

COMMON SENSE

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COMMON SENSE

1. The Final Arbiter

Common sense comprises a system of firm and nominally unquestioned beliefs lying at the heart of one's personal *weltanschauung*; as such it stands guard as the court of final appeal; it must always have the last word. No 'new wisdom' being urged upon us should be accepted if, after due consideration, it fails to pass muster.

Such is not all to say that it is rigid, intransigent, or incapable of a shift in its point of view or expansion of its horizons, but only that these must be through internal initiative and direction, rather than under external duress. As with all forms of self-improvement, it has to be an 'inside job'. One might make the decision to radically alter one's system of beliefs -as for example when passing through the 'singularity' of religious conversion. But if this is to be whole-hearted, the step can only be undertaken if one's common sense judges its precepts to embody superior values or a deeper wisdom and understanding than the status quo which it seeks to replace. To embrace a new faith with reservations, in order to gain the consolations which are offered may make life more tolerable -but at the cost of dividing one's spiritual house against itself. I take this to be a bad bargain for the way in which it forecloses upon any convergence to a true unification of the persona.

The essential affirmations of common sense never really change, but merely deepen -or have the opportunity to do so- with the state of advancing knowledge and insight. Its degree of robustness does vary with the spiritual resilience of the times. It is essentially conservative, tending to find itself confronted by challenges only when there is a paradigmatic shift. Things are *roughly* as they appear for *most* of the time -even though, occasionally, one would have to say *very* roughly.

It is not to be discarded or preempted by anything purporting to be the 'new wisdom' -in particular any such which shall declare the faculty itself to have been outmoded and rendered obsolete. To stand one's ground against any such forceful intrusions demands elements of both courage and faith. For a start, it cannot be grounded upon the diaphanous foundation of 'universal doubt' -the most insidious form of pan-relativism. The 'fitting humility' which its proponents urge in justification of its adoption is, as often as not, but impotence in disguise.

"....[Tillich] insists that in man, being is never given automatically as it is in animals and plants, but depends upon the individual's courage, and without courage, one loses being. This makes courage itself a necessary ontological corollary."
Rollo May

Also inseparable from its constitution is an element of faith -of the 'amour propre' kind, or of a 'knowing who one is', that one is a substantial and valued entity which is an ens spiritualis rather than a res naturalis -which does not at all commit one to any form of Cartesian dualism. And faith -it is necessary to remind the mainstream intellectual- is not doubt which has been suppressed, dodged or side-tracked, but rather confronted and faced down. Only a faith which has thus been enriched and transfigured by the encounter is to be trusted. Doubt is no longer 'out there' as an ever present agent of corrosion, but inside, where it belongs, an enemy which has become an ally. Strong belief without doubt is better named zealotry.

One of the great merits of such authenticity is the fearlessness of common sense in the face of challenges. These are welcomed with open arms because of their growth-forcing potential and enrichment which they promise¹. The outcome alternatives are win/win -and one can hardly ask for more than that. Should the challenge, upon examination, turn out to be well-founded, then common sense will have become broadened and deepened in the process of accommodation; and if not, then its incumbent beliefs will have become clarified through the kind of self-scrutiny which the meeting of challenges demands. (I believe it was the physicist Niels Bohr who thirsted after paradoxes and antinomies for this very reason).

Common sense affords the only refuge open to us from 'silly' theories of every kind which though consistent with empirical fact and free of internal contradiction are not such that one could live by:

".....By a 'silly' theory I mean one which may be held at the time when one is talking or writing professionally, but which only an inmate of a lunatic asylum would think of carrying into daily life . I should take behaviourism, taken quite strictly, and certain forms of idealism as 'silly' in this sense. No one can in practice or his friends or enemies simply as ingenious machines produced by other machines, or can regard his armchair or his poker as being literally societies of spirits or thoughts in the mind of God. It must not be supposed that the men who maintain these theories and beliefs are 'silly' people. Only very acute and learned men could have thought of anything so odd or defended anything so preposterous against the continual protests of common sense."
C.D.Broad (1925)

".....I suspect that there is a class of positions that are wrong but not refutable and that behaviourism may be in such a class. These (behaviourist postures) are essentially irrational positions (like, eg. solipsism) which start with a denial of something much like a foundation tenet of common sense which can, in the abstract, be rationally defended for however long one wishes to persist in superordinate irrationality but which cannot be implemented without brooking self-contradiction".
Koch (1964)

2.Its Origins, Odyssey and Current Eclipse

Perhaps it is legitimate to trace its origins all the way back to the 'animal grace' characteristic of pre-human genera and species. They live within the safe harbour of instinct studiously 'impedance matched' by genetic wisdom to the environmental niche which they occupy. No soul-searchings are needed -were they possible- to make sense of the outside world; things *are* as they seem to *be*. Such beings are born knowing who they are -without need or benefit of existential agonization or spiritual regeneration. Common sense is the only kind they have, and things work out very nicely.

But in passing through the 'sound barrier' into explicit self-consciousness, man was, so to speak, to wake up to discover himself 'in orbit' wondering how on earth he got there. He was to find himself confronted by the very vertiginous 'great questions' of meaning and existence, of life and death, to which no ready-made answers were at hand. We have left behind the shelter of instinct -and there is no way back; we find ourselves caught, as it were between the acts. We are homo caducus -man in transition-, still in process of trying to make sense of it all.

".....Man, by forgoing transcendence, does not and cannot acquire the singular strength and security of the animal nature. If he renounces the prerogatives of his human existence, he immediately becomes less than an animal. Man, in short, cannot 'be there' like other existents; he either transcends his 'being there' (Dasein) or he descends below the animal level by losing himself and his possibility of transcendence."
Reinhardt, speaking of Jaspers

Throughout both history and prehistory, solutions of sorts have been found, but none has proved to have true staying power -and we are still searching. No doubt such disturbing questions were at first to obtrude only implicitly as a kind of subliminal awareness, producing nominally satisfying answers couched in terms of myth and legend. Such 'peasant wisdom' is about as close as it is possible to get to a human equivalent of 'animal grace'. But it was not to last. The maturation of language and the refinements in thought and intellectual speculation which it made possible led to an explicit probing of all matters -sacred and secular- including an introspective scrutiny of our own nature, constitution and significance. Sometimes the answers which were forthcoming were found to be both satisfying and sustaining, but their associated 'golden ages' -if that is what they truly were- lacked staying power; again and again we were to lose our footing. Our present-day nadir of spiritual insolvency and inward sense of existential alienation are the consequences of a long and turbulent process of decline over a period of several centuries. The spectacular flowering of a secular and physicalist science were but to provide a coup de grace. Within the immediate present, we find ourselves confronted by a science which persistently exceeds its mandate in pronouncing on questions of meaning and value which are nowhere in its purview. It has come to hold itself preeminently and exclusively competent to render the Received Opinion on all matters -and it is getting away with murder. And there has been no more spectacular casualty than that of common sense. Here is Einstein's judgment for a start:

".....Common sense is merely the deposit of prejudices laid down in the human mind before the age of 18".

But Dawkins, in addressing the problems of neodarwinism, goes much further. It is hard indeed to square the prima facie teleology and the genius for coordinately dense and hierarchically organised entities which living creatures have turned out to be, with the mechanism filtered noise which lies at the basis of the dogma of neodarwinism. The kind of protests which are in most urgent need of silencing are such as those voiced, for example, by the venerable William Paley in his hypothetical encounter with a watch:

".....In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there forever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think that the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew, the watch might have always been there."

The Blind Watchmaker p 38 1828 natural theology Oxford: J. Vincent

Paley goes on to say that we could not but doubt that the watch had been designed and crafted by some unknown artificer with its time-telling function in mind; if this be true of watches, then what are we to say of the incomparably more intricate wonders of biological organisms?

".....Locomotives and watches do not usually arise in nature by a play of chance forces -do, then the infinitely more complex 'organic' machines?"
Ludwig Bertalanffy Problems of life.

Or, as Fred Hoyle more dramatically put it:

".....that a tornado sweeping through a junkyard might assemble a Boeing 747 from the materials therein".
Johnson p 104

One may or may not want to follow Paley in his identification of the source of meaningfulness and purpose which are so strikingly manifest by organisms, *yet some* explanation is called for -which neoDarwinism does not begin to supply. Dawkins quotes bishop Hugh Montefiori's abundant scepticism on the subject:

".....there seems to be no explanation on Darwinian grounds....It is no easier to explain...It is not easy to understand....It is equally difficult to explain....I do not find it easy to comprehend....I do not find it easy to see....I find it hard to understand....It does not seem feasible to explain....I cannot see how....neoDarwinism seems inadequate to explain many of the complexities of animal behaviour....it is not easy to comprehend how such behaviour could have evolved solely through natural selection....It is impossible....how could an organ so complex evolve?....It is not easy to see....It is difficult to see" The Blind Watchmaker page 38 His book was "the Probability of God"

Dawkins responds with a contemptuous dismissal of any such pleas as 'the argument from incredulity'. The position has finally come to be taken that scientific progress has always been bought at the expense of affronting commonsense, so that we have about arrived at the point where we should disregard its protests; even to give voice to its promptings is now regarded as a sign of vulgarity, if not of *lèse majesté*; no doubt it has a place in the minds of the peasantry and proletariat and others who remain mired within the vulgarities and superstitions of 'folk psychology'.

".....Several of the greatest discoveries of science are counter-intuitive.....Evolution by natural selection is perhaps the hardest of the counter-intuitive ideas which we are asked to accept.....Only experience leads to the assimilation of correct, counter intuitive arguments. One comes to accept

them because one cannot do without them....Alternatively, you may give up and become a mystic".
Leslie Orgel *The Origin of Life*. John Wiley & Sons 1973

In other words, Orgel seeks to compel acceptance through imposing a falsely limited choice. Not only is mysticism not the only alternative which might be contemplated, but apart from this, it is better, when confronted with such outrage, to simply reserve judgment. Indeed -by an inversion of the syllogism- it has even come to be held that counter-intuitive and paradoxical ideas are *more* likely to be true, on the grounds that many of the more seminal discoveries of science were initially shocking to its sensibilities. Such a line of argument would have done credit to that venerable Middle Ages theologian Tertullian who claimed, for example, that the assertion 'the Son of God died' was worthy of belief because it [was] absurd; that 'He was buried and rose again' was 'certain because it was impossible'. [Swinburne, Richard; *Faith and Reason*]; 'What makes God comprehensible is that he cannot be comprehended'. I am here, of course, not passing judgment upon his beliefs but only faulting the logic by which they are sustained.

Should such arguments fail to take hold, Dawkins has devised one further stratagem for putting our doubts to sleep:

".....An apparently (to ordinary human consciousness) miraculous theory is *exactly* the kind we should be looking for in this particular matter of the origin of life. This is because 'evolution has equipped our brains with a subjective consciousness of risk and improbability suitable for a lifetime of less than a century'" Johnson p105 quoting Dawkins

Everywhere, we find a s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g of evidence –to the point where the making of a promise is taken to imply its redemption. Darwin himself was not above the stratagem of equating possibility with actuality

"....The solution of each new difficulty in turn came more easily to Darwin as he triumphed over - not simply disposed of- the preceding one. The reader was put under a constantly mounting obligation; if he accepted one explanation he was committed to accept the next. Having first agreed to the theory in cases where only some of the transitional states were missing, the reader was expected to acquiesce in those cases where most of the stages were missing, and finally in those where there was no evidence of stages at all. Thus by the time the problem of the eye was under consideration, Darwin was insisting that anyone who had come with him this far could not rightly hesitate to go further..... "

"As possibilities were turned into probability, and probability into certainty, so ignorance itself was raised to a position only once removed from certain knowledge. When imagination exhausted itself and Darwin could devise no hypothesis to explain away a difficulty, he resorted to the blanket assurance that we were too ignorant of the ways of nature to know why one event occurred rather than another, and hence ignorant of the explanation that would reconcile the facts with his theory".

Hitching page 216

The playing of 'God of the gaps' in reverse –that of stealing the middle ground without burden of proof- has been taken one step further –that of inverting the syllogism, a process of closure by which the conclusion taken to justify the premises:

".....The mathematician D.S.Ulam argued that it was highly improbable that the eye could have evolved by the accumulation of small mutations because the number of mutations would have to be so large that the time available was not nearly long enough for them to appear. Sir Peter Medawar and C.H.Waddington responded that Ulam was doing his science backwards; the fact that the eye had evolved and therefore 'that the mathematical difficulties must be only apparent'...to which Ernst Mayr added 'somehow or other, by adjusting these figures we will come out alright. We are comforted by the fact that evolution has occurred.'" Johnson p 38

I can find no way of contending with such surrealistic contortions of the human mind than by declaring a two minutes' silence. Have I indeed blundered into the Cabinet of Dr Caligari? After submitting to such recommended lobotomy of the commonsense faculty, we should indeed have no further qualms in embracing the Darwinist credo, hook line and sinker.

I must emphasise here that I'm *not* suggesting that neodarwinism, as a *sufficient* mechanism underlying evolution should be dismissed merely on counter-intuitive grounds; rather, what I'm urging is that given such intuitive uneasiness, the *default posture* ought to be one of reserved judgment -and this regardless of whether or not one has a viable alternative to offer. Surely the adoption of such a posture would be in the best traditions of scientific speculation. Yet instead, what we are witnessing is the spectacle of some very able minds hard at work putting together arguments of evasion and concealment. As a footnote to the present example, I must add that no rebuttals have so far been offered, to my knowledge, in response to the more sophisticated of the probability analyses which have been made. Neodarwinism is, in fact, in deep trouble, and nowhere more so than at life's origin. My forthcoming book "The Origin of the Specious" makes an in-depth analysis of the thermodynamic, biochemical and probabilistic problems involved. In summary, it seems to me that naive intuition's scepticism is amply justified.

3.The Major Claims & Assertions of Common Sense

A *robust* common sense -as characterised in the opening paragraphs above is more than a critical faculty or organ of circumspection; in addition, it comes armed with certain deep-seated intuitions which are largely cross-cultural; they are found equally within the educated intellectual and the untutored peasant. They may be said to be centred within that domain of philosophical inquiry which is remote from, and complementary to, that to which science addresses itself -particularly the physicalist science which dominates the current intellectual scene. These are the beliefs or intuitions which may be said to be -in the parlance of confrontation- 'non-negotiable'.

At the centre of these intuitions must surely be an affirmation of the mystery of the person, psyche, subject - or, as some would prefer to say, the soul. The unfolding phantasmagoria of mental events is something which the psyche *has* rather than *is*.

".....The self of which we are conscious in self-consciousness is a subject which in some sense has, rather than is, its different experiences, and is identical with itself through them"

C.A.Campbell Selfhood and Godhood

The 'received opinion' can find no justification for this piece of 'folk psychology' To many present-day trend-setting scientific intellectuals, the self *is* the unfolding tapestry of conscious experience; what we call the 'subject' is an illusory abstraction .. Of course, *explicit* self-consciousness is a latecomer within phylogeny, but the default position should surely be that such an authentic subjective/objective polarity is inseparable from what might be called authentic monadship; it was only when the cortical underpinnings had surpassed some kind of 'critical mass' -or organisational complexity, that the polarisation was to come into focus. One would have thought that to question this subjective presence were an ultimate folie de doute, something to have generations of existentialists turning in their graves. Yet such scepticism is widely voiced by household names holding forth on the subject at conferences, within books and journals and within TV programs aimed at enlightening the general public on the subject.

However, its curious elusive nature as an object of the attention has been seized upon by sceptical, nihilist philosophers as a justification for denying its existence:-

".....There are some philosophers who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call ourself; that we feel its continuance in existence. .for my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time. (anyone) may perhaps perceive something simple and continued which he calls himself; although I'm sure there's no such principle in me" David Hume.

The definitive response to Hume has been given by Smythies:-

".....When David Hume was asked his opinion about the existence of the ego, he complained he was certain that it did not exist, for whenever he searched around in his consciousness all he could ever find was some particular thought or image and never any 'ego'. However, this very failure on Hume's part enables us to define the ego -for Hume's ego was that which was actually doing the searching and failing to find anything except thoughts and images"

This is precisely why the plain man is undisturbed by his own experience of the Humean paradox. He simply assumes that self-observation is but one instance of reflexive singularity, ie. of a situation in which a relationship among a set of objects holds so long as no attempt is made for an object to address itself. Thus you can use your phone to call any other in the network but you cannot call yourself.

Second is that the psyche is a *valued* entity; indeed, all manifestations of actual value or of intrinsic and self-proclaiming significance within the Universe are to be found within the conscious minds of living beings and nowhere else. The inorganic realm of mindless matter is merely there, and not there *for itself*. It is as destitute of intrinsic as it is replete with instrumental value -for without it, there could be no you and no I. One might be tempted to say that it had an *ontological density* of zero; however, it must have *Some* true being to *be* there at all, so perhaps we might credit it with an ontological density of 0+; this may be just sufficient to turn the trick, when it is remembered that your computer and mine can detect the difference between the three states of 0-, 0, and 0+; they had better, or they will 'crash' a lot more than bloody 'windows'. Contrast the following:

".....The paradox of consciousness and personality is that each of us is situated precisely at the centre of this world; each of us is at the centre of infinity." Maritain (1948)

".....Mind is a microcosm which, though its existence at the heart of the universe is ceaselessly threatened, nevertheless possesses a higher ontological density than that whole universe." Jacques Maritain (1948, p.148)

-or, more hyperbolically:

"...Every time a man dies, a whole universe is destroyed" [Popper 1977 p3]

Of course, one might here insist that it is not a universe but 'only' its microcosmic reconstruction which is lost. However, I am moved to raise the possibility that there may be more 'information' -whatever that may mean- within a single adult human mind/brain ensemble that in the entire inorganic cosmos.

Common sense also proclaims the freedom of the will, that we are at every moment free to exercise a choice within an envelope of options, despite our difficulties in its exercise under circumstances of extreme duress. Many an existentialist would go further by giving such openness of choice an absolute normative priority, replacing, Descartes 'Cogito ergo sum' with 'Eligo ergo sum' -I choose, therefore I am. (we need to remind ourselves that to assert the efficacy of consciousness is not quite the same thing as freedom of the will. Indeed, Searle accepts the first while denying the second):

".....Pointing out that we *can* give up beliefs in a flat earth and literal sunsets, Searle says that 'we can't similarly give up the conviction of freedom, because that conviction is built into every normal conscious intentional action'. After saying that 'science allows no place for the freedom of the will', he adds that 'we can't act otherwise than in the assumption of freedom, no matter how much we learn about how the world works in a determined physical system..Nagel's....position is similar. In spite of seeing no way to give a coherent account of freedom, he says 'I can no more help holding myself and others responsible in ordinary life than I can help feeling that my actions originate within me' ". Griffin (1997)

-In other words, we can 'do what we will but cannot will what we will'.

This notion is anathema to the mainstream intellectual who strives to dispose of it by one kind of argument or another. I would want to claim, however, that in order to be able to argue against it, you have to know what it is, and that you can't know what it is without having it. Eccles make much the same point:

".....I state emphatically that to deny free will is neither a rational nor a logical act. This denial either presupposes free will for the deliberately chosen response in making that denial, which is a contradiction, or else it is merely the automatic response of a nervous system built by genetic coding and moulded by conditioning."
John C. Eccles

It would be impossible to explain to anyone who lacked free will how this agency was to be distinguished between true openness of choice and self-willed which was to some degree noisy and unpredictable.

John Searle seeks to explain away free-will intuitions in a way reminiscent of Dawkins' more general dismissal of counter-intuitive promptings in general, on orthodox neodarwinian grounds:

".....For reasons I don't really understand, evolution has given us a form of experience of voluntary action where the experience of freedom, that is to say, the experience of alternative possibilities, is built into the very structure of conscious, voluntary intentional human behaviour. For that reason, I believe, neither this discussion, nor any other will ever convince us that our behaviour is unfree."
John Searle: Minds Brains & Science

He then adds the following very revealing line of argument, the likes of which underlie -often sotto voce- so much of the materialist weltanschauung currently occupying stage centre:

".....But if libertarianism, which is the thesis of free-will were true, it appears we would really have to make some radical changes in our beliefs about the world. In order for us to have radical freedom it looks as if we would have to postulate that inside each of us was a self that was capable of interfacing with the causal order of nature. That is, it looks as if we would have to contain some entity which was capable of making molecules swerve in their paths.....There is not the slightest evidence to suppose that we should abandon physical theory in favour of such a view."
John Searle Minds Brains & Science

In other words, the *possibility* that the lex naturalis may be in need of extension to accommodate mind has been placed -dogmatically, one has to say- beyond the pale; to seriously raise the issue is to invite ridicule from ones colleagues and to jeopardise one's funding.

An inseparable consequence of any affirmation of free will is that willy nilly, subjective time, at least, must be of 'process' rather than 'manifold' kind, that is to say, that our personal future does *not* already exist fully formed 'out there', waiting for us, into which we are inexorably carried. Notwithstanding that much of what we do is more or less predictable, the future, for us, does not pre-exist in any ontic sense. This in turn demands that either special relativity is due for a re-examination with respect to its disallowance of some form of true inertial manifold or framework in space, or alternatively, that somehow or other, subjective time must stand exempt, partly at least, from the deprecations of its physical counterpart.

Common sense also avers us to be fundamentally rational beings in command of our thought processes and in possession of valid reasoning machinery despite the fact that we sometimes act irrationally or are slipshod in our use of logic. Such experiences do nothing to undermine our confidence in either of these principles, serving rather, simply to put us on our guard.

".....We all know false beliefs arise, mostly innocently, and we all recognise irrationality in our fellows and even in ourselves. But as Davidson points out, false belief, perverse desire and irrational action only makes sense as such against a background of mostly true beliefs, normal desires and fundamental rationality".

William Seagar Metaphysics of Consciousness London New York 1991 Routledge p 38

In its ever-present drive to marginalise and trivialise mind, Current Wisdom has sought to turn this argument inside out, allowing the exception to oust the generality, Such dog-waggy is a recurring stratagem in their attempts to cut mind down to size.

Quite apart from this, there is no escape from an a priori acceptance of certain principles of logic which cannot themselves be further grounded without running into circularity; these are but one instance of many beliefs which have to be accepted on faith if we are not to be halted in our tracks or frozen into immobility. They are among the things which Kant had in mind in his concept of the 'synthetic a priori' conceived as a rebuttal to Humean scepticism:

".....It should be noted right away, however, as Alistair McKinnon has shown so clearly, that order is not something that we can ever prove, for we have to assume order in any attempt of proof or disproof.....even David Hume has pointed out that there can be no explanation of reason by reason" T.F.Torrance

".....Blaise Pascal....showed that in mathematical proofs, no matter how rigorous, it is impossible to operate only with explicitly derived terms, for in any definition one set of terms is defined only with reference to others, which within the definition must be left undefined".

T.F.Torrance

So far, the discussion has been limited to what common sense has to say about the presence of the psyche and the activities with which it is preoccupied. But it also harbours strong intuitions about both the gritty reality of the perceptual world, and the realm of Transcendence which is vaguely yet persistently apprehended in quite another way.

Let's look first at the world of perception. Common sense can hardly come to terms with its pronouncements about the self and its works without proclaiming the reality of a subjective-object polarisation, with the added affirmation that the 'outside world' is truly there. One takes this position despite the fact that all that we *directly* know is what our minds reveal to us, as a consequence of which there is no way -through argument or observation- that the challenge of solipsism can be disposed of. This immediately brings under suspicion *insubstantiality* of the physicists' view of the cosmos. What we are being offered is a *phenomenology* which hovers at the margins of perception from which it never quite seems to *ground out*. This is underscored by the way in which imaginary numbers intrude into both of the worlds of relativity and quantum physics -though perhaps more poignantly in the latter. I shall return to this matter further below.

I do not think that *some* kind of affirmation of Transcendence can be -or should attempt to be- avoided, and this for two kinds of reasons. For a start, I must observe that I have never met or know of a mathematician of any substance who was not a Platonist -including such rabid atheists as the venerable G.H.Hardy of Oxford -and Ramanujan- fame. In discussing the matter with Penrose a couple of years back, I was not surprised to hear him echo the same sentiments. In fact, in his "Shadows of Mind" he goes much further, hinting at Platonic Universals in some form or another as may be necessary to account for even the simple everyday intercourse between people, let alone the more mysterious processes underlining creativity and self-organisation. And it is not clear that physics can discharge its function in the absence of a realm of transcendence wherein to 'park' its system of laws. The Hartle/Hawking model of the origin of the cosmos seeks to dodge this, though in a highly speculative and unproven way. I think that their notion is open to another, more fundamental objection which I shall come to later.

But the above is an appeal to inference and as such is, I fancy, insufficient. I doubt that such arguments stand their ground in the absence of a deeply felt *awareness* of its presence which has an *immediacy of participation* which in its own way is as real as the disclosures of ordinary perception. Those who have mastered the discipline of the inward-turningness of mystical contemplation proclaim the transcendence which they encounter to be the ultimate reality in terms of a universal source within which all ultimately takes origin and is sustained. Now, while it be the case that these experiences reveal truth *only to themselves*, being unavailable to us because of their alleged *ineffability*. I believe this notion to be a misconception. It is not true that mystics are a special breed who can talk only to one-another; the difference between them and the rest of us is a matter of degree, and not of kind, -even though the degree be large. Just about everybody has had moments of illumination which seem to have lifted him

qualitatively above everyday experience; such moments are typically fleeting, yet which may leave indelible, life-long impressions -even to the point where they are felt to compensate for long interludes of pain or frustration. If it were not for this, Plotinus and Eckhart would make little or no sense to us. We may not be able to plumb their depths, but there's no mistaking what they are talking about, regardless of one's particular ontological commitments. The Theist can read between the lines of Plotinus, and the Monist between those of Eckhart.

What is so easily overlooked, and whose importance cannot be over-emphasised, is that in the final analysis *all* experience is ineffable because all that can be passed between minds must move as low-frequency, narrow bandwidth pulses through the slender threads of the afferent neural system, hence is totally physical in nature. What is conveyed by these nerves is therefore necessarily destitute of all traces of intrinsic meaning or qualia. All that can pass between minds are strings of symbols (whether linguistic or iconic) which are ultimately conveyed through nerve fibres as frequency-baseband or frequency-modulated signals. Even the understanding *that* they are symbols is ineffable, is not something that can be explained by one person to another unless the recipient is already in possession of language, so that he knows -if only implicitly- the relation between symbols and meaning and the difference between semantics and syntax, and lexicons and grammars. There is no way that meanings or thoughts or feelings or intentions can be communicated between people; they can arise only in the minds of recipients through a process of imaginative reconstruction which, for the most part, is performed with consummate ease. It is the *transparency* of this reconstruction process which makes it so hard for us to disabuse ourselves of the illusion that literal communication is under way. Even more than this, it typically seems to both parties, in the process of intimate dialogue, that mind directly knows mind, and that communication is absolutely direct, to the point where the consciousness of the one appears, naively, to infuse that of the other. In face-to-face dialogue, the mind of each seems to stream from the face, and to modulate the voice, resulting in a seamless interface of shared experience.

There are two ways of looking at these two levels of ineffability; we could say that making sense of what the mystic has to tell us is but an extreme and challenging instance of a task which is negotiated without effort at the more mundane level of everyday chatter. -Or, we might say that our ability to communicate the most commonplace of ideas is -properly regarded- already to be taken as a bloody miracle.

That mystical experiences *may* be drug-induced, ie. arise through the ingestion of appropriately constituted molecules, cannot be used as an argument of dismissal. Imagine the following. You are in a dimly lit room, one wall of which is taken up by a picture window whose view is totally obscured by heavy drapes. However, these may be drawn back by a powered mechanism controlled by a black box which responds only to the presence of certain chemicals. If you drop a tablet of, say, LSD30, then following a latent period during which a necessary proofing analysis is made, the mechanism crackles into life, causing the drapes recede, disclosing a most glorious scene - maybe Constable's 'Haywain' come to life, or an Alpine landscape. However, it is nonsense to say that these views came from, or are a product of the activating tablet whose role was limited to bringing about a disclosure of something coming from God knows where. And those who would say that it is a special configuration of cortical or neural substance which the psychedelic drug contrives to turn on must perforce address and come to terms with the problem of the origin of *qualia* of which the experiences of which we have been talking are but the most mysterious instance.

'Transcendence' is normally thought of and spoken of within the context of one or other of the systems of religion. However, it may be acknowledged in an unstructured way simply as an eternal realm within which we and the cosmos reside and somehow take origin. There need be no divine Person involved, but the realm has to be something more than a kind of null state of the cosmos from which the big bang took origin, because it must be as much a source of mind as it is of matter. In other words it must be a *numinous* domain. A 'theory of everything' which excludes this characteristic is misnamed -however well its equations may satisfy physicists.

Perhaps it scarcely needs to be added that our human monadship would hardly be up to the task if it were not for the fact that the constitution of each one of us forever has one foot anchored in eternity:

".....The crucial question must now be faced. Can a segment of finite reality become the basis of an assertion about that which is infinite? The answer is that it can, because that which is infinite is Being-itself and because everything participates in Being-itself. The *analogia entis* is not the property of a questionable natural theology which attempts to obtain knowledge of God by

drawing conclusions about the infinite from the finite. The *analogia entis* gives us our only justification of speaking at all about God. It is based on the fact that God must be understood as Being-itself."

".....Every finite being participates in Being-itself. Otherwise it would not have the power of being. It would be swallowed up by non-being, or it never would have emerged out of non-being".
Tillich

I would insist that an essential aspect of authentic personhood is in an affirmation of absolutes, that is to say, in a standing aloof from the pan-relativism which underlies much of present-day thought: ".....There is something which resists the stream of relatives." (Tillich) That is to say, that somewhere within a surface wash of relatives lies an element of absolute 'better' and 'worse' -whether one is talking of beauty truth or goodness -or any other of the eternal verities. Such an affirmation is *not* to imply that such absolutes can be captured in any kind of normative manifesto or brought into sharp and definitive focus. One can affirm their presence without claiming a definite knowledge of just what they are. This point needs to be made because a favourite argument of dismissal has always been that an ontic affirmation must lead to a follow-up of casuistry. Hence, it follows that it is only necessary demonstrate the falsity of the latter to automatically disposes of the former.

Should you feel that I am claiming too much for common sense on this account, I would be prepared to back off into the following irreducible residuum. Common sense, as I have characterised it, has always been committed to what might be termed 'strong' agnosticism which merely claims there is something or other beyond the secular world which immediately greets us, regardless of our ability to say much, if anything about it. In contrast, a so-so agnosticism opines a 'maybe' while a weak agnosticism stands by a 'no' which leaves the door of optimism only marginally ajar.

In closing this section on the scope and reach of common sense belief, one might pose the question 'are existence and reality ultimately meaningful?' To this, common sense can make but one response: 'of course'. - regardless of whether or not one has much, if any idea of just what such meaning might consist. To say 'of course' is to say 'yes', but in addition to rebuke the interrogator for asking a silly question. It is not in fact a truly valid question at all, but a *catachresis* posing as a question. Though grammatically correct it is essentially diseased for the way in which it conjoins concepts inappropriately. 'Meaningless' cannot stand on its own feet but can only be understood as the negation of 'Meaning'. If Reality truly is meaningless, then how, pray, did we ever come into possession of any platform of meaning upon which to stand while ramming the reproach of unreality down its throat. Denials of free will fall into the same class. One cannot deny it unless one knows what it is, and one cannot know what it is without having it. Likewise denials of the psyche or ego. One cannot deny it without knowing what it is and one cannot know what it is unless one has it.

4.How Challenges to its Beliefs Should be Met

Common sense should welcome -not to say long for- challenges to its beliefs -most of all those which carry a koan-like shock, because of the way in which their resolution demands a searching review of our current position. In wrestling with it we mostly end up either by acknowledging its truth or demonstrating its fallacy; either way, we win. If the challenge is upheld, then accommodation is only to be achieved through a growth-forcing process in which our understanding is deepened and our horizons broadened; to demonstrate a compliance of this kind is not at all to yield under duress.

But quite the reverse may prove to be the case; the longer the matter is contemplated, the more outrageous it becomes. Should the problem defy resolution, then the only possible response should be one of standing ones ground while awaiting further developments, and to do so with every expectation that a resolution is possible -at least in principle. To adopt such a posture is to do no more than to affirm a belief that reality is, at bottom, rational, and that within a broader context, everything 'hangs together'. The one unacceptable outcome is that of capitulation; to do so is to put the authenticity of ones psyche in jeopardy.

The following pair of examples will serve to highlight the distinction between the two cases. Among many of its discoveries, physics has proved that matter is actually mostly empty space. This offers an immediate affront to

common sense because it runs so contrary to naive appearance. However, upon deeper reflection, the matter can be resolved to our satisfaction; most of the emptiness lies hidden within shells of electrons at a scale sufficiently small to be beyond direct perceptual access. Our accommodation can be assisted here by simple analogies. The disc swept out by the revolving propeller of an aircraft engine is, strictly speaking, mostly empty space, yet functionally is anything but -as we would quickly discover if we were unwise enough to walk into it.

Now, in comparison, consider the notion of 'time travel' which some have sought to ground upon relativity; the more it is contemplated the more outrageous it becomes. Even the inescapable consequence of special relativity itself -that the future is predetermined- runs absolutely counter to the essential nature of the self and the intentional stream of conscious episodes which flow from it, in consequence of which it must be assumed that something must be seriously wrong somewhere within frameworks which are tolerant of such possibilities.

A second example has already been cited further above -that concerning organic evolution. *That* it occurred -and roughly in the way depicted by palaeontologists is just about the most solidly proven and firmly established theories within the entire armamentarium of science, hence compels acceptance. Yet despite the near-universal claim by the scientific community that it is to be *totally* accounted for by some brand of neodarwinian mechanism, no proof has been forthcoming; probings drawing upon thermodynamics, biochemistry and probability analysis suggest that it is on very shaky ground, and that our common sense response of incredulity is fully justified.

Of no small significance is the way in which most of the 'surprises' (as defined above) which come to affront common sense have to do with the character of external, physical reality, and arise partly through the very limited bandwidth of our physiological sensors and of the slender channels to the cortex furnished by the peripheral nervous system. More than of narrow bandwidth, our sense organs are absolutely and totally *opaque* to the intrinsic nature of matter, to its underlying 'Ding an sich' of Immanuel Kant. In contrast, the other category of assaults which science has sought to foist upon common sense judgment concern mostly internal matters connected with how mind and its owner seem to be to themselves. None of the discoveries made by neuroscience are counter-intuitive in any deeper sense -eg. the direct and immediate dependence of both self and mind upon the circulating currents within the 'enchanted loom' of the cerebral cortex. It is only such physicalist insistence that consciousness is nothing more than a non-efficacious epiphenomenon of such events that intrude upon inseparable intuitions of our own inner nature (and incidentally run into rough weather in terms of accounting for the brain's performance).

Griffin (1997) puts it this way:

".....Hard core common sense beliefs are those that we inevitably presuppose in practice, even if we deny them in our theories. Indeed, if we try to deny them, we presuppose them in the very act of doing so.....If such beliefs exist, denial of them in our theories would involve us in violations of the law of non-contradiction; we would be simultaneously denying (explicitly) and affirming (implicitly) the propositions in question." p.258

".....In a phrase reminiscent of Charles Peirce's criticism of 'paper doubts', Honderich says of epiphenomenalism, 'off the page, no one believes it.'" p.259

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There *is* however, one of its discoveries which though indubitably true, is yet so counter-intuitive to the way in which we look at the world that it defies acceptance. by most. I am referring to the dismissal of 'naive realism' that we are *directly*-cognisant of the outside world, whereas the real truth of the matter is that the world directly apprehended in acts of perception (and praxis) is a total reconstruction located in some sense 'in' or if not adjacent to the cerebral cortex. Such, of course, is not to be taken to imply solipsism; there *is* an objective world 'out there' all right, and one to which our inner image is seamlessly interfaced -until something goes wrong somewhere within our central or peripheral neural machinery. The outcome of this dilemma is of great interest for the way in which it has been covered up by a kind of 'double think' process. At the intellectual level, the truth is accepted while being denied at the 'gut' level. One thing aiding the cover-up is that to truly come to terms with the dilemma calls for a form of introspection which does not come easily to the 'outward-turning' Western mind. I attempted to drive this matter home by means of an extended series of diagrams with supporting comments¹.

5.Scientists' Assault on Common Sense

A great many destructive arguments are being brought to bear, falling into three categories. First, are arguments stemming from theories which have yet to be substantiated, and which are almost certainly false; second, the passing off of metaphysics as science, ie *interpretations* of facts as though they were the facts themselves. And third, the deployment of logical sophistries pressed into the service of marginalising or trivialising those intrusions of mind which are found to be so offensive to mainstream physical science.

Foremost within the first category is the drawing of inferences from Neodarwinism -touted as a *sufficient* driving force and mechanism behind evolution. As we have seen, this set of dogmas has been used to dismiss our intuitive incredulity that this doctrine could truly deliver the goods, while Searle declares that we believe in free will because the germ plasm has endowed us with this built-in conviction. Again, common sense balks at the paradoxes of Quantum theory -above all the way in which its evolving wave functions hover in an imaginary (in mathematical sense) phenomenological domain which calls into question any grounding-out in a substantial reality beyond. Yet there are suggestions that it may be seriously flawed. Bohm, for example has proposed an alternative approach which preserves a firm reality.

The Michelson/Morley findings about the velocity of light demands that we find something to replace Newtonian space/time. Relativity is not in itself a *fact* but a *way of looking* at the empirical discovery in question. Relativity is, therefore, as much metaphysics as science, so consequently does not, or should not *compel* our acceptance. As we have seen, the substitution of a more realist and 'physical' interpretation, in addition to doing away with the monstrosity of a preformed future also disposes of needless paradoxes of its own creation within physics itself.

I have had cause to note that the challenges with which common sense has found itself confronted fall, more or less, into one of two classes; those which merely surprise -however much- yet which can, upon reflection, be accommodated. On the other hand are those which bite more deeply into the psyche's authenticity and closely-held beliefs, in which contemplation serves only to intensify the sense of outrage. That we have been prepared to yield to instances of the first has repeatedly been urged as a argument compelling our acceptance of the second. In short, common sense, we are finally assured, is no longer to be trusted and hence should be disregarded. The litany is a familiar one, walking us through our changing views about the scale, and constitution of the cosmos, from Ptolemy to the Big Bang. This odyssey being completed, we are then told that further concessions to naive judgments are demanded by the dogmas of relativity and quantum theory presented as proved-out theories in need only of refinement and mutual integration into a 'theory of everything'.

It is not easy for common sense to resist the intrusions of what the current paradigm is offering as the higher wisdom; such is the prestige of science that those outside have become all too eager to burn incense at its alter and to make mindless extrapolations from some of its findings. As Richard Feynman -no friend of philosophy- was to remark;

" '.....That all is relative is a consequence of Einstein, and it has produced influences on our ideas' In addition, they say, 'It has been demonstrated in physics that phenomena depend upon your frame of reference'. We hear that a great deal but it is difficult to find out what it means....After all, that things depend upon one's point of view is so simple an idea that it certainly cannot have been necessary to go to all the trouble of the physical relativity theory in order to discover it."

Gleick (1991)

. The willingness of the mainstream scientist to decouple his intellectual engine from the corrective promptings of commonsense- is but one of the many 'principles of unreason' which abound. Finally, it is not insignificant that ideas underlying the worth and dignity of man are rejected with special enthusiasm. One cannot but note that a sophomoric odium antitheologicum is widely embraced; many an intellectual has developed a sharp eye for possibilities of sacrilege, and will commit it when he can. Stephen Hawking concludes his account of the Hartle/Hawking theory of cosmic origin (in which the rabbit of time is pulled out of the hat of space in a way which dodges any need for a singularity):

".....So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end. It would simply be. what place, then, for a creator?.....The New Physics would appear to plug this gap [of the Gods] rather neatly". Stephen Hawking A Brief History of Time. Bantam Books 1988

It is of interest to note that the modern intellectual had his counterpart, even in the days of Pascal:

".....Do they profess to have delighted us by telling us that they hold our soul to be only a little wind and smoke, especially by telling us this in a haughty and self-satisfied tone of voice? Is this a thing to say gaily? Is it not, on the contrary, a thing to say sadly, as the saddest thing in the world?"

The following personal observation will give some idea of what I have in mind. While seated in the Cafeteria at NIH (the National Institutes of Health in Washington DC) a few years back, an argument broke out at the next table between a neoDarwinian and a young girl who was obviously an orthodox believer of somewhat fundamentalist persuasion. Inevitably he was winning hands down, And the more disconsolate she became, the more he warmed to his task; he seemed to be drawing nourishment from her increasing desolation. No doubt if someone had asked him why he was so berating the young girl, he would have answered that he was only trying to help her by freeing her from the shackles of superstition. But there was no mistaking the faustian crackle in his voice. He was not a nice man.

I would like to conclude with an example of how an amateur armed with no more than his native gumption and a non-technical overview of science together with the claims made in its name can make rings around the professional. John Horgan [date & title], in possession of no more than these, was able to survey all of the current mantras and pancrestons -from The Origin of Life to the New Thermodynamics and correctly identify their weakness -not to say absurdity. Future historians must surely rub their eyes in wonderment that the present day mainstream intellectual should have come to regard himself as a paragon of rationality, objectivity and open-mindedness. To find his equal, one needs to reach all the way back to the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages.

FOOTNOTES

¹It is appropriate to briefly review the nature and scope of paradoxes. W.V.O.Quine recognises three classes:

- O Veridical. Though surprising at first, a closer study discloses *why* appearances are misleading, hence dispelling the mystery.
- O Falsidical. These owe their origin to some confusion or inconsistency in their mode of presentation. Once this is unmasked, they disappear.
- O Antinomies. These are stubborn paradoxes which challenge important and fundamental aspects of our world-view. Their resolution depends upon our ability to transcend our present limitations and step up to a higher level of understanding.

A good example of the first is the counter Intuitiveness attendant upon the dispatch of 'naive realism'; all of the versions of the Cretan liar paradox (which are due to set theory ambiguities -ie. whether or not they include themselves as elements) are examples of the second. But the more stubborn antinomies seem to be connected with the anomalous behaviour of infinite sets -just because these are beyond articulate grasp.

".....A veridical paradox packs a surprise, but the surprise quickly dissipates itself as we ponder the proof. A falsidical paradox packs a surprise, but it is seen as a false alarm when we solve the

underlying fallacy. An antinomy, however, packs a surprise that can be accommodated by nothing less than a repudiation of part of our conceptual heritage."

Quine goes on to suggest that there is no real break between veridical paradoxes and antinomies:

".....One man's antinomy can be another man's veridical paradox, and one man's veridical paradox can be another man's platitude."

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Yet elsewhere, theories which cry out for Occamian surgery are put conveniently beyond its reach. Thus consider the outrageous brute-force redundancy of Everett's 'many worlds' rescue of relativity from the fatal intrusions of quantum theory. When challenged recently upon this point by a reader of a *Scientific American* article ["The Quantum Physics of Time Travel" p.68-75 199??], the authors (David Deutsch & Michael Lockwood) responded:

".....Occam's razor properly applies to concepts, not universes. To say that there are 'many universes' is no more than to say that big things obey the same physical laws that experimental physics routinely apply to subatomic particles, which involve multiple trajectories or histories. What does violate Occam's razor is the introduction of added elements -such as hidden variables or a collapse of the wave function- for which there is no experimental or theoretical justification beyond a stubborn attachment to a classical world-view". [S/A Mar 1994]

I would only react by saying that while not violating Occam's razor as classically stated, the notion evokes the same kind of protest. After all, Occam's principle isn't taken to be valid because Occam proposed it, but because of its instant intuitive appeal. So also in the closely parallel present instance. [I also take it to be true that perhaps the evolution of state vectors [?] is open to much the same kind of objection, in reduced form].