

The Necessity and Rationality of Faith

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Faith gives you a sense of meaning. Rational faith makes life meaningful.

These words, however, will do neither. Between material individuals, words reduce meaning to information. Communication, today, through the dead space of a petrified universe, is not communion. We individuals, we have ideas and they are beautiful, weightless, even truthful, but put them into words, try to reach another soul, and watch as they grow massive. Watch them fall faceless into the void. Only information survives here Information that quantifies and calculates and helps atoms contemplate atoms.

This is the grid-like existence brought to reality by the intersection of individualism and materialism. These twin ideologies dominate our consciousness by confining our rationality within a two-dimensional existential plane: we are either forced to exist as material individuals, alone awaiting annihilation ... or we are forced off the edge of existence. In other words, we must choose between a meaningless existence and an impossible one.

It is an existential crisis. And to face it—clear-eyed and with passion—is to face heartbreak or insanity. The problem is that modern rationality precludes the universality that supports meaning. And this leaves us dissonant. Our hearts are anxious for a sense of meaning that our heads refuse to concede To live with a hard head is to die with a desperate heart. But to embrace the heart is to deny life. Faith may give you a sense of the universal, it may even allow you to glimpse it, but on its own, it will not allow you to live it. To live a meaningful life, to participate in the universal, requires that our centers of consciousness be reconciled to a common reality. We require rational faith.

To access this alternative rationality, we need to change the way we map our existence. This sounds like a big ask, but we do this all the time. We are always telling stories. And the stories we tell ourselves about the origin and nature of reality—of our shared experiences—define the parameters of our rationality. Broadly speaking, these stories fall into two categories: traditional and modern. One we know by heart, and the other we've had to learn. The traditional narrative—the narrative I'm appealing to here—is the story that animated consciousness before the reverse alchemy of modern philosophy turned consciousness into a “hard problem”. Unlike the modern narrative, which assumes that matter is fundamental and that consciousness is witchcraft, the traditional narrative begins with consciousness, easily accounts for matter, and allows for the possibility of rational faith and a meaningful life.

Before we recount the traditional narrative, however, let's decide exactly what are meaning and faith. You may have heard certain champions of materialism—ideologues recruited from the most unimaginative of career scientists—argue that they believe meaning in the universe is local and temporal. This sounds impressive. It seems to add up to something. It is certainly designed to resolve our existential crisis. At its best, however, it is an exquisite example of high sophistry. *Local* and *temporal* “meaning” is *isolated* and *transient* ... just like you are. If, therefore, you're willing to render meaning *meaningless*, then you can live a meaningful life. For the rest of us, meaning requires continuity and universality within whatever system it is seeking

to define. We conscious beings are concerned with defining *existence*. And from the perspective of *existence*—from the perspective of being itself—the strictly local and temporal is meaningless. Like a word without a world. It is arbitrary. It is exactly what we are trying to escape ... to transcend. Any meaning that does not comprehend all the stars in heaven is no meaning at all. The universe is universal or it is nothing. Meaning brings the whole of existence together—it relates our microcosms to the macrocosm. For the limited being, therefore, meaning is a continuous connection to that which transcends limitation.

And that is the object of faith. Faith is a heartfelt belief that the essence of one's being transcends its apparent limitations; and more, that this individual essence is identical to the universal essence, or to being itself. Faith is a specific kind of belief. It does not, for example, refer to any belief in an unprovable assumption. That modern definition of faith is overly broad. Materialism, for example, is an unprovable assumption. And from that perspective, we might accuse our modern champions of engaging in faith-based reasoning. But I don't want to *accuse* anyone of having faith. That negative conception of faith—as a catchall for arbitrary assumptions—reveals the failure of positive meaning under the modern narrative and the reflexive power of language: as modern individuals atomize consciousness, languages become lexicons ... communicating no meaning in themselves. And words like *faith*, around which whole worlds revolved, now collapse into empty receptacles teetering on the outer rungs.

Restoring faith, therefore, is a necessary step towards finding meaning in life. Without a belief in transcendence, life becomes anatomical. If there is nothing outside of space and time, and we are reducible to atomic chemistry, then we are already dead. But if consciousness is fundamental, if consciousness does not merely arise from brain chemistry but constitutes reality and everything in it, then true universality and true meaning—true life—is possible.

Crudely put, this is the choice between materialism and idealism. These two theories underpin the modern and traditional narratives, respectively. The former assumes that we are material organisms sharing a physical world. The latter assumes that we are mindful beings participating in a shared consciousness. In one, our existence is local and temporal. In the other, our being is universal and eternal. Each is a threshold assumption ... implicit in every thought and action. The choice, therefore, is inevitable: if you are not aware of having made it ... it has been made for you.

A simple, often vague, sometimes visceral, awareness that this choice of narrative exists must, therefore, be the first step in our restoration of faith. It is an awakening. Once we realize, each in our own way, that the choice between materialism and idealism is not determined by rationality—but is a *determinant* of rationality—then we are free to make that choice. And this choice, freely made, is inevitable. I choose meaning. And so do you.

For the modern individual, however, faith is more than a choice. The volition of a limited consciousness cannot challenge a shared experience. Only experience can do that. Only through the repeated experience of transcendence do we develop the faith necessary to withstand the push and pull of our modern piecemeal reality. And though this experience may appear elusive, it surrounds us always. We are all familiar with it. It is the thing you're always chasing. Except, you may not have realized that the universal doesn't hide. You've sought it out in ecstasy and misery, through exhaustion and tranquility, in all the distraction and indulgence and toil of a material world—but understand, transcendence is what happens when you stop. In motionless consciousness we experience a singular reality. A reality where the multiplicity of manifestation

collapses into the simple being of the heart center. A reality where past and future reveal the eternal present. Where consciousness exposes and dissolves the sensual plane. And where, through repeated experience, we gain assurance. We realize what is. That manifest phenomena, though appearing finite and absolute from our limited perspective, are infinite and their origin is in consciousness ... universal consciousness. We realize that our senses deceive, and we learn to trust in the heart. That is faith.

Faith is the abiding trust that brings continuity to the experience of transcendence. Our initial experiences of transcendence are—at best—episodic. Each experience is isolated ... and lost in the intervening multiplicity. With the addition of faith, however, these isolated experiences begin to communicate. Faith enables us to remain in communion with the absolute even as our senses are consumed by the relative. The faithful heart is a sanctuary, allowing transcendent experience to form a continuous current through the sensual plane.

This visceral continuity, however, though it may establish a sense of meaning, is not sufficient for us to participate in that meaning. To live a meaningful life, to gain permanent access to the universal—to gain enlightenment—requires rational faith. It requires the unity of consciousness. The trust we place in the heart must lead to wisdom. And not only abstract wisdom, but a holistic understanding comprehensible at the level of daily experience.

In other words, we need to internalize the traditional narrative. We need to go beyond the simple notion of idealism towards a comprehensive worldview ... in the same way that the scientific worldview takes us beyond simple materialism. If we can internalize this alternative method of narrativising our moment to moment reality, we can give our experiences of transcendence a rational foundation. We can bring the whole of our being into alignment.

Here's how it works. Under the traditional narrative, consciousness is the fundamental phenomenon—instead of matter—and change moves from unity to multiplicity. We begin with singular consciousness. Without plurality, space and time have no basis of relativity, and therefore, all possibility exists simultaneously, as one idea. As we descend, however, consciousness becomes decentralized and ideas multiply. Eventually, the polycentricity of consciousness allows certain ideas to exist beyond the power of any particular constellation. These ideas are what we call matter. From the perspective of the collective matrix of consciousness, matter is like any other idea; but from the perspective of an individual node, matter is autonomous. In other words, at this low level, instead of ideas answering to consciousness, individual minds answer to matter. Eventually, as the move towards multiplicity continues and the division of consciousness approaches infinity, individual minds lose awareness, the distinction between inner idea and external matter dissolves, and the cycle resets at the level of singular consciousness.

But this is all still very meta. Our task now, then, is to map this metaphysical blueprint onto the microcosm of human experience. Following the pattern of humanity's archetypal lore, we can divide the stages of consciousness into the categories of God, Nature, Society, the individual, and beyond. Humanity traditionally understands the metaphysical state of unity in consciousness as the mind that is God. This level of consciousness presides above manifestation. Immediately below this level, a shift towards multiplicity in consciousness brings Nature into existence. This transition may be understood allegorically as the Fall of Satan and the creation of a sensual plane between heaven and hell. Satan's sin, as James Joyce put it, "was the sin of pride,

the sinful thought conceived in an instant: *non serviam*: I will not serve.”¹ In an instant, a single egoistic thought divided consciousness and created the manifest world. Keep in mind, however, that with consciousness at the level of Nature, the manifest world does not yet properly include humanity. To the extent human beings exist, they exist as an aspect of Nature. Within this system, human beings experience the universal as an immediate intuitive reality. This quality is lost, however, when Society separates from Nature and places humanity above animal and plant species. This is the allegorical Fall of Man, when humanity loses its innocence and becomes separately conscious at the level of Society: “For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5 King James Version). At this level, human beings no longer directly perceive the universal. God is now at the height of a distant hierarchy. But since humanity’s consciousness is collective—at the level of Society—transcendence remains a rational part of reality. And, therefore, all that is required for enlightenment is faith: to trust that the universal abides in the heart of every being ... that “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21 KJV). Traditional rationality, however, erodes as consciousness solidifies within the body. Individual consciousness creates the illusion that material limitations are fundamental. Matter is no longer viewed as a relative phenomenon, but as absolute in itself. And under this individual–material view, transcendence is irrational. Both head and heart are now severed from the universal. In the modern period, therefore, it is not enough for individuals to have faith. To experience enlightenment, individuals must embed their faith within a holistic conception of reality. And again, mere theory is insufficient. One must internalize the traditional narrative at the level of daily experience. Enlightenment requires that the aspirant recondition the mind. A process that starts with meditation. This practice, however, is failing as our meta-awareness dissolves into the subconscious beyond of postmodernism.

When we lose awareness of our own consciousness, we will lose the possibility of inner alignment. The cultivation of rational faith is a deliberate process. In order to internalize the traditional narrative—to reinterpret our daily reality by restructuring our cognitive schema—we need to be aware of the foundations of our own rationality. We need to awaken to the subjectivity of our own experience ... to the relativity of the phenomenal world. When we acquire this meta-awareness, we uproot the hegemony of modern rationality and allow the heart to breathe; we are drawn repeatedly to the experience of transcendence; we develop faith as consciousness gravitates towards its primordial pole; we gain a sense of meaning; the universal expresses itself; and from this ascendant center of power, we begin to deconstruct the limitations of individual consciousness and to recondition our minds in accordance with the holistic rationality of the traditional narrative. This is the path to enlightenment—the path to a meaningful life—for the modern individual. This path, however, can hardly be charted here. The systematic deconstruction of the modern narrative and exposition of traditional rationality required for such a program of reconditioning goes far beyond the scope of this essay. I have, however, attempted this project in a separate work.

¹ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 99.