in stories – consider some "folk wisdom" recorded by perhaps the wisest person who ever lived, the "slave from Samos", Aesop.[16]

> **The Kites and the Swans**
> The Kites of olden times, as well as the Swans, had the privilege of song. But having heard the neigh of the horse, they were so enchanted with the sound, that they tried to imitate it; and, in trying to neigh, they forgot how to sing.
>
> *Moral: The desire for imaginary benefits often involves the loss of present blessings.*

Now, Dear, please think about what you just finished reading. First was Aesop's seemingly "innocent little story" about kites ("any of various birds of the hawk family") and swans, which can "no longer" sing. This story, as with all of Aesop's wonderful fables, contains wisdom. For those who couldn't easily see the wisdom in his story, Aesop added the moral, "The desire for imaginary benefits often involves the loss of present blessings", which is the same wisdom as in his fable, but stated in different words. And for those who didn't discern that wisdom, Aesop had another fable:

> **The Donkey and His Shadow**
> A traveler hired a donkey to convey him to a distant place. The day being intensely hot, and the sun shining in its strength, the traveler stopped to rest, and sought shelter from the heat under the shadow of the donkey. As this afforded only protection for one, and as the traveler and the owner of the donkey both claimed the shadow, a violent dispute arose between them as to which of them had the right to the shadow. The owner maintained that the traveler had rented the donkey only, and not his shadow. The traveler asserted that he had, with the hire of the donkey, hired his shadow also. The quarrel proceeded from words to blows, and while the men fought, the donkey galloped off.
>
> *Moral: In quarreling about the shadow we often lose the substance.*

So then, Dear, do you see what I mean, first, by wisdom is rarely found in words, [but] sometimes wisdom can be in stories? It's just that, if there is wisdom, it can be expressed in many different ways.

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[16] Dear: You can find most (if not all) of Aesop's fables on the internet at the wonderful web site: http://classics.mit.edu/. In what follows, I'll be copying many of these fables from this web site, with which there's associated a (silly!) copyright statement on which I've already commented.

And of course a certain old grandfather is tempted to add some advice to his grandchildren, expressing Aesop's wisdom in still different words (warning them not to give up what they have in this life in exchange for what con-artist clerics promise in "the next life", warning them not to lose the substance of their lives by grasping at the shadow of "eternal life"), but I'll resist the temptation to "moralize", and instead just move on to try to make my point.

And my point (and my hope) is that you see words for what they are: just abbreviations. Further, if the words are to convey some meaning (even wisdom!), then any and all of them can be 'unabbreviated', replaced with synonyms, or even replaced by other phrases that convey similar meaning. Thus, Aesop beautifully summarized his first story (even "replaced it") with its moral, expressing the same meaning in entirely different words. Then, he provided a second, totally different story (dealing with a donkey's shadow and of course with totally different words from those used in his story about the kites and swans), complete with its own moral (in still different words), and yet all four sets of words convey the same meaning – the same wisdom.

You don't need to belabor the point, Grampa, it's totally obvious.

Well, good, but then, consider the first "fundamental and astounding difference" between this "totally obvious" point and what's at the foundation of all organized religions. In science, in contrast (and it should be so in all communications!), any word is used with the understanding that, whenever required or desired, the word can be replaced with its meaning (or, in the case of "base words", its meaning can be kicked, or pointed at, or whatever). But in all religions (and in most of metaphysics, courtesy errors by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle), words are considered "the essence". For example and as I showed you in an earlier chapter (**Q2**), Plato "elevated" words such as Goodness, Beauty, Truth, Love, and so on, to what he called "ideal forms" – complete with capital letters, no less!

Aristotle made similar errors; for example, consider the following, which he wrote in Book (or Chapter) XIII of his book *Metaphysics:*

> For two things may be fairly ascribed to Socrates – inductive arguments and universal definition, both of which are concerned with the starting-point of science.

Dear: that's absolutely wrong – and this error not only dominated science for approximately 2,000 years (roughly until Galileo and Bacon corrected

it), but it still dominates all religions. In particular, "universal definitions" have nothing whatsoever to do with science: the starting point (and the end point!) of science is data!

What Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were unfortunately doing was just copying what all the clerics of the world had already done with their words, especially with the words for their gods (Re, Amen, OM, Yahweh, and so on). Thus, just as Plato cooked up his "ideal forms" from his "universal definitions", the primitive people who cooked up religions "thought" that they had "captured the essence" of something when they knew its name – which is why they considered the names of their gods so important, why they "thought" the names were so powerful, and why (in many cases) they kept the names "secret". John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) said it well:

> The tendency has always been strong to believe that whatever received a name must be an entity or being, having an independent existence of its own. And if no real entity answering to the name could be found, men did not for that reason suppose that none existed, but imagined that it was something peculiarly abstruse and mysterious.

Below I'll provide some examples (to which I've added some italics).

- In the Genesis myth from ancient Egypt (quoted earlier in this chapter) there is:

  > Re was all-powerful… *His power and the secret of it* lay in his hidden name…

  Later in the myth, the goddess *Isis* tricks the sun god *Re* into revealing his "secret name", which as I mentioned in an earlier chapter, turned out to be the same secret name of all gods that have ever be concocted: "Power" – i.e., power for the priests!

- Similarly for the ancient Hebrews: recall that, when Moses (who, if he ever existed, seems to have been trained as an Egyptian priest) reportedly first talked to "God" (who appeared as a flaming bush rather than as, for example, a flaming Saturn V rocket – for reasons explained neither by God nor Moses!), Moses didn't ask God if Elvis was with him (or a similar pressing question that "modern" Americans might ask), but instead, Moses reportedly asked God his name (which surely would be the last question a "modern" person would ask). And God's reported answer? It's the penetrating brilliance at *Exodus 3,* 14 (and yes, Dear, I'm being sarcastic):

  > I AM THAT I AM; and he [God] said: "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you."

  Subsequently, Hebrews identified their god with the consonants YHWH – but the name "God" is never said or written by a "modern" devout Jewish people, who (at least in this country) will always avoid saying their god's name and who will always write the word as G_d, because his name is too holy to be written in full!

- In contrast, Hindus not only speak the name of their god, but they repeat it for their meditations. Thus, in the *Upanishads* (the second parts of the four "holy books" of Hinduism, called "the Vedas"), you can find (in *Katha*):

  > Of that goal which all the Vedas declare – which is implicit in all penances, and in pursuit of which men lead lives of continence and service – of that will I briefly speak. It is – OM. This syllable is Brahman [i.e., God]. *This syllable is indeed supreme. He who knows it obtains his desire. It is the strongest support. It is the highest symbol…*

  And thus "modern" Hindus will sit in "a lotus position", meditating, chanting their god's name: "OM, OM, OM, OM…", which, incidentally, if you'll say it yourself, over and over again, gets pretty close to: "I AM, I AM, I AM, I AM…"[17]

- As for the ancient religions of Mesopotamia, I'll skip the fifty "holy names" of Marduk (which I mentioned in **Ix** and which you can find on the internet), but let me at least mention some of the twenty "holy names" of Zarathustra's god (Ahura Mazda – after whom the Mazda car is named), because Zarathustra's crazy scheme is at the basis of Judaism (as written by Ezra and his cohorts when the Jews were under the influence of the Persians in Babylon), and therefore, it's the basis of Christianity, Islam, and of course Mormonism. You can find the following (and much more!) on the internet using the key words: Ohrmazd Yasht (Hymn to Ahura Mazda):[18]

  > Zarathushtra asked Ahura Mazda [aka God]: "O Ahura Mazda, most beneficent Spirit, Maker of the material world, thou Holy One! *What of the Holy Word is the strongest?* What is the most victorious? What is the most glorious? What is the most effective? What is the most fiend-smiting? [You can even smite fiends with words?!] What is the best-healing? What destroyeth best the malice of Daevas [Devils] and Men? What maketh the material world best come to the fulfillment of its wishes? What freeth the material world best from the anxieties of the heart?" Ahura Mazda [God] answered: *"Our Name…"*

  The text then goes on to give twenty names for Zarathustra's god, including: "the one of whom questions are asked", "the herd-giver" [I wonder why one of his names wasn't "the Cadillac-giver"!], "the strong one" [after all, might makes right!], "perfect holiness", "understanding", "knowledge", "the most beneficent", "he in whom there is no harm", "the unconquerable one", "he who makes the true account", "the all-seeing one", "the healing one", "the creator", and other such asinine names.

- Christians can find many examples of similar silliness, especially since they can choose from either the Old Testament or the New Testament. In fact, to find such silliness, Christians needn't search further than their "Lord's prayer" – although, as I've reviewed in **Qx**, there are questions about the "correct" form of this prayer (or

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[17] Actually, Dear, as I'll show you in the "excursion" **Yx**, the Hebrews probably adopted the phrase "I am that I am" from the Egyptians – who might have adopted it from the Hindus (or *v.v.*). Thus, in the Egyptian *Papyrus of Prisse* (dating from about 1,000 years before Moses allegedly lived), the "unseen One who created the heavens and all things" calls himself "Nuk pu Nuk", which (as I'll show you in **Yx**) has been translated to mean: "I am that I am"!

[18] From *Sacred Books of the East,* American Edition, 1898, translated by James Darmesteter.

even if people are to pray at all, if you "believe" the Gnostics' Jesus). In any event, let me remind you of some of this prayer:

> Our Father who art in heaven, *hallowed be thy name*… For thine is the kingdom, and the *power*, and the glory, forever, *Amen*. (*Matthew 6,* 9)

I italicized "hallowed be thy name", "power", and "Amen", Dear, in hope that you'll see how, to this day, certain unfortunate children are being indoctrinated with remnants of the religion of ancient Egypt: God's name is "holy", his essence is "power", and then, top-off all the foolishness with the name of the ancient Egyptian son god *Re*, aka *Amun*, aka *Amen*!

- And similarly for the poor Muslim children, who learn from the Quran

> This is because Allah [God] is the *Truth*… and because He has *power* over all things… (*Pilgrimage 22,* 6)

- And then there are the poor Mormon children, who learn from the Book of Mormon such nonsense as:

> Believe in God; believe that he is, and that he created all things, both in heaven and in earth; believe that he has *all wisdom,* and *all power*… (*Mosiah 4,* 9)

> Therefore, I would that ye should be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in good works, that Christ, the Lord God *Omnipotent* [i.e., all powerful] may seal you his, that you may be brought to heaven, that ye may have everlasting salvation and eternal life, through the wisdom, and power, and justice, and mercy of him who created all things… (*Mosiah 5,* 15)

What I hope you see, Dear, is the same silliness of religious people and metaphysicians who "think" they've captured "the essence" of something in words. Thereby, they end up with nonsense such as "Allah is… Truth" and "God is Love". Meanwhile, a certain argumentative kid might say:

> Hey, wait a minute! 'Truth' is the state of a proposition not yet falsified (and therefore a state that can be approached only asymptotically), and an illustration of 'love' is the effort that an old grandfather expends, writing a book to try to help children. And if what you mean by 'Allah' and 'God' is that which created this universe, then it seems to have been a symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in a total void, arising because it's the nature of Nature to explore all available states. So what you seem to be saying with "Allah is… Truth" and "God is Love" is: "The original symmetry-breaking fluctuation in the total void… is a asymptotic state of any proposition that we have not yet been able to falsify… and is an old grandfather trying to help children." To which, let me add some gospel (which you may know means "good news"): fortunately for you, some new medication is available that might ameliorate your schizophrenia.

Sorry, Dear, I tried – but again I got carried away. Below I'll add some "postscripts".

PS#1: My first "postscript" is added in case you're thinking that I must be making this stuff up. I'm not. All clerics of the world are (and always have been) bonkers over words. All religions have their "holy books" filled with "sacred scripture" – not a word of which is to be changed. In contrast to this craziness, Dear, think again of the genius of Aesop: his message wasn't in his words, but in the meaning of his stories. As someone else wisely wrote:[19] "[Aesop's] fables are not to be believed but understood." Would that the same could be said of all "holy books"!

PS#2: My second "postscript" is that Karl Popper (of "Popper principle" fame) made the point much better than I can. In the following quotation from him, I've added a few notes in brackets [as per usual].[20]

> In science, we take care that the statements we make should never depend upon the meaning of our terms. Even where the terms are defined, we never try to derive any information from the definition, or to base any argument upon it. This is why our terms make so little trouble. We do not overburden them. We try to attach to them as little weight as possible. We do not take their "meaning" too seriously. We are always conscious that our terms are a little vague (since we have learnt to use them only in practical applications) and we reach precision not by reducing their penumbra of vagueness, but rather by keeping well within it, by carefully phrasing our sentences in such a way that the possible shades of meaning do not matter. This is how we avoid quarrelling about words.
>
> Our "scientific knowledge", in the sense in which this term may be properly used, remains entirely unaffected if we eliminate all definitions; the only effect is upon our language, which would lose, not precision, but merely brevity…
>
> There could hardly be a greater contrast than that between this view of the part played by definitions, and Aristotle's view. For Aristotle's essentialist definitions [i.e., in which a word is burdened with "capturing the essence" of some thing or process] are [imagined to be] the principles from which all our knowledge is derived; they thus [are imagined to] contain all our knowledge; and they [are imagined to] serve to substitute a long formula for a short one.
>
> As opposed to this…, scientific… definitions do not contain any knowledge whatever, nor even any 'opinion'; they do nothing but introduce new arbitrary shorthand labels; they cut a long story short.

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[19] Donna L. Preble in her article that you can find on the internet entitled *The Storyteller from Samos.*

[20] Copied from Section II of Chapter 11 of Popper's book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and from Chapter 6, entitled "Two Kinds of Definitions", of *Popper Selections* (David Miller, Ed., Princeton University Press, 1985).

> The problem of definitions and of the "meaning of terms" is the most important source of Aristotle's regrettably still prevailing intellectual influence, of all that verbal and empty scholasticism that haunts not only the Middle Ages, but our own contemporary philosophy [and all organized religions!]; for even a philosophy as recent as that of L. Wittgenstein suffers… from this influence.
>
> The development of thought since Aristotle could, I think, be summed up by saying that every discipline, as long as it used the Aristotelian method of definition [such as any organized religion!] has remained arrested in a state of empty verbiage and barren scholasticism, and that the degree to which the various sciences have been able to make any progress depended on the degree to which they have been able to get rid of this essentialist method…
>
> …Aristotle's doctrine of definition… led to a good deal of hairsplitting. But later, philosophers began to feel that one cannot argue about definitions. In this way, essentialism not only encouraged verbalism, but it also led to the disillusionment with argument, that is, with reason. Scholasticism [,] mysticism [,] and despair in reason [the hallmarks of all organized religions!]… are the unavoidable results of the essentialism of Plato and Aristotle…

"In a word", Dear, if words are "essential", they're unimportant! And if you don't see what I mean, Dear, then I'd challenge you to do something. Grab any "holy book", open it at a random location, strike out all the words referring to its god (the LORD, God, Jesus, Allah, Om, whatever), replace them with BB (for Big Bang) or SBQLFTV (for Symmetry-Breaking Quantum-Like Fluctuation in a Total Void), and then read the text. My challenge to you is to see if you can constrain your laughter!

And incidentally, Dear, if you do read the complete chapter of Popper's book (or the complete book!) from which I took the above quotation, then you might notice (and then wonder why) his paragraphs as quoted above are reversed from the order given by Popper. But then you might better see what he means by reading <u>definitions</u> from left-to-right (as is done in all religions) rather than right-to-left (as is done in science and in anything that makes sense). For example, for religious people who hear or read, from left-to-right, "Allah is power" or "God is love", their heads voluntarily nod in ascent and they say "Amen". But for those of us who read definitions from right-to-left ("Power is Allah" and "Love is God") our heads involuntarily jerk up, and we say: "Say what?"

Similarly, Dear, sometimes it's better to read a book, starting at its last page! For example, if you read the last page of the Bible first, then its despicable

threats might convince you to trash it immediately; if you read the last page of the Quran first, then its supernatural silliness might stimulate you to toss such nonsense aside; if you read the last page of the Book of Mormon first, you might decide to check which of Shakespeare's plays was plagiarized (and be far better off reading them!); and if you read the last chapter of this book, then you'd already know what I meant by SBQLFTV!

PS#3: My third "postscript" is to mention that, in the metaphysical ramblings of the philosopher Alfred Whitehead (1861–1947), who I hope is the last, famous metaphysician, he proposed nonsense similar to what I mentioned above. In particular, "in essence", he proposed that God was all quantum states available in the universe – and "believe it or not", as you can find on the internet, many "modern" theologians have bought into his craziness. And I call it "craziness", because it's all just word games.

PS#4: And my fourth and final "postscript" is an apology. In the above, I've been using expressions, such as "symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuations in a total void" and "all quantum states available in the universe", which I wouldn't be surprised are void of meaning for you. Yet I used them, in part because I'm using them as a "teaser" for what's to come (in **Z**, where I'll try to explain what I mean), and in part because, later in this chapter, I want to show you that it doesn't matter if you don't know what those words mean! And if that doesn't make any sense to you, then be patient for just a little while longer, while I try explain the second of the two "amazing features at the bases of all religions."

Failures to Appreciate that Organized Religions Are Science's Failures!

Besides displaying misunderstandings of the purpose of words, all religious people fail to see that all organized religions are not only just primitive science but also the failures of such primitive science! Originally, this "primitive science" was a worldview developed by savages, who probably "thought" something similar to the following.

1. Something unknown is behind all this – something unknown and powerful. It's scary. We'd better try to placate this powerful unknown by worshipping it.

2. To worship this powerful unknown, we gotta do what it wants. Let's ask some spokesmen of the powerful unknown to find out what it wants.

3. If we do what these spokesmen say we should do, then we'll be the good guys and we'll be rewarded. Those who don't are the bad guys; they'll be punished. And if the spokesmen say so, then we can do what we want to the bad guys.

Thus, Dear, if you'd look at the historical development of the primitive science known as religion (as I partially sketched in **Ix** and will sketch more in **Yx**), no doubt you'd find, first, that savages were awe-struck with (and fearful of) the power of volcanic eruptions, tornados from thunderstorms, floodings, etc. So, they asked their witch doctor (or shaman) what the fearful force wanted, he said it wanted a beautiful virgin pushed into the volcano (or whatever), and the obliging fools accepted his authority. Then, thousands of years later, semi-savages wrote all the world's "holy books", in which (as I showed you in an earlier set of quotations) you can see not only the idiotic idea of the need to worship the powerful unknown but also the idiotic idea that even the powerful unknown's name must be worshipped.

One would wish that no modern human would be so primitive as to "believe" such silliness, but the semi-savages who wrote the "holy books" included hideous stuff such as the following, threatening "unbelievers".

> The Old Testament (*Deuteronomy 28,* 58): If [Moses reportedly said] you do not… revere this honored and dreaded name, this name 'the LORD your God', then the LORD will strike you and your descendants with unimaginable plagues, malignant and persistent, and with sickness, persistent and severe… Your life will hang continually in suspense, fear will beset you night and day, and you will find no security all your life long.
>
> The New Testament (*Revelations 21*, 8): But as for the cowardly, the faithless [although it can easily be argued that it's the faithful who are the cowards!]… their lot will be the second death, in the lake that burns with sulfurous flames.
>
> The Quran (*The Accessions 8,* 55): Surely the vilest of animals in Allah's sight are those who disbelieve…
>
> Mormon *Doctrines & Covenants 63,* 6: Wherefore, I, the LORD, have said that the fearful and the unbelieving… shall have their part in that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Thereby, religious con-games got underway, worldwide, and thus a large fraction of all the mayhem, murder, and massacre that has blighted this otherwise beautiful world during the past many thousands of years – and continues throughout the world today.

As the Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic (~400–323 BCE) said (consistent with his famous line "I am looking for an honest man"):

> When I look upon seamen, men of physical science, and philosophers, man is the wisest of all beings. When I look upon priests, prophets, and interpreters of dreams, nothing is so contemptible as man.

And I'd add, Dear, that it's useless to try to find the bottom of the depths of the depravity to which clerics sink in promoting their con games. It's a bottomless pit: they've done it all. Meanwhile, pity the poor children throughout the world, in all religions: they're indoctrinated with the worldview of savages, force-fed primitive science as "truth", and threatened with (and in many cases experiencing) the clerics' concocted Hell.

Yet, it would be inappropriate to blame the people of the past – and even those of today in many backward countries (such as those controlled by Muslim clerics). After Moses sent his Levite storm troopers out to murder the unbelieving Israelites (as described in the Old Testament), then the people saw "the wisdom of belief". Similarly, when "Saint" Constantine (the "butcher" emperor of Rome) chose (for political reasons) to support Christianity with "the Imperial sword", the people saw "the wisdom of belief". And similarly for all subsequent rabid rabbis, parasitic popes, lunatic Luthers, and all the idiotic Imams of Islam (starting with the murderer Muhammad): people soon saw "the wisdom of belief" – to avoid torture and to live.

But in this country, today, the main fault lies not with the clerics (who understandably want to continue to gorge themselves on free lunches, liquors, and other lusts). Instead, today, the main fault lies with the people. And yes, most of them were indoctrinated with idiocy when they were children, but when they became adults, they could have chosen a different course. It's understandable that many people are afraid of the unknown, it's understandable that many people conclude that something big and powerful must be "behind it all", and it's understandable even when people choose to rely on someone else's judgment rather than their own. But responsibility for that choice is theirs. Thereby, they cede knowledge of some powerful unknown to the clerics, who of course are very pleased to tell the people how to live their lives – primarily, of course, by keeping the clerics fat and happy and powerful.

Please, Dear, don't do the same. Instead, rely on your own judgment. Don't rely on the judgments of peers, parents, priests or politicians. Don't rely on the judgment even of a certain old grandfather – because, kind and wise as he undoubtedly is [☺], he arranged for you to have a tremendous brain in your head. Use it! Remember Mangasarian's:

Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults.

Consider also, what the philosopher David Hume said (here paraphrased),

It's wise to proportion your beliefs to the evidence supporting them.

And consider, as well, more wisdom from Bertrand Russell:

Religion is something left over from the infancy of our intelligence; it will fade away as we adopt reason and science as our guidelines.

Please, Dear, don't forget that at the base of the entire primitive, childish, outdated, incorrect science called "organized religion" resides clerical ignorance and lies – displayed by the first cleric who claimed he knew what the powerful force wanted. As Voltaire said:

The first priest was the first rogue who met the first fool.

That "first priest" knew he didn't know. He lied, and he loved the power over the people, the prestige, and all the booty that his lying produced. Thereby, the clergy got their con games up and running, and today, it's an astoundingly lucrative con game: of course its difficult to know the exact figures, but Mormon clerics are collecting at least $1 billion per year; Catholic and Jewish clerics are probably each collecting at least $10 billion per year; Islamic clerics may be collecting $100 billion per year. And if their revenues are threatened, then just as street gangs, organized crime groups, and drug lords have their "turf battles", the clerics have their "holy wars" – not to "protect the faith", but to keep the cash flowing.

Remember, too, Socrates' assessment,

There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.

Actually, Socrates went further. In his generous view of mankind, Socrates suggested that if people realized their ignorance and resulting evil, they would correct their ways. Maybe. But consider the case of clerics. Is it

only out of ignorance that they continue their evil? When they learn that they're preaching a primitive, outdated worldview, will they desist – or are they too committed to their cash flow? When they learn that they've caused and continue to cause enormous harm to humanity, preaching their outdated science, will they desist – or are they too afraid of working for a living?

Socrates also said:

> Is not… the most reprehensible form of ignorance that of thinking one knows what one does not know?

If that's correct, does it describe the clerics? Or maybe the clerics behavior is better described by what Lao-tze (c.604 – c.531 BCE, the "founder" of Taoism) said earlier:

> To know that you do not know is best; to pretend to know when you do not know is a disease.

In reality, though, surely there are many types of clerics, going from bad to worse. Least offensive are those who display what Socrates called the most reprehensible form of ignorance: those who think they know what they don't. Then there are those who Lao-tze would call diseased: pretending to know what they don't. And then the most evil: those who know that they don't know, pretend that they do know, know the harm that they are doing, and yet, do it anyway – because of the booty it brings. If so, then maybe Socrates assessment should be revised: There is only one good, knowledge (obtained *via* science), and many types of evil: many derived from ignorance, most manifested in organized religion, and all damaging the goal of helping knowledge expand.

Maybe Confucius (551–479 BCE) said it best:

> When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it – this is the beginning of wisdom.

And, too, there is another statement by Robert Ingersoll:

> To know that the Bible is the literature of a barbarous people, to know that it is uninspired [and similarly for all "holy books"!], to be certain that the supernatural does not and cannot exist – all this is but the beginning of wisdom.

In any event, Dear, whether the clerics are promoting their ignorance or their lies, please don't "believe" their silly worldview. Although they're more competent than you in stringing meaningless words together, lying to the people, and stealing from the producers, they have less of a clue of what's going on in the universe than do you.

"But," said the skeptical grandchild, "do you have a better worldview?"

Yes, Dear, I do – as do somewhere between ten to fifty percent of the people of the world. It's called secular or scientific humanism or just "Humanism". Similar to most people who live in China, Japan, and much of Europe, we reject all types of "supernaturalism". In most "western countries", we're called "Humanists" or "Naturalists" (and recently, "Brights"). In earlier chapters, I showed you some humanist values and a little about the worldview of Humanists; here, I want to add a few more details.

THE WISER WORLDVIEW OF HUMANISTS

The prime distinction between all Humanists and all religious people follows from their responses to the fundamental question: Is the universe natural? I urge you to address this question for yourself, Dear, and to prod you to do so (and to stimulate you to reach the Humanists' conclusion!), I'd ask you the following questions. Are you aware of even the smallest shred of evidence that supports the view that the universe is other than natural? Do you know of even a single bit of data that supports the speculations that some magic man (some giant Jabberwock) in the sky is in control? Do you have even the tiniest crumb of confirmation that claims by any and all clerics are anything other than ingredients of gigantic con-games based on the science of savages?

If you do have any such data, Dear, then please let me know. I'd be glad to consider them. And actually, as I've written in an earlier chapter, I'd even be glad if the evidence were found to be reliable, because I know very well that it's difficult to struggle though life without leaning on fairy-tale crutches available for rent from any religion – at a ridiculous rate! It could be very comforting to "believe" that some giant Jabberwock in the sky knows what the hell the universe is "all about" and that an eternity of bliss awaits "the faithful". But I know of no such data, and therefore, I see no other honest way to proceed than as Ingersoll did:

When I became convinced that the universe is natural…

That doesn't mean that I (or any Humanist) "knows" how this natural universe "works". But, Dear, that's a common and fundamental characteristic of all Humanists: the willingness to live with uncertainty.

That's why I wrote, a few paragraphs ago, that it doesn't really matter if you know what I mean by a "symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in a total void." In **Z**, I'll try to show you what I mean by those speculations, but please don't forget that they're just speculations: in fact, not only are no data yet available to test the predictions of my "hypotheses", I'm hard pressed to use them to make any predictions! But the important point is this: although nobody yet knows, with certainty, what this universe is "all about" (e.g., what caused the Big Bang), the difference between "naturalists" and "supernaturalists" is that we Humanists don't assume what we don't know: we accept the uncertainty for what it is, and try to move on from there.

As he did on so many occasions, on so many topics, Robert Ingersoll said it well (in *Foundations of Faith*, published in 1895):

> Confronted with the universe, with fields of space sown thick with stars, with all there is of life, the wise man, being asked the origin and destiny of all, replies: "I do not know; these questions are beyond the powers of my mind." The wise man is thoughtful and modest. He clings to facts. Beyond his intellectual horizon he does not pretend to see. He does not mistake 'hope' for 'evidence' or 'desire' for 'demonstration'. He is honest. He neither deceives himself nor others.

Approximately 1700 years earlier, when Christianity was just getting started, the "philosopher-Emperor" Marcus Aurelius (121–180) showed similar intellectual honesty and courage facing the unknown, when he wrote in his *Meditations* (Book or Chapter Eleven):

> What a soul! – that which is ready if, at any moment, it must be separated from the body, and ready either to be extinguished or dispersed or continue to exist; but so that this readiness comes from a man's own judgment, not from mere obstinacy, as with the Christians, but considerately and with dignity and in a way to persuade another, without tragic show.

More recently, Richard Feynman (co-winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965, the year I attended one of his public lectures ☺) wrote something similar:

> I can live with doubt and uncertainty and not knowing. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers and possible beliefs and different degrees of uncertainty about different things, but I am not absolutely sure of anything, and there are many things I don't know anything about… I don't have to know an answer. I don't feel frightened not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without any purpose, which is the way it really is as far as I can tell…

Actually, though, I wish Feynman had said that a little better – although I wouldn't be surprised if he said it the way he did to try to make the rest of us think a little harder! (A remark that I expect you'll understand, Dear, if in your first-year college-physics class – and then in all your subsequent physics classes, through graduate school! – you struggle through his "elementary" physics texts!)

My complaint is with Feynman's comment about "purpose" ("I don't feel frightened not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without any purpose…"): did he mean our purpose or the purpose of the universe?! That is, there's no doubt that these DNA molecules have a purpose: they've been reproducing for about a billion years, and apparently want to continue to do so! Thereby, all life has a purpose: to continue living. And whereas we humans have the audacity to claim that we're intelligent, our prime purpose could be said to be: to help intelligence continue.

Probably I should try to explain what I mean; I'll try to do so in the **X**-chapters; here, I'll just mention the following. Most people would probably agree that humanity's prime goal is "progress" – especially if the word 'progress' isn't defined! Thus, religious fanatics would undoubtedly agree that "progress is the prime goal" – considering it to be "progress" if everyone adopted their dogma! Even I would accept that humanity's prime goal is "progress", but quoting an unknown author,[21] I'd first repeat:

> …on the whole, Socrates was right in saying that no man *knowingly* does any evil thing, but only because he thinks it is 'good'. There is only one true meaning for 'progress', then, and that is a gain in human capacity to identify what is truly good.

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[21] Dear: The quotation is from an article (by an unstated author) entitled "Nature, Nurture, Choice", which appeared in Vol. XXVI, No. 14 of *Manas* (11 April 1973). The article is available at http://www.manasjournal.org/pdf_library/VolumeXXVI_1973/XXVI-15.pdf.

To which I would add Socrates' prescription, "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance", leading me to conclude that there's then only one true meaning for 'progress': increase in knowledge.

But 'progress' is a topic that I'll try to address in the **X**-chapters. For now, to end this **W**-chapter, let me show you what I review with the letter 'W' when I'm walking. Depending on my mood and what might be troubling me, it's usually something similar to the following:

> ***W:*** *Words, Whys, and Wisdom:*
> *Be wary of words; they're just symbols.*
> *Be wary of 'whys': the purpose of life is to continue living; if the rest of the universe has a purpose, it may be to commit suicide, returning itself to a state of total nothingness; and whereas no data yet support any other hypothesis, it appears that we humans have the most intelligence that at least this part of the universe has created; therefore, help human intelligence go on. Thereby, WISDOM can be identified as an acronym for: the Worldview in which Intelligence's Survival is the Dominant Objective of Mankind.*

And by the way, Dear, if you really want to enhance your wisdom, then I recomend that you adopt a really relevant reversal of the acronym WISER: "When I Seriously Exercise Regularly" ! ☺