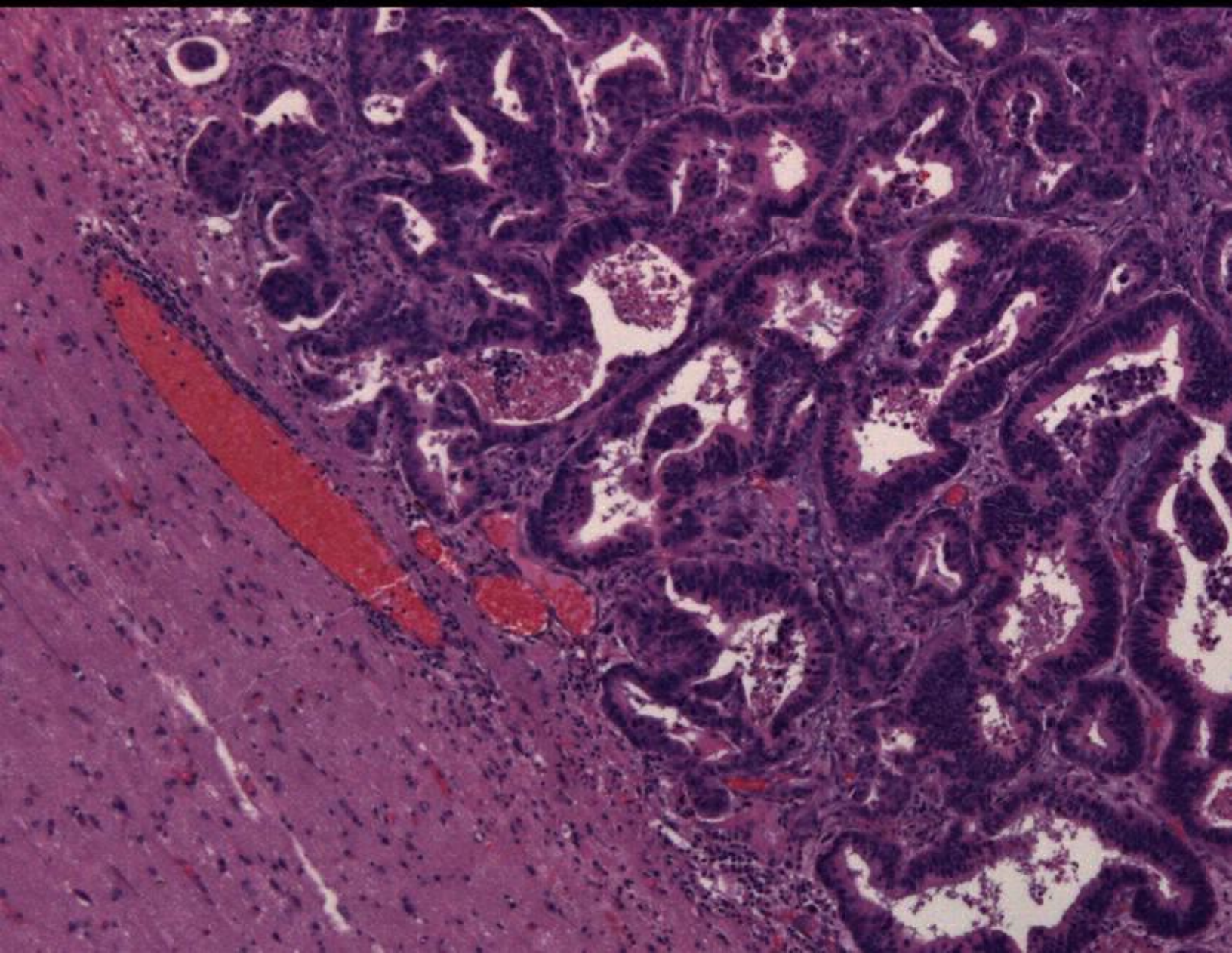
Christopher Stewart

Takers Economy

An Inquiry into Illegal File Sharing



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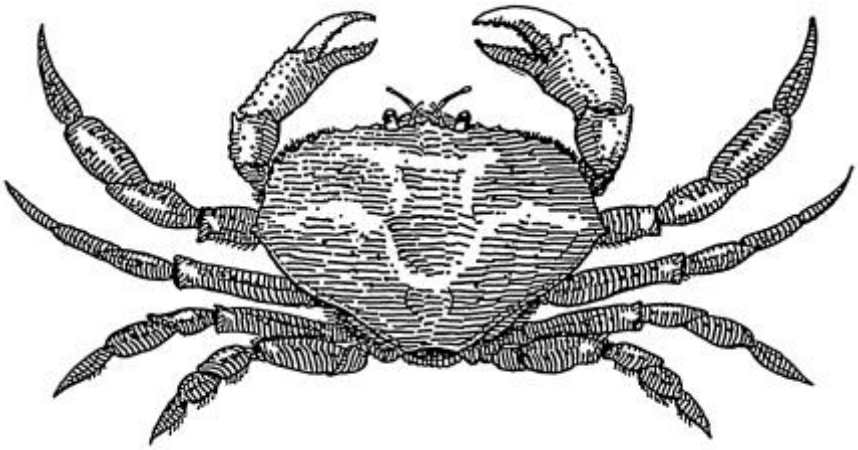

An Essay By

Christopher Stewart

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« Whoever injures the innocent and offends the upright quickly goes to one of ten certain states: discomfort, loss, physical injury, serious illness, insanity, oppression by a ruler, cruel slander, loss of relations, destruction of possessions, or fire burns his houses. When his body dissolves, the fool is born in hell. »

– *Dhammapada*, Chapter X, « *Violence*, » verses 9 to 12.

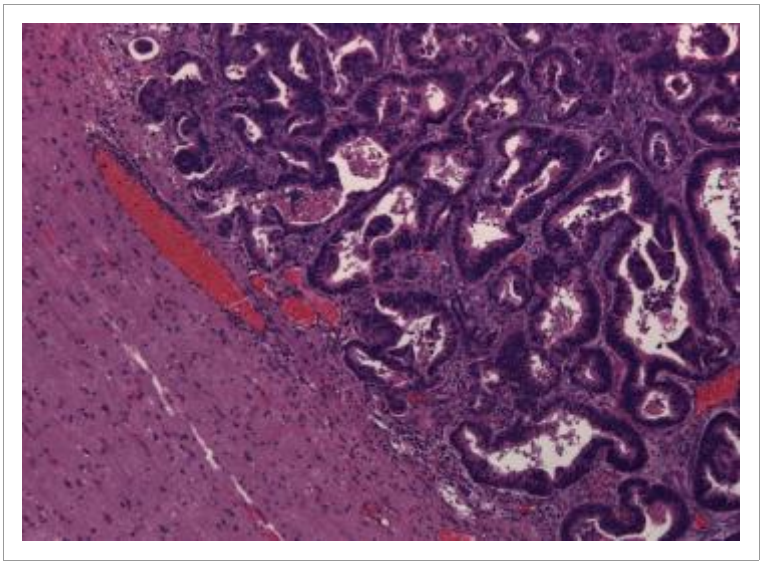
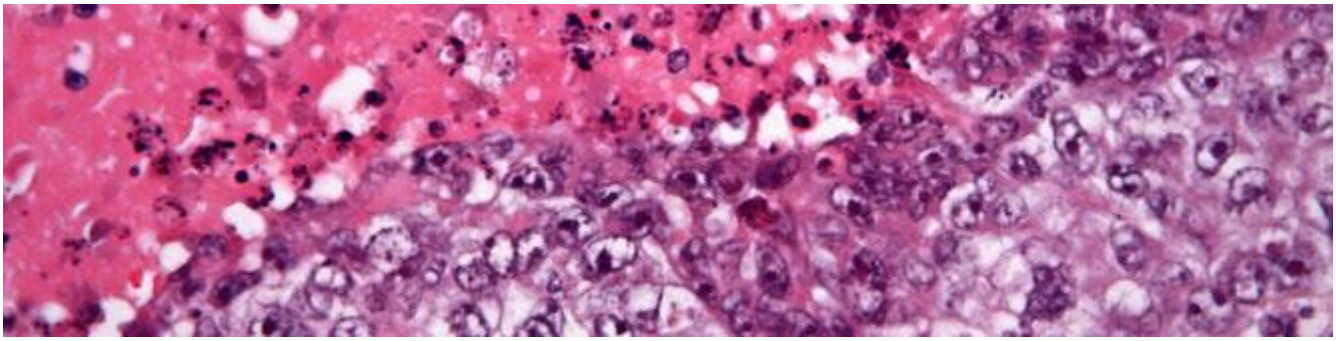


Table of Contents

1. Introduction 1
2. The State of Play 4
3. Ars Divina 11
4. Oneness 23
5. An I for an I Makes the World Go Bound 54
6. Alternatives Rock 88
7. Verses 98
8. Links 104
9. Credits 106
10. Disclaimer 108
11. About the Author 109
12. License 110



1. Introduction

䷑ Work on the Decayed

My first day of work on this essay was mostly invested in gathering and sorting ideas expressed in several conversations in which I took part over the course of the recent weeks. I also addressed the presentation of the whole, and decided on the various visual elements.

In one of those virtual discussions, I have compared illegal file sharing to cancer. As I recalled the exchange, the disease seemed like an apt metaphor to inform the design of the book. I quickly found pictures of cancer cells, and the crab stood out as the obvious emblem, but it was selecting a bullet for the sections within the chapters that required the most time. Eventually, I noticed that one of the fonts installed on my laptop includes the hexagrams of the I Ching. When I read the eighteenth, named « *Correcting* » in the list on Wikipedia, my right leg had one of its subtle spasms that told me the figure was what I was looking for. A few hours later, as I was getting ready to compose the present introduction, I discovered the following explanation of the image of the hexagram, also called « *Work on the Decayed* » :

> *« The wind blows low on the mountain: The image of decay. Thus the superior man stirs up the people And strengthens their spirit. »*
>
> *« When the wind blows low on the mountain, it is thrown back and spoils the vegetation. This contains a challenge to improvement. It is the same with debasing attitudes and fashions; they corrupt human society. His methods likewise must be derived from the two trigrams, but in such a way that their effects unfold in orderly sequence. The superior man must first remove stagnation by stirring up public opinion, as the wind stirs everything, and must strengthen and tranquillize the character of the people, as the mountain gives tranquillity and nourishment to all that grows in its vicinity. »*

[source : Ask the Oracle, *Work on the Decayed*]

Motivations

Most if not all the aforementioned conversations stemmed from my reactions to videos or music files that I believe were posted illegally in various social networks. Another thread started when I enquired about albums shared via a mailing list to which a friend added me without telling me what it was about. Arguably, my responses weren't directed to the proper recipients, or authorities, but in any case the ensuing exchanges provided me with relevant material for the present undertaking.

In my opinion, one of the major problems of sharing music on the internet is that there is often very little way of establishing that the artists, or more accurately the rightsholders, have approved the contents for distribution in this fashion. In many instances, they haven't, and thus propagating those creations on the net infringes their rights. When the files have been released directly by the artists, for example through their own websites or their official channels, then there is no doubt, but that is not the case when just anybody uploads music to the internet.

Manifestly, there are individuals who do this wittingly in the hopes of profiting from the operation, but not all those who take part in such activities share their bad intentions. In fact, in my experience, it seems that a significant proportion of people who engage in such activities on the web don't do it out of ill will, quite the contrary. Nevertheless, enjoying and spreading media files that have been uploaded by unverifiable sources likely contributes to a culture which doesn't do much good for most artists, nor for music in general.

There are evidently materialistic preoccupations associated with these circumstances. However, I imagine that those concerns have been debated at length already. Although I will brush on the subject, this is not the primary aim of the present effort. Rather, my interest is in the more fundamental questions of what this state of affairs means in terms of individual and societal development, how such non-consensual acts hurt those who commit them, how those actions make it more difficult, and in some cases nearly impossible, for certain of the people involved to fulfil their mission in the world, and therefore, how the collectivity suffers the consequences of those violations. In other words, the view that I intend to propose is that those infringements harm the entire artistic ecosystem, and as a result everyone ultimately loses through them.

This is an issue that has been bothering me for quite a while, and my reactions had in fact been silenced for too long. A few years ago, I was amongst a group of people who had a golden opportunity to implement a new way of sharing contents over the internet, one which facilitated the due remuneration of creators, and moreover offered incentives for file sharers, pirates included, to play by the rules. But, to make a long story short, we weren't successful in our attempt. I have no idea how the other individuals who participated in the project live with this failure today, yet personally, when I see people sharing files illegally, or when I look

at the state of the music industry, or when I consider how certain independent artists must work impossible schedules in order for their creations to receive the attention they deserve, I feel partly responsible. For various reasons, which essentially amount to selfishness, I never tried to explain my position on the matter of illegal file sharing back then. However, I should have, as I eventually realized. Hence, another motivation behind the publication of this essay is to express thoughts that should have been voiced much earlier. I have faith that others will also benefit from this undertaking.

䷃ Mission

> *« What has been spoiled through man's fault can be made good again through man's work. »*
>
> [source : Ask the Oracle, *Work on the Decayed*]

In writing and releasing this book, my hope is to work on the decayed, and contribute to reform what has been spoiled because of my carelessness. I trust that the endeavour will have positive effects on the larger world.

In the following chapters, I will share my perspective on the actual damage caused by illegal file sharing. In this aim, I will present my perception of the nature, value, and function of art, and examine the inherent interconnectedness of all things. In addition, I will suggest alternative directions towards what seem like more favourable futures for the collectivity.

But first, I will propose a succinct overview of the situation as it now stands, including a look at certain of the technological tools currently available, copyright law and some of the misconceptions that surround it, and arguments commonly employed in attempts to justify infringement.

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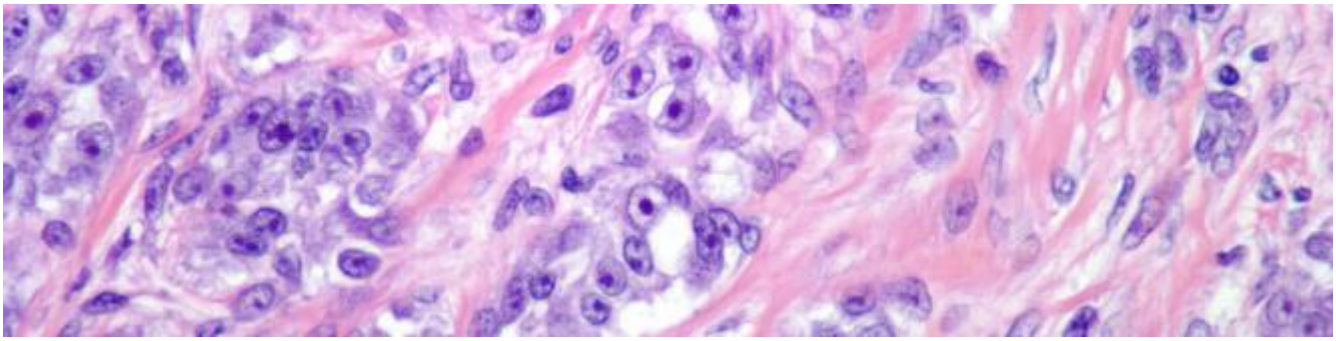


2. The State of Play

But Everybody Else Does It !

Nowadays, sharing music in social networks has apparently become customary. There are quantities of groups and channels dedicated to such activities and wherein the question of whether or not the contents have been approved for that kind of distribution doesn't seem to bother the participants. The group members or channel owners simply post the materials regardless of the rights or the will of the creators, and objections are practically nonexistent.

Evidently, not all violations are committed wittingly, and the matter of education must definitely be taken into account in the equation. Still, there is also the issue of the currently available services and technologies, and what they provide, or don't provide, to help improve this state of affairs.

But Nothing Prevents Me from Doing it !

There is obviously tremendous worth in what those platforms and tools make possible. Not that long ago, capturing an event in real-time using a cameraphone, and publishing it so that people located halfway across the world are able to experience it merely a few minutes later, would only have been plausible in the context of a science-fiction story. Nevertheless, this has become commonplace, and media of this sort are in fact used in news coverage more and more frequently.

Likewise, from the perspective of the content creator, there is also inestimable value in having the means of distributing one's work, in a matter of instants, to an audience that is potentially unlimited. Moreover, being able to mark uploads as private or unlisted, or having the option of allowing or disallowing embedding of the materials, and thus having a degree of control on how and where they can be experienced, increases this value.

Yet, that same simplicity which facilitates the propagation of content also comes with its negative effects. On one video sharing website whose popularity renders its identification superfluous, the sole hurdle that might discourage anybody from uploading illegal contents is a message warning them that they must own the copyright, or have the necessary rights for any medium they publish. Consequently, certain people seem to assume that any content successfully uploaded to the website is legal. Generally speaking, similar services that host

media files operate on that same principle, which supposes that users are honest, and either familiar with the ins and outs of rights and copyrights, or willing to educate themselves prior to uploading. The problem with that policy is that, manifestly, many users of those websites don't know, and apparently don't care, whether contents are lawful or not. As a result, there are quantities of material uploaded illegally to such platforms.

When looking at a media sharing page, for instance a video, there is usually very little information helping one determine if the upload has been approved by the rightsholders or not. The details of the channel through which the content has been published might provide a clue, and hence give a way to the viewer who doesn't want to participate in a questionable culture to identify legit files. If one can establish that the media is being shared via an official channel, whether it is operated by the creators themselves or their management, for example by a record label, then they can avoid dubious materials. Still, nothing really prevents anyone from creating a channel that seems to be the official channel of someone else, and therefore, this validation method is not necessarily always straightforward.

Furthermore, there are services that enable users to share contents published on those media file hosts in additional ways. For instance, one such website allows its users to create playlists using music uploaded elsewhere on the net, including the audio tracks of the videos hosted on that most popular sharing platform. The music can then be shared via embeddable players on social networks or on one's own site. This service doesn't ascertain that the music has originally been uploaded legally or not. Arguably, considering the aforementioned policy, nothing really forces them to, as they can make the same consequent assumption that if files have been uploaded over there, then they must be legit. Although some of the titles in those playlists do not infringe any rights, as many artists offer free contents, there's no way to tell by looking at the players whether the music is being shared lawfully or not.

Another unfortunate aspect of the present state of affairs is that the responsibility of identifying and reporting violations is incumbent solely on the rightsholders. For example, on that same prominent video sharing website, if a viewer were to come across uploads of The Beatles on a channel operated by an obscure individual who obviously doesn't own the rights to the contents, the available tools wouldn't allow them to report the offender, nor to flag the media as inappropriate. Only the proper rightsholders, or people with a right in law to act on their behalf, can initiate an infringement procedure, and they have to do so in written form, following well-defined guidelines, contrasting with the simplicity of the uploading process.

Admittedly, creators have some instruments at their disposal. For instance, that video sharing website to which I keep referring offers an automated content identification program that they claim is able to recognize « *user-uploaded videos comprised entirely or partially* » of reference material provided by the rightful owners. However, this program is « *designed for exclusive rights holders whose content is frequently uploaded.* » I have no idea of its actual use and efficiency, but clearly it isn't available to everyone, and doesn't preclude all infractions.

Although they remain opposed to the practice, many artists seem to have given up on fighting the illegal sharing of their creations. And understandably so, as the task of stopping viral distribution of their media, that can be akin to trying to dam Niagara Falls with mouse clicks and keystrokes, can become a too great demand on their time, which is already scarce as it is.

Therefore, evidently, there are still deficiencies to be addressed. Still, just as distinctly, while waiting for the next technological god to be mechanically brought onto the file sharing stage to implement the ideal resolution to this predicament, deciding to break the law is not a viable way forward.

䷀ But Why Do We Need Copyright Laws Anyhow ?

One of the outstanding observations emerging from my recent discussions is that the necessity that motivates copyright law is frequently ignored, or not well understood.

In the United States Constitution, the clause quoted below is known as the « *Copyright Clause.* » Interestingly enough, it is also known as the « *Progress Clause.* » It empowers the Congress :

> *« To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries. »*
>
> [source : *Copyright Clause of the United States Constitution* entry in Wikipedia]

Copyright protects the creators from eventual exploitation or misuse of their work by third parties, which in turn furthers progress itself.

If anybody could consume, use, adapt, share, or resell creations as they see fit, then, for many creators, undertaking to bring their creations into the world wouldn't be viable. Those who have access to more means could simply duplicate new works as they are published and distribute them in widerscale operations before the rightful authors could do so. Then, who would ever want to contribute to common progress, but the most self-abnegating, altruistic individuals, or those for whom doing otherwise wouldn't be an option ?

Thus, copyright also protects the music lover, the bibliophile, the amateur of visual art, and anyone who thrives on innovation, because it ensures there are people who are willing to dare bring their creations into the world, for the benefit of all.

䷀ But I'm Giving It away, and It's for the Common Good !

One of the conversations I referred to above had developed around a self-improvement video which used for its soundtrack a song by a well-known Icelandic female musician.

Clearly, the same laws apply not only to sharing already existing media files, but also when creating new material, regardless of the nobility of the intentions of the creators, and no matter how tempting it might be to use the contents of someone else.

Using already well-publicized materials from recognized artists presumably enhances the final product by making it more appealing. Nevertheless, unless the well-known artists, or more accurately, the proper rightsholders, give their approval, then such use is not legal, and perhaps more importantly, not consensual. Moreover, recourse to those methods raises the question of the quality and the tenor of the message the creator is attempting to convey.

It's not as if creators are short of options. For example, there are several services from which users can download royalty-free music to use in their projects. Other sites function as intermediaries between musicians who are willing to license their compositions, and content creators who need songs or instrumentals. And there are countless independent musicians who struggle on a daily basis to promote their work, and who would be more than happy to allow their music to be featured in such creations, in exchange for the exposure, if only they were asked for the permission in the first place.

But It's in the Public Domain !

A seemingly common misconception related to this question is the idea that whatever is published on the internet without an explicit copyright notice is not copyrighted. Since the adoption of the Berne Convention, in the 165 signatory countries out of 207 sovereign states, creations are copyrighted de facto, without need for registration nor mention :

> *« Under the Convention, copyrights for creative works are automatically in force upon their creation without being asserted or declared. An author need not "register" or "apply for" a copyright in countries adhering to the Convention. As soon as a work is "fixed", that is, written or recorded on some physical medium, its author is automatically entitled to all copyrights in the work and to any derivative works, unless and until the author explicitly disclaims them or until the copyright expires. Foreign authors are given the same rights and privileges to copyrighted material as domestic authors in any country that signed the Convention. »*

[source : *Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works entry in Wikipedia*]

Therefore, when people assume that content published without copyright notice can be used freely, or is in the public domain, they are mistaken. If an assumption should be made, it should be instead that all content is copyrighted, unless specifically stated otherwise.

But It's My Music, so I Can Do What I Want with It !

Another misconception I have encountered is the idea that, once someone has bought copyrighted material, they own it, and thus they can use it as they wish, including uploading it onto the internet and sharing it with whomever they like.

But this is not the case. For instance, when purchasing music, buyers receive a copy of the content on a support, be it a CD or a DVD or a digital file, and a license for personal use, which allows backup copies, yet does not permit sharing those copies. Whether wittingly or not, buyers enter into this contract by virtue of purchasing copyrighted material.

But I'm Helping the Artists !

Some argue that by sharing contents, they help the creators by promoting their work, which in turn is assumed to accrue their revenues.

This is debatable, and possibly true in some cases, but it remains an assumption. More importantly, as long as the authors haven't asked specifically for that kind of publicity, then the activity is non-consensual, and likely goes against their wishes. As long as the materials haven't been approved for distribution in that fashion, sharing them is illegal, regardless of the nobility of the intentions of the sharers. Such actions possibly hurt the artists much more than they help them, although this might depend on what they consider is best for their art. Nonetheless, establishing this obviously requires asking them for their stance on the matter.

A literature review composed by an Austrian researcher in 2010 found 22 independent studies on the effects of music file sharing. 14 of them concluded that illegal downloads have a « *negative or even highly negative impact* » on recorded music sales. 3 of the studies found no significant impact while the remaining 5 found a positive impact. On the whole, it would therefore appear that the promotion argument doesn't stand.

A study conducted in 2006-2007 found that « *music downloads have a positive effect on music purchases among Canadian downloaders but that there is no effect taken over the entire population aged 15 and over.* » A revaluation of the same data by another academic reached an opposite conclusion, claiming that 3 out of 4 P2P downloaders responded that they would have bought music via paid sites, or CDs, or both, if P2P were not available, and only 1 out of 4 would not have purchased it, which suggests that the availability of P2P networks causes a 75% reduction in the demand of music downloaders.

A joint 2010 study undertaken on behalf of the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association and conducted over a 12-month period in 2009-2010 found that 12,600 full time equivalent jobs were forgone across the entire economy due to movie piracy. It also reported that a little less than half of the direct consumer spending losses to the movie industry were the result of digital piracy.

A recent study concluded that well-known artists could benefit from a small increase in sales when albums were leaked early online. However, that impact is not seen for newer or less known artists. This contradicts the argument that file sharing allows less visible artists to have their work discovered by a wider audience, lessening the advantages of having access to greater promotional means. In other words, it would seems that file sharing does not level the playing field, as proposed by its advocates.

But I Wouldn't Have Found that Band Otherwise !

This is essentially the previous argument, seen from a different perspective.

Being offered the opportunity to experience the work of creators one has never heard of before is potentially beneficial for all parties involved. It gives the recipient the possibility to reach a position from where they can support and enjoy the endeavours of the artists in question. But that benefit doesn't justify sharing illegal content. It's not as if there aren't any other options.

Many artists invest in elaborate websites, official channels, and various other forms of online presence, through which some of their creations are made available freely, specifically for such purposes. Sharing links to those sources, or contents coming from them and hence approved by the rightsholders, accomplishes that same objective, presumably as efficiently, but with the significant difference that the activities are consensual.

The bottom line is that finding new artists, and helping artists getting discovered, can be achieved via legal means, while at the same time participating in a culture that promotes a satisfaction of one's needs and wants that is respectful of the needs and wants of others, rather than indifferent to them.

But Those Recordings Aren't Available Anymore !

In determining if sharing is legal or not, the age of the materials might be a criterion, as the associated copyright might have expired. Nonetheless, their commercial availability is not a factor.

If the material isn't available, one alternative would be to contact the creators or their management and ask them to re-release the contents in present-day formats. If it is possible to do so, and if there are enough requests, the operation might be viable and thus profitable for all parties concerned. And if not, then perhaps the rightsholders will consent to make the material available freely as a gesture of gratitude towards their supporters. However, as long as such permission is not granted, then sharing the otherwise unavailable material is illegal.

But It's Only for Fun, Not for Money !

Some people seem to think that providing a link to a store or an official website along

with the content they share illegally, or suggesting to buy the official releases of the artists, or citing the « *Fair Use* » article of the Copyright Law, or claiming that they only share the files for entertainment or educational purposes, or stating that they don't make money from the activity, somehow exempts them from complying with the law.

As explained above, while trying to help the creators is commendable, there are legal and consensual means of doing so.

To qualify as fair, the use must, amongst other criteria, advance either the progress of the arts, or knowledge in general, through the addition of new elements.

If, while practising an activity, absence of monetary profit equated absence of any form of profit, then no one would practice this activity, unless perhaps if they were obliged to. In other words, entertainment purposes are not devoid of profit, and therefore, in a consensual and mutually beneficial relationship, the entertained should either seek to duly reward the entertainer for the entertainment they have made possible, or refrain to entertain themselves at their expense.

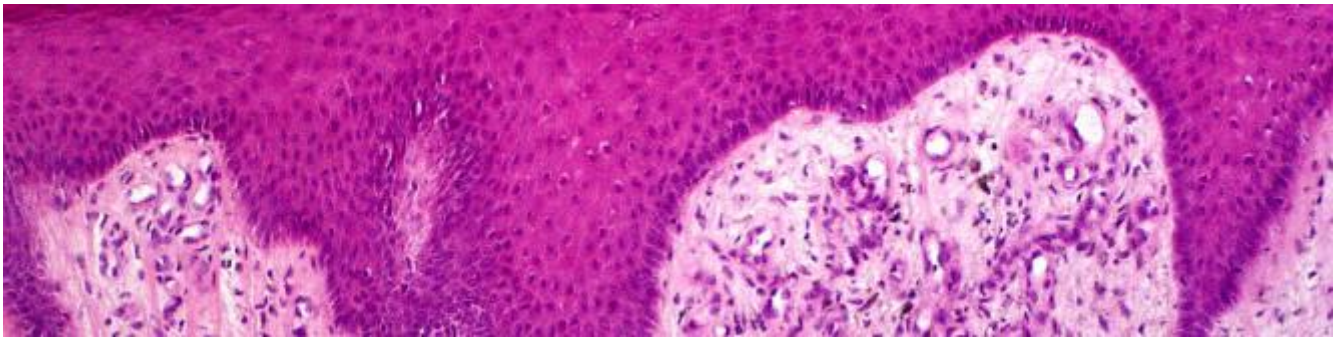
Lastly, the educational fair use guidelines typically apply to academic contexts, such as schools and libraries, where there is actual education taking place. Furthermore, not all uses in those circumstances are considered fair. Thus, the argument cannot be invoked to justify sharing files on a social network, apart maybe in exceptional situations.

But It's Only Art !

In my experience, the matter of the nature, value, and function of artistic endeavours and their fruits appears to be widely ignored, or at least misconstrued.

Personally, this is something I would have liked to be taught about in school, and not have to understand for myself. If the meaning of creative undertakings and their yield would have been imparted to me at an earlier age, I would definitely have followed a very different trajectory, presumably a more fortunate one, as I would have started exploring music much sooner.

Nevertheless, this question I will attempt to briefly delineate in the following chapter.



3. Ars Divina

䷀ Everyday Miracles

> *« In the creative act, the Creation continues. »*
>
> [source : Robert Fripp, *Aphorisms*]

Creative acts are at the heart of many ostensibly ordinary activities.

In order to respond appropriately to specific situations as they arise, often, one simply applies an already known template. However, at other times, new forms must be developed. Cooking a meal might require the creation of a recipe. Expressions might have to be invented to meet the needs of particular interactions. Behaviours might have to be adopted to satisfy the sensibilities of certain persons. The emergence of new circumstances might call for the establishment of new policies. New combinations might have to be conceived to solve never before encountered difficulties using what is at hand. And ultimately, each day is new, and each moment is unique, even when routine in appearance.

From a more encompassing perspective, existence itself can be understood as a creative process whereby, through actions and decisions, or lack thereof, physical structures are built, relationships are deepened, objectives are achieved, and various outcomes are shaped.

Hence, all human beings can be thought of as creators, although perhaps to different degrees.

Yet, not all creations are works of art. Or, stated more accurately, not all creations are considered works of art. For instance, generally speaking, tools, furniture, appliances, means of transportation, or computer programs, are not regarded as works of art. This suggests that works of art have qualities that set them apart from other creations.

Thus, before exploring the value and the function of art, it seems necessary to examine its nature.

䷀ The Fruits of Light and Delight

> *« Both art and spirituality have a goal, and that goal is supreme joy, supreme delight. We can say that art is a tree of evolution. We climb up*

> *this tree in order to pluck the fruits of light and delight, and we climb down this tree in order to distribute the fruits of light and delight. »*
>
> [source : Sri Chinmoy]

In my understanding, art is a process comprising four components, namely, the artist, the audience, the medium, and intelligence.

Through this process, the artist will first, fix the shape of the medium, and second, use the medium to enable the audience to connect to the intelligence. Depending on the nature of the medium, the art will be called music, literature, poetry, ballet, sculpture, or any of the other art forms, or combinations thereof.

I believe it is important to emphasize that achieving the creation of the medium does not mean that the process is consummated. Presenting the medium to the audience is also required. If a tree falls in a forest, and there's no one around to hear it, whether it makes a sound or not doesn't matter much to those who aren't around, unless perhaps if they happen to be studying philosophy. But if presented with a medium that conveys the experience of the sound of a tree falling in a forest, then those people will possibly awaken to the reality of trees falling in forests. In other words, in my view, communication between the intelligence and the audience is a mandatory element of the artistic process.

Presumably, every creation conveys some form of intelligence, generally by allowing or facilitating experiences. Hence, the nature of the intelligence that the process of art attempts to make experienceable would be its distinctive characteristic. I propose that, whereas other creations typically address temporal aspects of existence, artistic creations concern essential aspects of existence. That is to say, art brings to mind intelligence about what it means to be human.

䷀ The Eternal Self

> *« The entire nexus of what art is trying to do is to provide a mirror for the eternal self. »*
>
> [source : Alex Grey]

Works of art not only convey experiences, but they also arouse states of mind within those experiences. They can be specific psychological states that the creator has experienced previously and wants to share, or the frame of mind the artist is in during the presentation, like it can be the case for an improvised musical performance for instance.

The more a person enjoys those states of mind, or identify with them, the more they will appreciate the works of art that have evoked them. The more those psychological states are revealing of who one is, or of what they are going through, the more valuable the works of art that engender them will be considered.

Conceivably, all creations have an artistic dimension, and its measure is the degree to which the states of mind they call forth inform one about their condition as a human being. Therefore, any creation that mainly addresses temporal aspects of existence is generally not regarded as a work of art.

From an individual perspective, one person might consider a particular object to be a work of art because of what it brings to their mind, yet at the same time, another person, in whom that object doesn't produce a comparable effect, might not share that assessment.

However, from a more global, societal perspective, great works of art are possibly those which call forth states of mind that transcend temporal aspects of existence, not just in a few individuals, but in great numbers of them. The more the essences that those creations evoke are universal and eternal, and the more the works will be praised, across cultures and epochs.

Thus, works of art that call forth beauty serve as reminders that beauty, its perception, and its appreciation, are essential aspects of being human. Likewise, they assert that beyond its temporal aspects, the self is eternally beautiful.

Ultimately, perhaps the most eloquent expression of the nature of art is that art is the expression of human nature.

䷝ Laden with Fairest Fruit

The artistic process bestows its benefits not only via the reception of the medium, but also via its transmission.

Hence, artists benefit from the original reception of the intelligence they undertake to convey, and also from the presentation of their creations to the audience. Similarly, audience members benefit when they receive the medium, and then in turn can become intermediaries through which the intelligence reaches a more people, albeit, at first in a different form, until they experience it for themselves.

My opinion is that those benefits are recognized intuitively, whether their nature can be put into words or not. They do not only provide the impetus to experience the associated artistic media, and then to share them, but they even compel certain individuals to contrive justifications for circumventing their responsibilities towards the law, so as to obtain them.

The mere fact that people would devise such justifications for experiencing or sharing artistic media unlawfully is a telling illustration of the worth of those creations. Clearly, art is not just art.

In the following sections, in an attempt to better define the value of art, I will suggest examples of intelligences to which it provides a connection. After all, if the nature of these intelligences distinguishes art from other creative processes, then it ensues that it must also

provide the components of its value that set it apart.

䷰ Unfolding the Future

> *« Einstein's space is no closer to reality than Van Gogh's sky. The glory of science is not in a truth more absolute than the truth of Bach or Tolstoy, but in the act of creation itself. »*
>
> [source : Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation*]

If existence is a creative process, then new structures of information have tremendous value. Whether it is because new conditions require new responses, or because the absence of new conditions calls for much needed change, having access to new forms can mean progress where there is hindrance or stagnation.

Acquiring new ways of looking at things can translate into significant breakthroughs. New perceptions can enable one to identify a yet unnoticed element of an apparent dead-end situation, which can be sufficient to trigger an insight that reveals a way out. Ultimately, in certain extraordinary contexts, a single idea can be enough to turn a whole life around.

And therefore, opportunities to be exposed to new intelligences represent inestimable blessings. Through those experiences, one can equip their toolbox with new strategies, and become aware of new realities using which they can enrich or transform their world.

Art is obviously one of the vehicles which convey intelligence that leads to innovation. Throughout history, avant-garde artistic movements have frequently been at the forefront of important societal changes. There are several historical reports that depict episodes wherein specific works of art were so revolutionary that they caused a commotion at their unveiling. Pablo Picasso's « *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* » and Igor Stravinky's « *The Rite of Spring* » both constitute striking cases of this phenomenon. Illustrations of more tangible transformations would for example be how some of the technology available today, such as submarines, cell phones, and satellites, first appeared in science-fiction.

However, this feat is not exclusive to art. Other creations, technological advancements for instance, can also be precursors of changes in how human beings approach their lives.

If the distinctive feature of art is that the intelligence it conveys tells individuals about their own nature, then, conceivably, the innovations this intelligence potentially leads to will impact the temporal aspects of their existence which contradict this nature. In other words, when one gains a new understanding of their nature, this recognition provides the impetus for transforming their life in such a way that it better corresponds to this nature. Hence, in revealing new elements of one's nature, art promotes the harmonization of the temporal and essential aspects of their existence, which implies an enhanced experience of life.

If there were an external, absolute reference, according to which everyone could model

their existence, and which would guarantee this concordance, then the question of attaining and maintaining a satisfying life would be easily answered. However, in the absence of such a standard, the availability of a mirror that returns their essence to the observer is of utmost importance as it enables the individual to contrast what they temporarily are with who they truly are, and thus to find a solution to the unique, very personal enigma of their existence.

Ideally, via various media, art provides this reflection which brings to the mind of the individual the intelligence to innovate in creating their next incarnations.

䷝ You're the Inspiration

> *« Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom. »*
>
> [source : Albert Einstein]

In my reckoning, there is a common thread that unites art, freedom, and inspiration.

Art requires inspiration. Art brings inspiration, to artist and audience alike. Art requires freedom. Art evokes freedom. Indeed, some works of art seem to scream the word out loud, and although their reality might be utterly different, certain artists incarnate the ideal. Art brings freedom, to artist and audience alike. And no matter the nature of one's fetters, there aren't many prospects more inspiring than that of freedom.

Whether it is via literature, movies, poems, songs, or other artistic media, inspiration is frequently conveyed in the form of stories of individuals who undergo tribulations and face obstacles similar to, or symbolic of, those the audience members are confronted with. And as those characters overcome challenges and eventually reach freedom, the audience members identify with them, anticipate their successes, experience their releases, and ultimately feel uplifted by the outcomes.

The transcendences depicted in works of art give people means of discerning possibility where there is appearance of limitation, and thus of reinterpreting what has been made stale by neglect. In this manner, flames can be rekindled, passions can be reawakened, and dreams dismissed too early can be embraced again. Therefore, art can bring freedom from past, and freedom from reason, which in turn allow one to hear the voice of inspiration, and to infuse life even in situations previously deemed forlorn.

Freedom is implied in the creative process, as the artist must free themselves in order to create. Art requires free time, and sufficient freedom from mental constraints to allow new ideas in and to let the work out. Less obviously, this also means a good measure of freedom from self-doubt, from the expectations of the audience, and from history, both individual and societal.

Similarly, art asks that those who receive it free themselves. The enjoyment of works of

art might not require the same degree of freedom as their creation, but in any event, it calls for free time. And in my opinion, this points to another eloquent illustration of the value of art, as it seems many people devote important portions of their quality time to art. Once the responsibilities of the day have been duly discharged, they settle around parcels of freedom, and hopefully delight in the experiences they bring.

So it looks as if, for many people, be they artists or enthusiasts, the activity of choice to invest free time in is art.

Hence, it can be said that, ideally, works of art are the footprints of the individual who ploughs their way towards increasing levels of freedom, revealing intelligence about human nature that inspires the audience members to reclaim freedom over temporal aspects of their own existence.

䷼ The Mystique of Attention

> *« The highest quality of attention we may give is love. »*
>
> [source : Robert Fripp, *Aphorisms*]

In my view, there is an aura of mystery surrounding attention that I would summarize as follows : attention has the potential to bring forth magic.

Attention appears intrinsically related to the experience of space and time. Where one directs their attention determines the space where they are present, be it the physical place where their body is, or a mental location. Likewise, it is one's focus of attention that defines how they use their time. Most decisions are essentially assessments of what one believes to be the best investment of attention, and thus of time, whether in the immediate or the more distant future. Paradoxically, time often flies by, to the point where it doesn't seem to exist, once attention is engaged.

Attention has the power to amplify, develop, or grow its objects. For instance, learning is the iterative process of giving attention to, first, a particular reference, in order to create a representation of it, and then to how one recalls and expresses this form, until the expression matches the representation to a sufficiently satisfying degree. When I write poetry, typically, I first give attention to a sentiment that I want to express. I gather words and phrases that pop up in my mind, and in maintaining my attention on the process as I toy with fragments of stanzas, an appropriate order eventually emerges. At times, it's as if nothing happens for long periods, and then suddenly, rhymes fall into place. The similitudes with writing an essay reside in how prolonged attention on jumbled ideas or specific points brings more accurate organizations and phrasings. Reflection is the process of giving attention to a question, as if magnifying it until its specifics can be clearly cognized. Visions are turned into projects, and eventually realized, in a similar manner. Work is basically the process of giving attention to a matter with the intention of achieving a particular result, to comprehend and discharge the

stream of intentions which thus appears, sometimes as if from out of the clear blue sky, and to maintain one's attention on that process as it unfolds until consummation. Personally, I find that, ordinarily, effort is required at the beginning, when it is time to engage attention, as afterwards the process just flows, as if of itself, unless obstacles are met.

How attention performs such feats seems puzzling, but to me, it is in the interactions between people that its wonders are most strikingly revealed.

One develops relationships with people by giving attention to them. When one enjoys giving attention to a particular person, they say they love them. Indeed, giving attention is an essential aspect of love. Failure from the parents to respond to the demands for attention of their offspring may lead to disorders when the children reach adulthood. In contrast, the child benefits from experiences of joint attention, when their parent and them share focus on the same object.

Many types of psychotherapy, whether in formal or more casual settings, involve joint attention were the objects of focus are self-expressions from the wounded, often in the form of spoken conversation. Whether the healing comes from bringing the damaged areas of the psyche of the patients to their own attention, or to that of the therapists, or to both, remains mysterious, but the effects are nevertheless undeniable. Likewise, individuals who have gone through traumatic experiences can find healing on their own in the expression of the events, in writing for example. Presumably, in such instances, the therapeutic effects come first from bringing the painful episodes to their own attention, prior to and during the expression, and then from an eventual publication.

If the artistic process can be therapeutic for artists, it can also achieve the same results for the audience. Works of art can be seen as embodiments of concentrated attention. Maybe all forms of work can be perceived in such a fashion, however, while other forms of work are not communicable, for instance because of legal issues, or commercial restrictions, or privacy concerns, works of art are generally intended to be communicated. When the attention they incarnate is that of an artist going through a healing process, conceivably, being exposed to the intelligence they convey allows one to follow a similar course, and possibly to cover the same distance. The cathartic episodes that certain artistic creations trigger in some persons seem to confirm this hypothesis. If such a concept makes sense, perhaps works of art can be said to provide experiences of deferred joint attention. Anyhow, it appears that art can bring to mind intelligence that has the power to heal.

In this perspective, by providing channels through which various forms of expression can reach wider audiences, and thus receive appropriate levels of attention that they would not receive otherwise, the internet stands out as an inestimable tool. As an illustration of the value of enabling this connection of attentions, my personal impression is that artists whose talents were mostly recognized after their departure, such as Vincent Van Gogh and Howard

Philips Lovecraft for example, would have known a far more fortunate fate if such a platform had been available in their lifetime. Hopefully, the world wide web will contribute to extend the life and further the creative output of similarly gifted individuals in the future.

On the downside, the internet makes it tempting to evaluate the worth or the quality of contents via statistics such as visits, views, comments, and likes or +1s, although none of them yield accurate indications of the intelligence the material conveys, nor for that matter of the actual attention that is given to it.

However it works its magic, it appears the gift of attention is of tremendous worth. In receiving attention, one is granted a priceless privilege, and my opinion is that human beings know this intuitively. Thus, people typically give without counting to those they love, but are not always so favourably inclined in other situations. For instance, advertisement and spam, which are basically demands for attention from unknown or little known individuals, usually out of context, are generally frowned upon.

This raises the question of the limits of attention. Many observers assert that attention is a limited resource, both in terms of scope and of span. The total amount of attention one can give over the course of a day is plausibly determined by the specifics of the sleep-wake cycle. But then again, the subjective duration of a day appears to depend on the capacity for attention, and on how attention is actually employed. This is obviously an essential factor in establishing approaches to living. If people could readily access infinite supplies of attention, with respect to both scope and span, then it would be theoretically practicable to respond to all requests, tackle all challenges, and discharge all responsibilities, in an impeccable manner. Yet, as long as one is restricted to a single point of focus for any given period of time, then choices have to be made, parsimony must be applied, or pruning must be resorted to. Some of the things that one would like to discover, or deepen, or nurture, must be relinquished, so that other things can thrive. Hence, its relative scarcity also gives value to attention.

Manifestly, the question of where one focuses their attention is of fundamental import. Considering how works of art such as movies, stage plays, and songs, direct the attention of the audience towards particular questions or situations, it seems that those artistic creations potentially play a crucial role in people's lives as reminders of what is of significance to them. This provides another angle from which to examine art.

In the remaining sections of the chapter, I will explore the function of art by looking at some of the matters towards which it directs the attention of the audience.

䷟ Pieces of Eight

One way to organize the subjects of artistic creations is to categorize them according to the measure in which they draw attention inwards or outwards.

As stated previously, works of art bring to mind intelligence about human nature. So,

when art focuses on inward concerns, it enters the realm of disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, and spiritual practice. Presumably, the individuals who study those disciplines aim to develop an understanding of existence, and of their own inner workings, in order to enhance their experience of life. Likewise, artists who delve into introverted pursuits shares the same objectives.

In my view, the nexus of art, religion, and science, is the common need to understand the world, and the role of the individual within it. This is the seed from which those cultures originate. While science typically favours a reason-based approach, and religion is rooted in the experiences brought about by faith or worship, art is based on following the impulses to create and express. The differences in these three vehicles reside in the avenues they prefer, however they're driven by the same necessity of finding ways to map aspects of life, so as to make sense of it. Therefore, the way of the artist is to trust the inspiration that leads them to explore a particular subject, all the while recording their findings in the form of the medium, and ultimately to present it to their fellow human beings. In this fashion, artists both learn and teach about human nature.

The creative process itself can be seen as a kind of spiritual practice. In my experience, ideally, it consists in sustained concentration on a stream of consciousness that is devoid of the concerns of the ego. In this respect, it is very similar to meditation, but whereas during meditation one merely observes that stream, in the creative process, one is required to act on the intentions that are apprehended. Both exercises arouse sentiments of elevation that are comparable in intensity, and which plausibly yield the same benefits. Conceivably, the fact that artists are often religious, or adepts in spiritual traditions, comes from a predisposition of the spirit to such customs.

As mentioned in the previous section, art is not the only form of work which requires continuous concentration. Still, what potentially distinguishes art is the characteristics of the stream of consciousness upon which the attention is directed during the process.

In Buddhist culture, there is the model of the Eight Consciousnesses, which is intended as a basis for an explanation of the workings of the mind, and how it constructs the realities sentient beings experience. The eight are as follows : eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, which correspond to the five senses, ideation-consciousness, obscuration-consciousness, and store-house consciousness.

The model initially comprised only the five sense consciousnesses, and the sixth, which is the consciousness of ideas, also sometimes called the monkey mind to reflect the tendency of this mercurial awareness to jump from thought to thought, swayed by the sensations of the five others. Eventually, the model evolved to better represent the sixth, and subdivided it into further aspects.

The seventh is self-consciousness, and is called obscuration-consciousness because it is

believed to obscure the processes of mind. It is that one which « *gathers the hindrances, the poisons, the karmic formations.* » In my understanding, it consists in all thinking that stems from the construct of a self that exists independently of everything else, such as broodings about past humiliations, ruminations concerning current status, or worries about the future.

The eighth is the store-house consciousness. It is believed to be the basis of the seven prior consciousnesses, to contain all experiential impressions, and to supply the substance to all existences. My reckoning of the creative process is that, in the best instances, the stream of consciousness on which I concentrate my attention comes directly from that store-house, uninterrupted by sensations, and undefiled by the seventh consciousness. In the hypothesis of the existence of a superorganism of which human beings would be the systems, just like ants can be regarded as cells of the colony which in turn supervises them and inspires them their intentions, the store-house would provide a connection to that superintelligence, which would oversee human activity. Hence, that superorganism would be the source of inspiration and intuition, that are cognized via the eighth consciousness, and which constitute the focus of the sustained connection that is central to the artistic process.

As a consequence of the nature of the stream of consciousness involved in the creative process, the resulting medium has the potential to direct the attention of the audience away from egoistic preoccupations, and towards matters of more fundamental import. In addition, this infuses the work of art with the capacity to induce sentiments of elevation, in a manner comparable to prayer or similar spiritual practices.

And thus, one of the functions of art is to maintain, strengthen, or possibly restore, the individual's connection to the very source of their existence.

䷀ Man in the Mirror

> *« Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realize its purpose through him. As a human being he may have moods and a will and personal aims, but as an artist he is 'man' in a higher sense — he is 'collective man' — one who carries and shapes the unconscious, psychic forms of mankind. »*

[source : Carl Gustav Jung]

When works of art direct attention on outward concerns, the intelligence about human nature they bring to mind usually pertains to questions of social change, injustices, politics and governance, and other communal aspects of existence. Conceivably, most artists have a natural sensitivity towards issues of this sort, as indicated by how quantity of them take part in activism, charities, and campaigning.

This is accomplished by reflecting emerging trends, or speculating on their upshots, or fictionalizing current events, or caricaturing some of the actors involved in them, or telling their story, or in more general terms by using devices through which specific facets of society are emphasized or put in perspective. The work is significant in how it can raise awareness of circumstances that are of interest to the masses, and yet would possibly elude the collective consciousness unless certain features of the situations that aren't obvious at first glance were adequately highlighted. This could be said of both art and journalism, but whereas the latter typically stresses the facts, or in other words the temporal aspects of the state of affairs, the former accentuates its human dimensions, through which it can reveal additional angles, and convey very different connotations. Moreover, art can potentially have a greater impact, and achieve deeper and longer lasting results, because it isn't bound by the same restrictions, and because of its aptitude to reach individuals in their subjective worlds using a language they can understand and forms to which they can relate.

By means of the same capabilities, which allow them to reach beyond barriers such as education level or social class, works of art also contribute to democratization of knowledge, which plays an important role in the evolution of communities.

But perhaps the factor which carries the most weight in this equation is the fact that many artists enjoy a privileged status in society. When they are self-employed, and therefore not in the pay of corporations, nor of governments, they can serve as independent observers. Then, unbound by editorial policy, and free to challenge dogmas and conventions, they have the latitude to act as the proverbial court jesters, licensed to express things as they see them. This relative autonomy, combined with the tribune built via their artistic work, puts them in a position to propagate the truths that the collectivity needs to face.

Presumably, this is the essential difference between entertainment and art. While the two sometimes offer comparable experiences, the former gives people what they want, and the latter gives them what they need. Whereas entertainment tells audience members what they want to hear, and shows them what they want to see, art attempts to make them aware of what they need to be aware of. That being said, manifestly, entertainment has its artistic dimensions, just as the artistic process can incorporate aspects of entertainment, and so the boundary between the two can sometimes seem tenuous.

On the individual scale, the influence of works of art comes from providing mirrors of who the person truly is, and from connecting people to the intelligence at the source of their being. On the societal scale, the mirrors rather reflect the essential aspects of communities, such as their organization, and the relationships and interactions within them, and between them. By the same token, they provide references using which people can situate themselves with respect to those groups, understand their role within them, and evaluate whether or not those structures play the roles they should be playing. When art direct the attention of the individuals outwards, it becomes the loudspeaker that echoes the intelligence of the swarm.

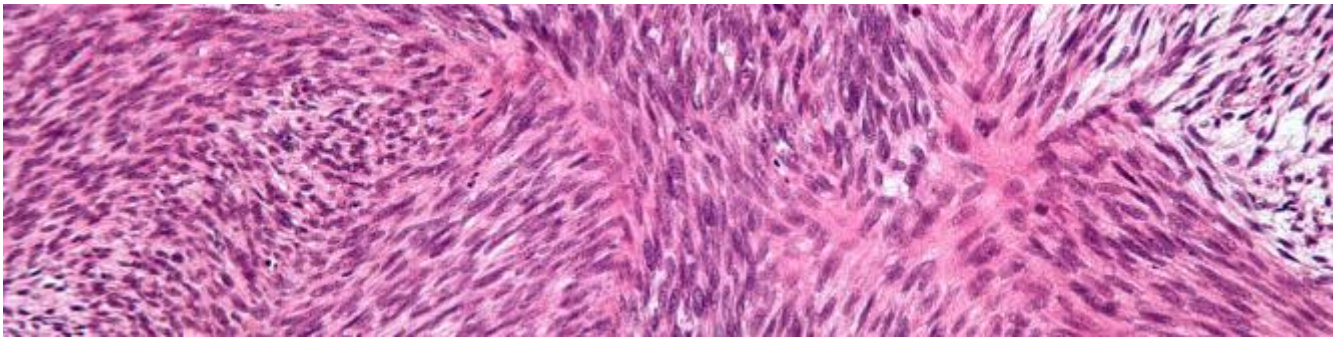
Things change when someone expresses the truth that everyone knows but no one else dares voice, because it cannot be ignored anymore. Thus, art influences where society is going by shining the limelight on how its institutions fail to serve the people, how they are remiss in helping them achieve their aims, and how they fall short in enhancing their lives. Likewise, art can redirect the collectivity by commenting on how those institutions need to be adjusted in order to fulfil their purposes. Hence, art contributes to an overall retroaction mechanism, whose quality determines whether individuals and communities progress or stagnate. And if this circuit is broken, or derelict, then society cannot be a successful self-regulating entity, and its equilibrium is threatened.

Therefore, another function of art is to provide a feedback loop using which society as a whole, as well as individuals, can choose directions towards futures that better harmonize with human nature.

䷀ Collective Soul

Now that the questions of the nature, value, and function of art have been delineated, hopefully, the importance of art, and the necessity for society to ensure the well-being of its artistic ecosystems, including the probity of the artistic processes, will be clearer to most.

In the next chapter, as a way of exploring the implications of oneness, I will suggest a model illustrating how human beings might all be interconnected. But first, I will present a quick look at how this notion is reflected in various schools of thought.



4. Oneness

United We Stand

« The unity of all things is experienced through the feelings. »

[source : Robert Fripp, *Aphorisms*]

Many belief systems, be they major world religions or more recent movements such as new age spirituality, hold as one of their fundamental principles the interconnectedness of all living beings, and in certain cases, of all things.

Whether this is stated explicitly, or implied in doctrinal elements, it seems to be a core concept shared by a number of traditions.

In the following sections, I will propose a brief overview of how oneness is expressed in various cultures.

What Goes Around

« We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. »

[source : Parliament of the World's Religions, *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*]

In 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions proclaimed the Golden Rule, as stated above, as the common principle for many religions. 143 respected leaders from all the major faiths signed the declaration.

If indeed all human beings are parts of one and the same living entity, then the Golden Rule follows as a necessity, as any action that injures others is ultimately injurious to oneself by virtue of harming the whole of which one is a component. And, likewise, any action that benefits others is beneficial to oneself.

In Buddhist culture, ethics are established on the underlying idea that there is no such thing as a self that is apart from everything else. The three poisons of ignorance, attachment, and aversion are considered to be the causes of all sufferings. Ignorance is the source of the other two, and is defined as identification to an independently existing self. From this stems the dualistic view of I and not I. This discrimination gives rise to attachment and aversion, as

phenomena are perceived as threatening or comforting, unpleasant or desirable, in the eye of the I. Oneness is thus of central importance in Buddhist philosophy. Failure to acknowledge it leads to incorrect representations involving relationships between the reified I and what it reckons are others, as a result of a misapprehension of the actual nature of being. It is those faulty constructs that engender mistakes, which in turn bring pain.

In Christian culture, the Seven Deadly Sins can be articulated around the relationship between self and others. Pride is considered the most serious of the seven, and is identified as failing to recognize the good work of others, desiring to be more important or attractive than others, and excessive love of self. It is regarded as the source of the six others, envy, gluttony, greed, lust, sloth, and wrath, all of which can be explained as excesses of the ego in seeking self-satisfaction, without concern for the consequences on others. The common denominator in all those types of wrongdoing is that oneness is ignored.

In the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, there are three core assertions, sometimes termed the three onenesses. One of them is the oneness of humanity, which is for instance conveyed via the following metaphor :

> *« Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. »*

[source : *Bahá'í teachings* entry in Wikipedia]

The Bahá'í Faith stresses the principle of unity in diversity. It affirms the value of the cultural diversity of mankind, while recognizing its unity, which transcends all divisions of race, nation, gender, caste, and social class, yet is not equated to uniformity. This school of thought provides what is likely the most unequivocal expression of the oneness of all human beings coming from a major religious tradition.

The concept of Ahiṃsā, which means non-violence, non-injury, or absence of desire to harm any life forms, constitutes the cornerstone of the ethics and doctrine of Jainism :

> *« The Jain concept of Ahiṃsā is quite different from the concept of non-violence found in other philosophies. In other religious traditions, violence is usually associated with causing harm to others. On the other hand, in Jainism, violence refers primarily to injuring one's own self – behaviour which inhibits the souls own ability to attain mokṣa or liberation. At the same time it also means violence to others because it is this tendency to harm others that ultimately harms one's own soul. »*

[source : *Ahiṃsā in Jainism* entry in Wikipedia]

Whereas, in other expressions of oneness, such as the Golden Rule, the self-detrimental consequences are implied, in Jainism, the self-injurious effects of behaviour that harms other

living beings are readily acknowledged. This suggests the underlying unity of all forms of life, via which violent actions and intentions are reflected on the very being of the wrongdoer.

Several African cultures have in common the philosophy of ubuntu, which focuses on people's allegiances and relations with each other. Here are two ways of defining it :

> *« I am what I am because of who we all are. »*
>
> [source : Leymah Gbowee]

> *« One of the sayings in our country is Ubuntu – the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity. »*
>
> [source : Desmond Tutu]

To me, ubuntu highlights the aspects of oneness through which all human beings are involved in mutually defining relationships. When one is sympathetic to others, then others return the favour. On the other hand, when one encounters somebody who is apparently not so well-disposed, then perhaps what it means is that one would benefit from taking a look at themselves.

In other major religious traditions, the essential importance of oneness can be inferred through various formulations of the Golden Rule. Here are examples from Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism :

> *« One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. »*
>
> [source : Brihaspati]

> *« None of you believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. »*
>
> [source : Muhammad]

> *« That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn. »*
>
> [source : Hillel]

A number of additional illustrations of the principle can be found in the *Golden Rule*

entry in Wikipedia.

Taoism emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao, which is ultimately considered to defy description. Nevertheless, the many ways of expressing its nature all point towards the concept of oneness :

- *« something that is both the source and the driving force behind everything that exists »*
- *« something that individuals can find immanent in themselves »*
- *« the primordial essence or fundamental nature of the universe »*
- *« the greater whole from which all the individual elements of the universe derive »*
- *« the underlying natural order of the universe »*

[sources : *Taoism* and *Tao* entries in Wikipedia]

Perhaps what sets Taoism apart is how oneness is not only revealed through its impact on human activity, but as well via the effects of a force that connects all that is.

Other systems are also based on principles which hint at oneness, or have oneness as their consequence. For instance, panentheism, literally « all in God, » posits that the divine interpenetrates every part of nature, is the eternal animating force behind the universe, and timelessly extends beyond it. Panentheism differentiates itself from pantheism, which holds that the divine is synonymous with the universe, and thus asserts that « all is God. »

䷿ Sometimes Entangled in Your Own Dreams

> *« The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of the mystical experience, but is also one of the most important revelations of modern physics. »*

[source : Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*]

Recent developments in quantum mechanics have evidenced the underlying unity of everything that exists, human beings included.

Experimental findings have demonstrated that the physical world cannot be regarded as independent from human consciousness. The results attest not only that by the very act of watching, the observer affects the observed reality, but also that the greater the « *amount of watching*, » the greater the influence of the observer on what actually takes place.

> *« The doctrine that the world is made up of objects whose existence is independent of human consciousness turns out to be in conflict with quantum mechanics and with facts established by experiment. »*

[source : Bernard d'Espagnat, *The Quantum Theory and Reality*]

Even more mystifying discoveries have ruled out theories based on the assumptions of

realism and locality. What that means is that the hypotheses that an objective reality exists when it is not observed (realism), and that nothing can happen faster than the speed of light, or stated alternatively, that separated events cannot influence one another instantaneously (locality), are incompatible with the conclusions of the investigations.

The implication of this connection between mind and matter is that things and human beings are not independent entities. To assert that there is a profound interaction between the two would not entirely reflect the facts. Rather, the evidence suggests that consciousness and the physical world are different aspects of one and the same continuum.

This translates into a oneness that extends from the individual, to their peers, to other living beings, to all things, and ultimately, to everything, whether located in the immediate surroundings, or in the farthest reaches of the cosmos.

䷝ May the Force See You

> *« One love, One blood, One life, You got to do what you should, One life, With each other, Sisters, Brothers, One life, But we're not the same, We get to, Carry each other, Carry each other »*
>
> [source : U2, *One*]

The vehicle of art also leads its passengers to the notion of interconnectedness, which in turn is reflected in their creative output. Hollywood has provided two obvious examples.

In the « *Star Wars* » film series, the concept of the Force is central to the plot. Depicted as an energy field created by all living things, it surrounds and penetrate living beings, and binds the galaxy together. Certain characters, Jedi for instance, can feel disturbances in the Force, or sense one another through their interactions with it.

In « *Avatar*, » the ecology of Pandora forms a vast biological neural network spanning the entire lunar surface and into which creatures can connect. Ultimately, it is this collective consciousness that defeats the human invaders in battle via the intervention of the wildlife.

The idea of oneness can also be found in various other art works, such as poems :

> *« Whatever we are, We belong together, Wherever we are, We will find each other, Whoever we are, We are, Forever one. »*
>
> [source : Leonard Nimoy, *A Lifetime of Love*]

and short stories :

> *« One thinker no less brilliant than the heresiarch himself, but in the orthodox tradition, advanced a most daring hypothesis. This felicitous supposition declared that there is only one Individual, and that this*

indivisible Individual is every one of the separate beings in the universe, and that these beings are the instruments and masks of divinity itself. »

[source : Jorge Luis Borges, *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*]

A Model for Oneness

The diversity of all those expressions pointing to the actuality of an underlying oneness that unites everything suggests that its realization potentially comes to everyone, regardless of whether their preferred exploratory vehicle is spiritual, scientific, artistic, or otherwise.

Nevertheless, it seems that transitioning to a paradigm wherein this oneness is never overlooked is not as simple as saying it. However, this is understandable as this is possibly an apt definition of what achieving liberation corresponds to. If oneness is only acknowledged intellectually, but not integrated in every aspect of existence, then acting against oneness is still likely. And whether it is stated as transgressing Buddhist ethics, committing one of the seven capital sins, breaking the Golden Rule, harming life forms, not acting in harmony with the Tao, or as other equivalent formulations, there appears to be a consensus that violations of this oneness are to be avoided. Therefore, presumably, liberation in the spiritual sense, or elimination of error, is accomplished when each and every facet of one's life accords with this oneness.

In my experience, the difficulty seems to stem from what I call the Democritus Curse. In other words, breaking out of the rut of the atomistic view of the world, that characterizes Western Thought, requires a great deal of attention. Having been taught at an early age that everything is composed of parts interacting with one another, the urge to deconstruct wholes in their parts is, if not a reflex per se, one of the prominent strategies that come to my mind in many situations. Hence, to a certain extent, wholes are neglected because only parts and their interactions are recognized.

To me, the notion of a superorganism provides a practical step towards a more holistic view, wherein, instead of seeing ants instinctively playing their parts, the superintelligence of the colony that orchestrates and directs their symphony can be discerned. The idea that all human beings are related components of one and the same living entity, pretty much as bees can be thought of as the cells of the swarm, is certainly compatible with metaphors such as the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Furthermore, this potentially constitutes an appropriate template to model various levels of organization within the physical world, both smaller and larger in scope, and thus serve as an apt representation of how all existing things form a continuum.

For instance, as a thought experiment, taking the human being as a starting point, one can imagine that their cells have a form of individual consciousness, through which they are aware of their inner workings, of the status of their organelles, and of the neighbouring cells.

In addition, the cells can access a form of consciousness through which they are aware of the tasks they must accomplish, however they are not in a position to know that the instructions in fact come from the organs which they compose. Similarly, the organs are aware of their cells, of their own functioning, and of the other organs to which they are connected, but they don't know the exact origin of their awareness of what they have to do, because they have little way of knowing that they are part of larger systems. The same principles apply to each of the systems, which are aware of their processes, of the organs they supervise, and of the other systems with which they exchange energy, but they have difficulty working out why they must do what they feel impelled to do, as their perspective doesn't allow them to realize that they are constituents of a human being. Perhaps the nervous system stands as the only exception, because it is connected to all the systems, and that its role is to relay information to all of them, but then again, that doesn't mean it can make sense of this information, and therefore deduce that it is an element of a larger living entity.

From the standpoint of the human being, the corresponding individual consciousness affords them the capacity to be aware of their physiology and of the status of their various components, to a certain extent at least, and also of their peers and their surroundings. The question of whether or not they have the potential to be aware of each and every one of their cells is an interesting one. To me, it seems humans are able to pinpoint the location of pains and of bodily annoyances to a particularly accurate degree. They might not know the exact cell which is causing the problem, but they know where to scratch when it itch. In addition, as a result of their awareness of their environment, including their fellow humans, they can have a sense that they are part of a larger whole, although its actual nature and magnitude might not be simple to grasp. And like their subordinates, they have an awareness of what they have to do, but ultimately don't know who or what inspires those actions. Nonetheless, they can speculate about the existence of higher orders of intelligence.

䷷ Amplification

The above is obviously a very basic construct. It aims to suggest rather than describe. Yet, I trust this merely imaginative analogy can serve the purpose of providing a metaphor sufficiently representative to explore oneness. Specifically, this model can help to illustrate the nature of oneness, and the fundamentals of how it is experienced at various levels of the hierarchy.

I will begin with the second point. How would individual cells for instance experience oneness ? First, a cell might come to recognize an inherent connection with its neighbours whenever it doesn't fulfil its duties properly, via the impact that this dereliction has on the functioning of its peers. Still, the converse might not be true, as the cell might not be able to determine if changes in its own operation, for example in the amount of energy it receives, are indeed caused by the negligence of its fellow cells, or other factors. Nonetheless, possibly, it can correlate those variations as consequences of its own performances, when that is the

case. Also, conceivably, the cell can have an inkling that its neighbours and itself are part of some larger whole, when, as the cell becomes aware of the tasks it must accomplish, all the surrounding cells modify their processes in an appropriate way. Then, the cell can suppose that there is some form of higher consciousness, similar to its own, that oversees all the cells, in the same manner that the cell oversees its own organelles. Hence, perhaps the cell cannot form a precise picture of that higher consciousness, nor of its extent, but it can surmise that this intelligence is the source of its awareness of what must be done, just like it must be for its peers, so that the whole can function harmoniously.

Therefore, formulated generally, oneness could be known through the correspondence between the actions and circumstances of the individual cell, and those of its fellows. Within a healthy organ, cells would function in concordance, yet should one cell be delinquent in its responsibilities, then this would affect some of its neighbours, and potentially the entire unit. In turn, this would impact the cell itself, either because the organ is unable to operate as it should and care for its components, or because it will take corrective measures to make sure the troublesome cell doesn't prevent it from fulfilling its role within its system. Presumably, if the organ can handle the situation on its own, then this won't come to the awareness of its system. However, in the opposite case, the issue could not only be transferred to the system, but even reach the consciousness of the human being, who could react accordingly. And so, ultimately, it would be impossible for a cell to be remiss in its duty without undergoing the effects in one form or another.

If, in the model, entities are assumed to have freewill, then as a result they are capable to decide whether or not to duly discharge their obligations. From the paragraph above, the influence of the intentions of the cell on those of the organ are evident. When the cell stops to cooperate, the organ must deal with the problem. In this fashion, the intentions of the cell are reflected in those of the organ, and likewise, they can be echoed in those of the system, and finally, in those of their human host. But this relationship goes both ways, and the aims of the human being are also mirrored in those of the cells, through those of the system, and those of the organ. In other words, it can be said that cells have an awareness that reflects the intentions of the organ. And this makes sense, because indeed, they collectively are the organ. Similarly, the intentions of the system are reflected in the consciousness of each of its organs, and the wills of the human being in the awarenesses of each of its systems.

Those observations could be applied to the matter of energy management for instance. The energetic needs of the human host are in fact those of its cells. Yet, the requirements of the cells are merely a reflection of how the person is using this energy. When the processes are at work, human beings need not be aware of the details of their functioning. The various levels of organization handle this for them, autonomously, unless participation of the host is necessary. So, for example, each cell and organ of the digestive and respiratory systems, and those systems themselves, can be regarded as independent intelligences that collaborate, at their own level, in carrying out their tasks, until they reach a condition where intervention

from an higher order of intelligence is mandatory. This can be when food must be ingested, or when the intensity of physical activity has to be reduced to facilitate breathing, or other circumstances of this sort wherein the human host must assent to the impulses which they become aware of.

Thus, at each level of the model, cellular, organic, systemic, and organismic, each of the components can be regarded as a superorganism, with its own intelligence, autonomy, aims, consciousnesses, constituents, and so on, and so forth.

䷤ It's Superorganisms All the Way Down !

In order to reach the second point and address the question of the nature of oneness, the construct can be expanded to include those levels of the hierarchy that encompass the human level. In this manner, human intelligence can be modelled as a combination of several other intelligences. Clearly, it takes into account the intelligence of its components, cellular, organic, and systemic. But it can also be seen to comprehend the intelligence of a variety of other levels of organization, familial, societal, national, and global, to name a few, which all can be considered superordinate superorganisms, from the human perspective.

Conceivably, the intelligence of each of the superordinate levels would be manifested as the swarm intelligence of the individuals composing the immediate lower level. Therefore, the manifestation of organic intelligence, when experienced from an individual cell, could be described as that cell's own awareness of what it must do, enhanced by how the equivalent inspiration is expressed by its peers in their actions and circumstances, and in that fashion further informing the cell of the relevance of its sentiment. Consequently, from the human standpoint, any superhuman order of intelligence would be observed in the behaviours and conditions of its directly subordinated structures, and the mentations of the individual with respect to those structures. So, for instance, the familial intelligence would be observed in the attitudes and situations of the family members, along with how the issues that relate to their family members are reflected in the consciousness of the individual. Likewise, communities, societies, nations, and other levels of aggregation could have associated swarm intelligences. The series could go on to include a global intelligence for humanity, a planetary intelligence for all life on Earth, and stellar, galactic, and universal intelligences.

In the model, just as the intentions of the cell are reflected in the those of the human being, and conversely, then it follows that the intents of the individual are mirrored in those of the universe, and vice versa, by virtue of the relationship that unites them, that is to say, because the universe is one of the superorganisms overseeing humans. Moreover, the same synchronicity applies from the wills of the cells all the way to those of the cosmos, and the other way around.

䷷ Stranger Than Fiction

I propose the following story as an illustration of the principles that emerge from the construct. Any resemblance with actual people and events might not be that fortuitous.

Let's suppose that one particularly uncooperative cell decides, out of the blue, without warning, to stop duly discharging its duty, and instead to alter some of its genes so as to be able to proliferate without regulation. Soon enough, that one cell has grown into a bunch of cells, and the organ doesn't quite know how to react to this situation. Eventually, the organ tries to cut the alimentation of the dissident cells, but they have already hijacked part of the circulatory system so as to feed on fresh blood at will. The organ is overwhelmed, so it calls for help, and its system quickly contacts the immune system which sends a team on location to eliminate the problem. However, the killer T cells arrive too late, and they are stumped by the quantity and the nature of the mutants. They try their best yet they cannot circumscribe the growth. The organ cannot function properly anymore, and furthermore there is a drain of energy on its system because the purposeless mass of tissue gets ever more voracious as it develops. Ultimately, the human host becomes aware of the condition, feeling weak and tired all the time, and losing weight inexplicably.

After some while, the man in question goes to consult his physician. The doctor listens as his visitor tells him about the symptoms, and almost immediately he has a bad feeling. He decides to investigate with blood tests, X-rays, and scans, which confirm his suspicions. His patient suffers from cancer. When he hears the news, the man is shocked, especially given that his wife has battled the disease a few years before. Nonetheless, he is a born fighter, so he gets a grip on himself and vows to beat the illness, just as his spouse did.

It so happens that the man is a politician, leader of a secondary opposition party in a North American democracy. When the man finally breaks the story, many of his countrymen are affected, because, beyond rivalries, he is known as an all around good guy.

About a year later, following a no-confidence motion successfully carried against the Conservatives, the parliament is dissolved and an election is called. The staunch man heads an effective campaign, and despite having entered the race with relatively low poll numbers, his party even rises above the other opposition formations. In fact, the surge is so strong that in the last weeks preceding the decisive day, the contenders all turn their attacks towards his party and him. Still, he performs well during the leaders debates and other TV appearances, and an attempted smear campaign against him even turns to his advantage. It seems that he has conquered his cancer, and when questioned about a recent surgery to his hip, he always confidently responds that he is healthy enough to lead the country. The surge of his party is the dominant narrative in the media as election day grows near.

The election results are revealed, and the man is delighted to see that his candidates and him have won a record number of seats, doubling the previous high of the party, which

now constitutes the Official Opposition, an historical first for the formation. Nonetheless, he also has to accept that their popularity has divided the Progressive vote in many ridings, to the extent that the Conservatives have not only remained in power, but have actually gained circonscriptions, and now form a majority government.

At this point in the story, one could argue that the bad intentions of the uncooperative cell have impacted the whole nation. For one, it could be advanced that a significant number of newcomers to the party reckoned that the man had successfully fought the disease, and hence endorsed him out of admiration. The opposite position could also be defended, that is to say, that the incertitude about his health status has deterred a substantial total of people from choosing the formation. At any rate, a case could be made that the sickness has played a role in the shaping of the new political landscape. However, the tale is not fully told yet.

A few weeks later, the man gathers the media for a sad announcement. A new cancer has been diagnosed, the nature of which is not disclosed, and so the man will be taking time away from his post. His looks leave little doubt to the audience that he is seriously ill. And as many have feared, the man dies within the next month.

Following a respectful period of mourning, commentators begin to wonder whether or not the man has been completely honest during the campaign. Some speculate that he has been deliberately vague about his health, and insist that he should have published the details of his condition from the outset, so that voters would have been in a better position to make an informed decision. The question is especially relevant for the electorate of one particular province, where the man's party has won more than half of its seats, despite the fact that it had only won a grand total of two in all of its history in that part of the country. Moreover, many observers agree that this feat was the direct consequence of the popularity of the man himself, and that the electors of that region have voted primarily for him, rather than for his formation. Several sources suggest that a specific TV appearance on one of the top shows of the province actually initiated the irresistible surge that spread throughout the nation. Thus, now that he is gone, many of those electors feel cheated, and support for the party is on the decline in the polls. Interestingly enough, the nature of the second cancer remains a mystery.

Possible dissimulation notwithstanding, the upshot of the ordeal is that the manoeuvre of the opposition has failed. Its collective situation is worse, as two of its major parties have incurred important losses in seats, both their leaders have been defeated and have resigned, and the government is stronger than ever.

One could conjecture that if indeed there has been foul play, then this has affected the outcome of the election. If the man was still fighting the disease when the campaign began, and had revealed the truth from the get-go, then, presumably, the results would have been completely different. In all likelihood, there would have been no irresistible surge, and hence little change overall. As a matter of fact, when the election was called, many complained that

it was a waste of time and money, as, most probably, the same administration would remain in post, albeit with a few less representatives. Conceivably, some Conservatives would have been expelled from their ridings, as the motivation behind the no-confidence vote was that the government had been found in contempt of parliament, the first such occurrence in all the history of the Commonwealth. In addition, a number of strategic voting initiatives would have potentially fared better, as none of the Progressive parties had a real shot at a majority anyhow, and the formations had collaborated in the past in an attempt to bring down their common adversary.

In any event, the effects of the disease on the political picture seem indisputable. If his cancer has incited the man to conceal his condition, then, plausibly, it is causally connected to the regression of the opposition. On the other hand, if the man has been honest all along, then the illness has obviously deprived the opposition of its rightfully elected leader, and at the same time taken the wind out of the sails of a party on the rise. All in all, it looks as if the weakening of the Progressive forces in the country indeed reflects the intentions of the cell, which are therefore echoed in the conditions of the individuals, families, communities, and nations that compose the population.

䷷ Super Unleaded

In order to illustrate the impacts of the sickness on the intentions of the superordinate intelligences, I propose the following interpretation of the consequent developments.

The strengthening of the Conservatives happens during a period of upheaval that stirs the entire humanity. While several nations are literally fighting for the right to a democratic governance, the renewal of the mandate of an administration which is frequently criticized for its disrespect of democracy comes as a disappointment for many Progressives in various other parts of the globe. Some find the outcome especially discouraging considering that the country where this has taken place is one of the ten largest economies in the world, and one where levels of individual freedom and education suggest that its people would rather have embraced the movement towards change observed in the international arena, and at the very least expressed its disapproval of the general attitude of its government. Thus, one can argue that the intentions of the cells have influenced the global intelligence to the extent in which the pro-democracy organizations of foreign states have been dispirited, or perhaps motivated to increase their efforts, by the misfortunes of the Progressives in the man's country. If the corresponding revolutions have been delayed, then it seems the global superorganism must be champing at the bit, patiently biding its time, eager to enjoy its maturation.

Moreover, given the track record of the Conservatives in terms of environmental issues, it appears that the planetary intelligence has also been affected by the will of the delinquent cell. Presumably, the setbacks of the Progressive forces have a direct impact on the health of the Earth, insofar as they are typically those who advocate eco-friendly policies, sustainable

resource development, and respect of nature. The fact that the country is one of the largest in the world makes the effects all the more significant. Therefore, chances are the planetary superorganism suffers while it awaits with anticipation an improvement in its circumstances.

Attention All Planets of the Solar Federation

At this point, it seems appropriate to warn the reader that the following version of the possible consequences of the intents of the derelict cell on the next levels in the hierarchy of intelligences requires somewhat of a leap of imagination.

Humanoid beings from a neighbouring solar system have been monitoring the progress of the Earth for centuries. They are keen to communicate with humanity, however the laws of their Solar Federation forbid them to go ahead until the civilization has attained certain standards, for instance because of concerns about the security of their ambassadors. One of these criteria is that the exploitation of petroleum must be abandoned, considering that its utilization as combustible or via its derivatives endangers the fragile equilibrium of life, and has proved consistently disastrous throughout the galaxy. Thus, they too were disappointed to witness the man lose his battle against the disease. In their projections, his party and him were at the forefront of the fight to replace fossil fuel with renewable energy sources for the years to come. So, their plans have been delayed, although they are still hopeful.

The stellar intelligence inhabiting the Sun initially flared up at the turn of events, as it is impatiently looking forward to the time when those extraterrestrials will finally be allowed to teach their technologies, through which humans will be able to travel in space and adapt the other planets in their solar system so as to colonize them. This is an all important step in its own enlightenment process, and as a matter of fact it has been lobbying the neighbouring stellar superorganism in order to have its humanoids loosen their regulations, but to no avail. The Constitution of their Federation leaves little room for interpretation regarding matters of intersidereal relations. Hence, the Sun also is experiencing arrested development as a result of the intentions of the irresponsible cell. But hey, what's a star to do about it except keep on converting hydrogen into helium ?

The Milky Way is substantially more philosophical about the situation than its yellow dwarf component. Despite careful assessments, it was surprised to learn about the initiative of the seditious cell. Its development strategy for the galaxy remains mostly the same, but it had to implement a few modifications, and adjust its previsions. This was routine work, and basically amounted to the edition of a few documents to reflect the changes. However, the unpleasant part was having to announce the updated instructions to its other constituents, as a number of civilizations under the supervision of the many solar systems it comprises are understandably weary of having to wait for humanity to get with the program. Nonetheless, one does not become a galactic superorganism without acquiring a trick or two, so calming the reluctant stellar intelligences and justifying yet another postponement didn't pose much

of a problem.

As usual, the Universe was two steps ahead of everyone else on the question. Naturally, it had foreseen the eventuality of the cell's disobedience quite a few years in advance. Yet, it decided not to curb its freewill, so as to give it the chance of doing the right thing, and teach it a lesson about integrity and responsibility. Instead, it worked out a contingency plan. As Supreme Being of the Cosmos, it took the liberty to inspire some humans directly in order to ensure that the man's successor would be knowledgeable in environmental matters, as this was a key element of its original design. Thus, in the end, the intentions of the insurgent cell only caused a mere ripple in its Grand Scheme, not to mention the obvious delays, but then again, it knew from day one that delays would be a factor in the equation. As long as it could bring each and every one of its subordinate intelligences closer to enlightenment during their lifetime, then its objective was attained. After all, reincarnation was always an honourable option to redeem the less fortunate who wouldn't make it all the way through on their first attempt. Or so insisted the Cosmic Intelligence Reference Guide.

And Back to Oneness

The above is merely an imaginative fabrication, but hopefully, it demonstrates how the model of a hierarchy of superorganisms within superorganisms can illustrate the nature of oneness as a continuum. The essential characteristic of this unbrokenness resides not in its material aspect, as for instance naked mole rats are not actually physically connected to one another within their colony, but rather in the symbiotic relationships that join parts within wholes, and in the endosymbiotic liaisons that unite parts to wholes, which are themselves parts within wholes.

Assuming that all those superorganisms have some form of intelligence, and therefore some form of consciousness, then the experience of oneness at any level in this hierarchy is essentially similar to that at any other level. That is to say, if components have an awareness of their own components, just as one can have an awareness of their physical and psychical architectures that is potentially comprehensive and voluntary, although it might not always be so, then components can have impressions that clue them about what is going on within themselves. And likewise, they can have impressions that clue them about what is going on within the organism of which they are components. Those impressions might be perceptions, intuitions, inspirations, or intentions, that inform them of what is going on with their peers, or of what is their own role within the whole. And then, occurrences such as synchronicities, serendipities, concordances, and harmony, can be viewed as confirmations of the relevance of those impressions.

Conceivably, the various levels of the hierarchy can be established where one chooses to aggregate them, and this needs not be fundamentally important insofar as the significant elements, which are the relationships within each level and between levels, form self-similar

patterns from one level to the next.

Then, the problem of infinite regress can rear its ugly head if it wishes, but as long as the model and its fractal structure is respected, then there is no real need to find up to which level, nor down to which level, the hierarchy goes, because experiences and the relationships directing them are essentially similar regardless of the level.

Thus, there would be no need to master any level other than one's own. A priori, there would be no particular reason to think that there should be something as a top level, or as a bottom level, and whether they exist or not would make little difference anyhow, because all that one would need to know could be learned at their level.

Searching for the divine in the infinitely large, or in the infinitely small, would not be necessary either, as no matter its scale, it would necessarily be reflected in the consciousness of the observer, whether via sensations or mentations, no matter at which level the observer chooses to represent themselves.

Ultimately, the distinctions within this unbrokenness that is oneness would merely be representational. Or, in other words, the superorganisms comprising the hierarchy, and thus the hierarchy itself, would only be abstractions. Nevertheless, within the dualistic paradigm ensuing from those aggregations, oneness would still be reflected in the interconnectedness of all aggregates. The characteristics of this continuum, when experienced from the dualistic perspective, would be that each and every part of each and every whole, and each and every whole itself, regardless of the level of observation, would be reflected in the others, involved in mutually defining relationships, and subjected to the effects of the actions of the others, both horizontally within each level, and vertically within the hierarchy, because there would not be any actual separation of them.

This is reminiscent of the famous Buddhist image of Indra's net :

> *« In the Heaven of Indra, there is said to be a network of pearls, so arranged that if you look at one you see all the others reflected in it. In the same way each object in the world is not merely itself but involves every other object and in fact IS everything else. »*
>
> [source : Sir Charles Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism*]

Conceivably, this phenomenon would be observed in all aspects of the existence of all entities. That is to say, there would be bilateral dependencies between things, with respect to form, function, physiology, circumstances, intentions, sentiments, and so on, and so forth.

Stated alternatively, paraphrasing the ubuntu formulation, oneness would mean that an entity is what it is, does what is does, and feels what it feels, because of what all the other entities are, do, and feel.

Or again, as long as one remains in the paradigm of parts and wholes, then reciprocity would be a fundamental law of their universe.

A disciple of Confucius once asked :

> *« Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life? »*

The Master replied :

> *« Is not reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. »*

[source : *Analects of Confucius*]

Hopefully, at this point, the nature and the experience of oneness has been sufficiently well illustrated, so I now propose an exploration of some of the implications.

䷀ In His Own Image

If human beings can be regarded as cells of a superorganism, then the question of the existence of a personal, anthropomorphic god, a deity that can be related to as a person and possess human characteristics, might be approached as follows.

Considering the divine and humans as superorganisms part of the same hierarchy, so that humans are subordinate to the divine, then they would necessarily have in common the attributes that define the superorganism class. Therefore, presuming that the model depicted earlier is representative of this class, and that this class somehow actually exists, the divine would have an awareness of humans, just like humans receive messages inwardly from their various systems, for instance when they hurt or when they are hungry. Still, when humans nourish themselves, they don't know the exact details of the cells which need to be fed. Yet, manifestly, the cells are fed in the appropriate way anyhow. As a result, believably, from the perspective of the cells, there is something as a personal god which can be invoked in their language, whatever that is, and that responds to their requests, despite the fact that humans typically do not speak cell tongue, nor know precisely which of the cells is asking for help. As a consequence, the idea of a god to which humans could relate as a person seems compatible with the model, and similarly, with the principle of oneness, and a form of communication is apparently possible between the two levels. This conjecture suggests that prayers might very well be experienced as impressions, comparable for example to hunger and pain, in the mind of the divine.

In order to answer this question more accurately on the basis of the model alone, one would require to establish additional features of the hierarchy, such as the number of levels between the divine and human beings, along with the capacities of the intelligences at those levels. However, this exercise largely exceeds the scope of the essay. Suffice to mention that

no matter the total of levels between the divine and humans, the construct implies that the intelligence at higher levels is such that the specifics of each human life relevant to god are reflected in its awareness.

For my own part, although I agree that the divine can be conceived of as a person and addressed as such, for example through prayer, I don't picture the process as a conversation between two persons. So I wouldn't claim to rigorously adhere to the view of a personal god per se. Nonetheless, from my own experience, I trust that, one way or another, the divine, or possibly a subordinate, knows precisely where it itches, and when and how to best scratch.

From the standpoint of the individual, there is little difference between pantheism and panentheism, insofar as, whether described as god itself or as within god, the totality of what can be experienced is divine. Or, phrased alternatively, the universe is what is known of the divine. My understanding of panentheism is that, in this system, while the whole cosmos is within god and therefore can still be interpreted as a continuum, other aspects of the divine stand beyond the extent of this unbrokenness, and thus are unknowable empirically. At any rate, the implied oneness the two systems have in common can be regarded as all that can be known. Hence, it would seem that with respect to the underlying oneness of the cosmos, the aforementioned systems are not in contradiction. Furthermore, it looks as if they agree that, if god has possibly some human-like attributes, for instance, because the universe can indeed be considered as a superorganism in the sense of the model, and so is endowed with intents, consciousness, intelligence, aims, and so on, and so forth, nevertheless, its form itself is not one of those characteristics. In other words, both systems preclude a god that is completely anthropomorphic, yet arguably allow a certain measure of divine anthropomorphism.

Presumably, a more relevant way of describing those features common to humans and the divine would be to present them as the divine qualities of human beings, rather than as the anthropomorphic attributes of god. Or again, maybe they simply are inherent qualities of intelligence, no matter which shape it takes.

Assuming that the proposed construct is sufficiently representative of the actuality of things, then, as illustrated earlier, oneness, or the interconnectedness between all entities, is such that the intents of the small are reflected in the intents of the infinite, and vice versa. Potentially, even an ostensibly inconsequential action can generate universal repercussions, and, reciprocally, even the most encompassing intelligences can influence the conditions of even the tiniest of their subordinates.

In terms of participation, from the human perspective, this implies a cosmos that is not a fixed entity, but more of a creative process in constant progress. The decisions and deeds of humans define and shape their worlds, to a certain degree at least. Conversely, humans also experience restrictions and obstacles, and at times it is as if the universe is conspiring against their best interests. If everything happens for a reason, which seems all the more probable in

the context of an underlying unbrokenness that unites all things, then perhaps some of those limitations and hardships can be explained as the upshots of oneness.

The Shackles of the Spirit

> *« My freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit. »*
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> [source : Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music*]

Plants, in order to grow, have to remain rooted. They cannot simply strive to reach the light of the sun, regardless of how attractive that light might appear, because if they uproot themselves in doing so, they will wither and die. Therefore, having to remain rooted might be perceived as an unfair restriction, yet in fact it is a necessity not only for growth, but indeed for survival.

Likewise, human beings need light, however they also need to remain connected with the whole, because ultimately, the whole is not distinct from them. Indeed, it is but another aspect of who they are, another manifestation of the underlying oneness.

One's connections are their roots. What that means is that one must give attention to those who look up to them, one must tend to the needs of those who rely on them, because if they don't, then they will end up uprooting themselves in some way. At the same time, one must be attentive to those whom they look up to, one must be supportive of those on whom they rely, because they are those who bring the light that one depends on to grow, and that one loves to experience.

The working life represents an excellent metaphor for those requirements. In order for one to receive the reward they seek and need to grow, they must fulfil their duties towards those who are upstream from them in its flow, and thus support them through their work. All the while, one must not neglect those who are downstream from them in the workflow, lest they find themselves deprived of important collaborators, or unassisted whenever they meet difficulties. That being said, for most if not for all people, work is a regular, nearly daily activity, and as such it can become afflictive in the long run.

Confronted with this state of affairs, a common and understandable strategy would be for one to seek release from those who rely on them, from those who look up to them, and indeed from similar restrictions, based on the premise that those demands on one's attention hinder them in their development, or in their enjoyment of existence.

This appears to be the individualistic approach to freedom. However, the unbrokenness

from which everything derives rather suggests that such a way can only lead one to illusory freedom. When one has the sentiment of being captive of this oneness, and hence attempts to elude it, in fact they are merely strengthening aversion. And while a degree of freedom can be realized in this fashion, for instance via disengagement from whatever experience causes aversion, it is limited in time and scope, and can eventually become an even worse prison, as a result of the specific conditions its perennity necessitates.

If oneness were actually simply an interconnectedness of parts within wholes, then it might be possible for one to free themselves from it, just as, ostensibly, a plant can be pulled out from the garden. But, as the plant tells us, when uprooted, although it is still part of the continuum that encompasses all things, the way in which it participates in it must change. So, instead of being a beautiful interface enabling chemical exchanges between air and earth, and a fascinating means of communication between light and darkness, perhaps it becomes the object of temporary admiration, its life support artificial, before fast becoming fertilizer.

In the context of oneness, trying to escape restrictions amounts only to changing their shape. For example, boundless wealth implies management of wealth, which in turn implies trust relationships. Boundless power entails exercise of power to reap its benefits. Boundless free time means finding pleasant uses of time. Shunning all forms of responsibilities involves ignoring one's own hunger, thirst, or pain. Enjoyment of any activity, regardless of its nature, requires a measure of engagement of attention. And this is really the crux of the matter, as it is in the bringing of attention onto its objects that aversion and affection are manifested. In other words, antipathy and fondness do not reside in the objects of attention themselves, so enjoyment of existence does not hinge on external circumstances, but ultimately on attitude towards those circumstances.

While the above implies that freedom from the unbrokenness is a delusion, it doesn't entail that freedom from other limitations is impossible, nor that it is without value. On the contrary, it means that the value of freedom is in how it gives one the capacity to choose the way in which they serve oneness, which goes a long way into determining the nature of the restrictions they have to cope with. More specifically, the necessity of having to contribute to the continuum doesn't preclude freedom from suffering. Rather, presumably, it simply means that what one must achieve in order to avoid pain is to learn how to act in accordance with this continuum. In theory, one can develop the suitable attitude towards any experience, and thus can enjoy anything. In practice however, it seems that individuals have predispositions towards particular people, activities, and situations, and this suggests that an ideal manner for them to participate into oneness might be implied in such inclinations and preferences. So, conceivably, perhaps one way to act in accordance with the continuum is to heed those inclinations and preferences. If the model of a hierarchy of superorganisms is a sufficiently accurate indication of what takes place in reality, then this also hints at a potential proper personal purpose within the unbrokenness, that would be inherent in the individual's unique set of characteristics at any given time, just as in other superorganisms each component has

its definite role. Hence, if one tends towards doing what they naturally love doing, then the restrictions they meet in this approach might be the temporary mechanisms using which the intelligence of oneness works on the invisible shackles of the spirit that prevent individuals from attaining and enjoying their preferred function in the oneness. Phrased alternatively, limitations would be, concurrently, the reflections of the extent in which one is not yet free, as in not having the required ability, to choose how they serve oneness, a sign allowing one to recognize as much, and a means of gaining this freedom, and the associated competence.

> *« Human life on earth is conditioned and unfree, and when man recognizes this limitation and makes himself dependent upon the harmonious and beneficent forces of the cosmos, he achieves success. »*
>
> [source : Ask the Oracle, *The Clinging*]

Although it might sound paradoxical at first, it appears that limitations are necessary for development. This phenomenon can be observed in various domains of human activity, and also in nature. For instance, the weightlifter needs barbells to develop physical strength, the footballer needs challenging opponents to develop skills, the politician needs opposition to find solutions that are more encompassing, and if the caterpillar doesn't remain within the confines of the cocoon, it will never know that it can undergo metamorphosis, grow wings, and fly, nor will it know the full extent of its beauty. Therefore, restrictions can be viewed as the tools using which one can develop the abilities and attitudes that are conducive to even greater enjoyment of existence. And after all, isn't perceived unattainability a measure of the value of experiences ?

In my opinion, this defines the true freedom, unbreakable freedom, all-encompassing freedom, ultimate freedom, that is freedom within oneness. It is freedom to become oneself while accepting to share common loads, freedom to tolerate the mechanics of restriction and enjoy the growth they further, freedom from attachment, detachment, and all their related concepts, so as to engage deliberately with the whole, and freedom to endure the removal of the chains that forbid self and others from experiencing life to its fullest.

In the end, if one is not free to relinquish freedom and experience something that limits it then are they not captive of an idea of freedom ? And are they not all the more so captive of this idea if this experience is precisely how that same limitation is removed ?

In the model of a hierarchy of superorganisms, this translates into the observation that any intelligence necessarily has subordinates and superordinates. Changing levels does not mean escaping limitations nor eliminating responsibilities, but rather changing their aspect and their scope. Overall growth is thus a measure of the extent in which one is able to serve oneness. Nevertheless, essentially, the relationships and responsibilities implied by symbiosis and endosymbiosis remain similar from one level to the next.

䷀ Truth or Consequences

While certain limitations ensuing from oneness are more easily recognized than others, some of the less evident restrictions can apparently be particularly difficult to figure out.

If what individuals experience as separation from each other is only an illusion, then it entails that one cannot hurt someone else without hurting themselves, whether directly or indirectly, intentionally or unwittingly. Presumably, this is what motivates the Golden Rule, and what Jainism acknowledges in the statement that the tendency to harm others is what harms one's own soul. Yet, the manner and extent in which this applies in practice might not always be simple to discern.

Phrased alternatively, if what must be achieved in order to avoid suffering is learning how to accord with oneness, at all times, then what does it means to accord with oneness ? Perhaps this matter is best approached through its complement, what does discordance with oneness means ?

> *« Whoever injures the innocent and offends the upright quickly goes to one of ten certain states: discomfort, loss, physical injury, serious illness, insanity, oppression by a ruler, cruel slander, loss of relations, destruction of possessions, or fire burns his houses. When his body dissolves, the fool is born in hell. »*

[source : *Dhammapada, The Sayings of Buddha*]

The aphorism presented in the epigraph can be regarded from various perspectives. For one, it can be considered as a dogma, originating from a prophetic source, whose authority is not beyond question. Given what is known of the historical Buddha, and assuming that the reference to hell is metaphorical, it might also be viewed as an affirmation reflecting direct experiences, repeated observations, whose universality is nonetheless not immune to doubt either. However, it can also be understood as imaging the consequences of oneness, in which case, it seems all the more easier to accept.

Many cultures have in common the concept of karma. In some of them, there is a god who is responsible for dispensing the fruits of one's deeds. In others, the effects of karma are the results of the laws of causation, wherein karma are actions, categorized in the group of causes. In yet others, karma is itself the law that brings back the results of actions. If there is indeed an unbrokenness underlying all things, then karma is possibly simply the responses of this continuum to one's actions. Thus, deeds that are generally known to cause good karma, such as acts of compassion, generosity, kindness, and respect, are most likely in accord with oneness, while those known to bring bad karma violate oneness.

A more definite formulation would be that actions which generate no adverse reactions are in harmony with oneness. Indeed, if reciprocity is the fundamental law of the universe,

then unpleasant occurrences can be interpreted as the echoes of one's own unpleasantness. Hence, such events imply no arbitrary meanness, nor any random hostility, except for one's own. Moreover, presenting them as the upshots of one's own misdeeds might be inaccurate insofar as the depiction misses an essential element, namely, that the misery one undergoes is a measure of the suffering they have inflicted on others. Therefore, a more useful wording would be that, whether beneficial or injurious, one experiences what they offer to others.

While obviously painful, hardships nonetheless potentially hold tremendous value. If one can recognize which actions are their exact causes, then they can establish what oneness abhors, and what it adores. In this manner, misfortunes can serve as course-correcting clues using which one can choose worthwhile aims, and determine the requirements that must be met in order to achieve them.

The hierarchical model of intelligent and conscious superorganisms provides additional insights into the meaning of concordance with oneness. From the standpoint of the cell, the extent of awareness encompasses the cell itself, that is to say, impressions pertaining to its components, and it also comprehends impressions about its peers, and impressions regarding the task that it must accomplish. The latter can also be viewed as reflections of the condition of the whole organ, including information about its current needs, and thus conveying hints at the appropriate actions to be taken. Presumably, as a result, a cell can measure the effects of its actions not only via their impacts on its peers, but also from how they affect the organ, the status of which is instantly echoed inwardly, in the consciousness of the cell, in the form of those impressions suggesting what must be done.

From the perspective of human beings, the equivalent experiences would likely be the feelings, good or bad, that either immediately precede, or accompany, or immediately follow, any activity. Continuous joyous sentiments surrounding an undertaking could therefore be interpreted as a sign that it accords with oneness. In contrast, negative impressions could be warnings that one should desist, or restrain themselves, as pursuing their intentions violates oneness in some way. The function of discomforts would be to inform one that their actions would harm, are harming, or have harmed, the unbrokenness, so that they can refrain, stop, or remediate. For instance, remorse would constitute a good illustration of this principle, and would be the reflection of the aftermaths of one's deleterious deed on the continuum.

That being said, the difficulty with such indicators is that they can very easily and very quickly be discounted, or disguised, by the obscuration-consciousness, the ego. This reveals all the tragedy of that particular process : the awareness it blurs is of utmost importance. But then again, this is a requisite for the ego if it is to successfully delude itself into believing in separateness. For example, if one sorely wants something, certain feelings won't stop them from rationalizing the matter, or inventing justifications. Similarly, if the individual is stirred by emotions when notifications occur, the picture will probably be distorted too. Moreover, the impressions attendant to misaligned thoughts could very well be mistaken for cautions,

when in those occasions it is the thoughts themselves that do not accord with oneness, and not necessarily other ongoing activities.

Even if the immediate inner reflection is missed, unacknowledged, perhaps too subtle or too hazy, then the consequences should nonetheless be observable in one's environment. However, conceivably, in such instances, there might be a delay between the action and the recognition of its upshots, which further complicates the identification of the injurious deed. Thus, despite the clues available to determine what accords with unseparateness and what doesn't, the causality is not always readily discernible.

Still, as mentioned earlier, assuming that the hierarchical model is sufficiently close to the reality it represents, then everything can potentially be understood at one's level, without having to find out the details or the scope of the superordinate intelligence of the underlying continuum. In other words, all the pieces required to complete the puzzle should be mirrored in one's own circumstances, whether in their surroundings, their interactions with others, or their own mentations. Hence, any manifestation, especially the unexpected, unprecedented, extraordinary, or synchronicitous ones, should be received as significant, and as expressions of the fundamental oneness.

To me, the above adds weight to the relevance of anthropomorphic views, particularly insofar as the Golden Rule can serve as a template for interaction, including with the divine. That one must treat others as one wants to be treated seems to naturally make sense, even when considering individuals as distinct entities. But when others are seen as expressions of a common underlying oneness, then it appears all the more necessary. When that continuum is regarded as merging with the divine, whether in totality or in part, then no matter which aspect of this unbrokenness one interacts with, whether physical or psychical, it cannot be regarded as anything else but as an aspect of the divine. The question finds its answer. The problem finds its resolution. What does it means to accord with oneness ? It means treating every aspect of it as divine, treating oneself as an aspect of the divine, and treating others as oneself. And indeed, ultimately, if what one experiences as separation is only an illusion, then this oneness is actually oneself, and how one treats it is really how they treat themselves.

This raises the interesting matter of the degree to which human beings are themselves divine. In the panentheistic stance, certain aspects of the divine are beyond the extent of the universe, and so, beyond the reach of oneness, which is nevertheless within the divine. This implies that one is of divine nature, although does not possess all the attributes of the divine nature. Therefore, in such a system, maybe the divine can influence oneness in ways that one cannot, and when events occur, it is no easy task to establish whether this unknowable part of the divine has intervened or not. When calamities happen, the divine is obviously hurt by them, although its unknowable aspects presumably remain unharmed. So, if the unknowable divine is responsible for those catastrophes, then this is possibly because not interfering at all would be even more self-injurious. As an illustration, if a part of the divine suffered from an

incurable disease that threatened to infect several other parts, then, plausibly, some form of self-amputation would be preferable. Or again, from a different standpoint, conceivably, the unknowable divine might sorely need one's assistance and participation, and whenever those requirements are not satisfied, then those parts of the divine of which one is responsible yet neglectful decay, just as one's organs would do if their cells were careless.

From the pantheistic perspective, the divine is synonymous with the universe, and thus with oneness, and the consequence is that, beyond separateness, one cannot be distinguished from the divine. If so, then tragedies such as reactor meltdowns, tsunamis, earthquakes, or 9/11, is what happens when one is behaving less than divinely. Likewise, any other less than perfect circumstance in one's world would be the reflection of less than perfect decisions, or actions. Those undesirable conditions could be the result of recent choices, or developments that have evolved from situations that one has caused unwittingly in the past. Nonetheless, the hexagram mentioned in the introduction is a reminder that mending is achievable, and that mistakes can be rectified by working on what has been spoiled, restoring its divinity.

It seems that, regardless of the system, one has little alternative but to behave divinely. In the hierarchical construct of superorganisms, collectively, the cells are the organ. Should a cell disregard the needs of its peers, it would be disregarding its own needs. The organ would suffer from it, and so the cell would too. If the construct is a reliable representation of reality, then when one disregards the needs of others, they disregard their own needs. The ensuing response of the world surrounding them is a manifestation if how their lack of consideration damages the superorganism that is hosting them, and hence how it impoverishes them too. Unseparateness further suggests that by behaving less than divinely, one acts against their very own divine nature, and the effects are a metaphor for how they are hurting themselves. It is oneself telling to oneself that one is damaging oneself. When one's world gets poorer, it is oneself who experiences the loss, for instance because of the potentialities that are delayed or destroyed. When one takes from someone else something that was not given, they really take from themselves. But this taking is actually taking from part of themselves something that this part needs, which is evidently conducive to difficulty, just like the cell cannot take from another cell and still expect the organ to function properly. Then, perhaps the taker will be lucky enough and only asked for something in return, and not stolen from. Yet, if they do not comply, then reciprocity implies experiencing that same taking of something they need.

Therefore, according with oneness is the mark that one must hit, at all times, whether in their actions, in their words, or even in their thoughts. When one misses this mark, they act against their very own divine nature, and they create repercussions that they experience in their own subjective realities as misfortunes, meanness from their peers, global disasters, setbacks, and other apparent injustices. When confronted with such situations, it is tempting to blame fate or bad luck, or attribute ill intents to others. However, at all times, it is simply the responses of oneness, the messages of a benevolent cosmos which is really oneself, trying to make oneself recognize that they have acted less than divinely, and have thus committed

some self-injurious deed.

When one is the victim of circumstance, there is little point in searching outwards for an explanation. Rather, the answer resides in what one has done to others, or has not done to others, or has done to themselves, or has not done to themselves, or has done to the divine, or has not done to the divine. And when the behaviour of others, or of oneself, is seemingly less than divine, then what else can one do but forgive it ? That it might be unacceptable, or unjustifiable, doesn't make error any less human, nor forgiveness any less divine.

䷷ Crimes and Misdemeanours

Presumably, all violations of oneness can be interpreted as consequences of wanting to circumvent the limitations it entails, rather than overcoming them, or outgrowing them.

When oneness is not recognized, restrictions might be regarded as originating from the ostensibly dubious motives of others, or the supposed unfairness of life. However, when one understands their nature as expressions of the underlying unbrokenness, and their function as instruments of growth, they can realize that they represent as many lessons to be learned, and skills to be acquired. Therefore, the paradox is that when one tries to evade them, they act against oneness, and so create all kinds of repercussions that not only increase confusion, but possibly lead to even more limitations. In addition, all the while, one deprives oneself of the wisdom and the abilities they would gain if they accepted to tolerate the challenges long enough to figure out how to duly conquer them. Manifestly, other skills and other facets of wisdom can be obtained during those detours, yet nevertheless, in the context of seeking to achieve a particular result, they likely imply delays. Moreover, should similar impediments be encountered in the future, one would still have to deal with them, whereas they wouldn't constitute an obstacle anymore if one had discovered how to properly surmount them.

Time appears to be one of the determining factors in the equation. Conceivably, this is because nothing of value is attained suddenly. Hence, when engaged in a protracted process, it becomes all the more tempting to contrive shortcuts in order to reach the desired objective sooner. In light of the formative role of restrictions, it looks as if this might be akin to trying to experience something for which one isn't ready, and which they would appreciate much more if they waited for the situation to ripen, and for their knowledge to evolve. This clearly demands patience and temperance, amongst other qualities, but perhaps this simply means that the qualities in question are precisely those required for the optimal enjoyment of one's future. School is probably the prime illustration of this principle, as the education one gains during those years generally opens them many doors leading them to greater opportunities. It seems that several of my acquaintances who were in a hurry to taste grown-up life back in those days found a renewed respect for learning later on their trajectory.

Another example that comes to mind in relation to those concerns is that of crime. The circumstances that might push someone to commit such offences are quite easy to imagine.

Hoping to extricate oneself from an otherwise insoluble predicament, or attempting to claim sovereignty over existence, or bask in unbounded freedom are all defensible aims. However, from the standpoint of one who has an awareness of oneness, choosing the road of illegality boils down to believing that oneness can somehow be outsmarted. But ultimately, if people are themselves aspects of the underlying oneness, then they are carrying justice with them wherever they go. Whether it manifests itself through internal or external occurrences, the physiology of oneness thus appears inescapable, and presumably, facing the consequences of one's transgressions responsibly is the wisest approach to the conundrum. Other strategies potentially lead to escalations, be they further wrongdoings, minor misdemeanours, or more serious felonies, in order to cover the initial violation or sidestep its upshots. They necessitate schemes to bear or silence the torment of remorse, which entail their own complications, and only harm oneself even more in the end. Regardless of the method, be it mental technique or clever dealings, outwitting oneness can be likened to trying to trick one's own intelligence. It is doomed to prove an exercise in futility, just as seeking to devise a plan that oneself would somehow never be aware of would be a waste of time.

䷢ Divided We Fall

« Give evil nothing to oppose and it will disappear by itself. »

[source : *Tao Te Ching*, *Chapter 60*]

Recognition of unseparateness also has significant implications on how one interacts with others, for instance in terms of how situations remain friendly and respectful or devolve into conflict.

If people can be seen as expressions of the unbrokenness, they can also be thought of as processes of a superordinate superorganism. Or, phrased alternatively, individuals can be understood as functions of the universe. Or again, conceivably, such is the intelligence of the divine that it can find a constructive way to use most, if not all, of what humans do. Hence, one's regular activities do not determine if one serves the cosmos or not, but rather how they serve it. That being said, this does not mean that all contributions to the whole are perceived as praiseworthy by all of humanity. For example, they are perhaps part of the feedback loop that conveys a bitter occurrence to an offender of oneness. And that doesn't mean that they are devoid of adverse effects for those who provide that retroaction, should this be achieved in a manner that hurts the continuum.

In other words, very probably, each and every individual serves good, most of the time if not always, but some might be viewed as working on the side of evil, some of the times if not always. Therefore, depending on one's knowledge of oneness, and their attitude towards what they believe to be evil, the seeds of discord possibly bloom in record time, or not at all, whenever one is confronted with what they reckon to be malevolent minions, that is to say, when they meet opposition, or when they face retribution.

Although in certain circumstances it can seem as the only productive strategy, fighting fire with fire is bound to yield less than satisfying results. In the context of oneness, and its consequent reciprocity, one experiences what they offer to others, and thus, approaching evil through evil, or responding to evil with evil, translates into attracting more of the vexation to oneself. Basically, this is how relatively innocuous events can degenerate into confrontations, as reactions that do not factor in oneness attract additional irritating manifestations. Such escalations obviously involve various forms of complications and losses that are necessarily worse than whatever damage was originally incurred.

If humanity is a superorganism, then when nations engage in battle, it is as if organs were fighting one another within the same body, and however some might justify it, this is evidently not healthy behaviour. The observation applies to other types of clashes, such as battles of ideologies, which can be likened to a struggle between two systems of one and the same organism. On a smaller scale, judgements between cultures, or social groups, make as much sense as if a muscle cell were to deride a liver cell on the motive that, clearly, it is doing it the wrong way, as this is not how one contracts to produce motion. Similarly, instances of discrimination would be akin to cells deliberately disregarding the demands of other cells on the grounds that their characteristics are different from their own, which would quickly lead to problems. The metabolism couldn't fulfil its responsibilities if all the cells were uniformly identical, and hence the organism couldn't function. This suggests that human beings must preserve diversity if humanity is to be healthy.

Some will perhaps argue that on certain occasions, the immune system of an organism fights against some of its own cells. To the best of my understanding, this happens in three specific contexts, namely, autoimmunity, tumour immunity, and when killer T cells eliminate dysfunctional or damaged cells. A high level of autoimmunity is considered unhealthy, and while a low level may actually be beneficial, it is only believed to be so insofar as it enhances future responses to pathogens. However, beyond the organismic model, and all the more so in light of the underlying continuum, irritations coming via people are never the equivalent of irruptions of pathogens, but are rather occurrences of retroaction conveying very valuable, and potentially course-correcting, information. Therefore, the autoimmunity analogy doesn't stand as a justification to oppose perceived evil with evil, as this corresponds to play-fighting with peers in order to prepare for battle against enemies that do not exist. And for the same reason, tumour immunity, and suppression via killer T cells don't obtain either, as opponents are not foes, and so, don't correspond to tumours, or damaged or dysfunctional cells. Stated alternatively, differences of opinion or disagreeable interactions aren't in themselves proofs of evilness, quite the opposite in fact, when read properly, they might just be saving graces.

> *« Overcome anger by nonanger, overcome evil by good. Overcome the miser by giving, overcome the liar by truth. »*

[source : *Dhammapada, The Sayings of Buddha*]

That being said, the above should not be interpreted to mean that no change can take place, nor that nothing should be opposed, on the contrary. The point is that the success of the undertaking depends on the approach. Evil can be opposed, but not with evil. Thus, if, as mentioned earlier, catastrophes, personal or global, are the consequences of less than divine behaviour, and if the unbrokenness, through the law of reciprocity, echoes to one what they provide to others, then opposition and change must be effected using methods exemplifying virtue.

䷿ A Matter of Integrity

According to the construct of a hierarchy of superorganisms, the experiences at other levels can be cognized as similar to one's own, in essence if not in details. Assuming that the model accurately depicts the nature of things, then, plausibly, at all levels of the hierarchy, there must be events comparable to what humans know as illnesses, and attention-getting, displeasing impressions comparable to what humans know as the attendant pain. Likewise, just as human beings possess defence mechanisms against sicknesses, other superorganisms must have reactions to such conditions so as to keep them under control, inhibit them, and ultimately, eliminate them.

If humanity is effectively a superorganism, and if some of its diseases take the shape of clashes between human beings, regardless of scale, be they disputes between individuals, or wars between countries, then there must be associated processes through which the global intelligence protects itself from them. Candidates would be world organizations, such as the United Nations, that could be viewed as the organs of a sort of immune system, preventing or responding to various forms of conflict. Those institutions represent the interests of many nations, and not merely a few, and hence, their interventions constitute appropriate means of serving the whole, at least in most cases if not always. Nonetheless, their actions generally address the concerns of states, or societies, but not those of specific persons. If the judicial system and law enforcement agencies appear to fulfil this function to a certain extent, they do not cover all situations, for example when the law has not yet been adapted to emerging types of crimes, or because offences are not reported, or acknowledged as felonies. However, to the measure in which individuals, by their less than divine deeds and decisions and their upshots, cause conflict between themselves, then it follows that the global intelligence must also experience those mishaps as illnesses. They must trigger painful impressions, and there must therefore be other mechanisms to handle those more singular issues.

Manifestly, those mechanisms cannot answer to all wrongdoings in the same manner. The severity of the remedy must match the gravity of the misdemeanour. When impelled to scratch the itch, the global intelligence must comply with the law of reciprocity. Thus, if the actions of an individual inflict a minor pain to this intelligence, conceivably, they will become aware of a correspondingly modest source of irritation, that might occur in their own private sphere, in their family for instance, or in wider spheres, such as the local or the national, and

that will have clear personal relevance to them. It could be disappointing political news, or a regrettable incident affecting a cause they stand for, or a personality they admire. If the pain felt by the global superorganism is more acute, then so would the annoyance that one would have to suffer. More intense afflictions would as well be in measure to the repercussions of the activities of the individual on the welfare of its host. Whether the result of one especially detrimental violation, or of an accumulation of less obvious infringements, to whose effects one is not indifferent though they remain ignorant of the link between the two, the impacts of the ensuing disaster on the individual would nevertheless reflect the distress imposed on the global intelligence. And again, the aftermaths could touch on any of the spheres of the offender, particular or global, but in a way that would be of deep significance to them, and would powerfully remind them of the misdeeds afterwards.

In some occasions, presumably as a last recourse, in order to preclude further harm, or because there wouldn't be a better option, the global intelligence would have to use a remedy that its derelict component experiences as an illness itself. Hence, understandably, just like one would not appreciate that their own cells behaved less than perfectly, yet would require them all the same, a superorganism might choose a cure that provokes a temporary ailment to one or many of its cells.

As a consequence, while a disease is self-evidently not a sign of a healthy organism, it might be the sign that its superorganism is healing. More accurately, some of the illnesses of the cells could plausibly be caused intentionally by their own superorganisms, as the healthy responses that eventually lead to their own wellness. As suggested above, this need not imply divine meanness, nor godly insensitivity, but rather reveal a necessity, for example that the welfare of the host, or perhaps even its survival, is at stake. So, paradoxically, there might be nothing wrong with an individual who is not healthy after committing a wrong, inasmuch as this leads to a situation where the individual recognizes their error, and all parties involved recover their health.

Various conditions could bring about such a predicament, which would very likely be an indication that less strict methods did not solve the problems. Unwholesome behaviours, whose repeatedly unheeded aftermaths do not successfully rectify the neglectful inclinations of the offenders, could possibly attract such radical countermeasures, for instance if they are prolonged beyond the point where the global intelligence has other alternatives.

In terms of unseparateness, activities that the intelligence of the underlying continuum cannot use to serve the common good, or cannot correct in any other way without making innocent victims, could force it to resort to those extreme means. If one keeps appropriating things that others need, then this could be how the intelligence of the continuum takes back something they need in order to help them realize what is going on. Or it could be the prod that presses individuals into compliance if their coping mechanisms against other difficulties are too strong, and they are unwilling to fulfil their duties towards oneness.

> *« The foundation of all mental illness is the unwillingness to experience legitimate suffering. »*
>
> [source : Carl Gustav Jung]

As a communication device, disease is hard to ignore. Whether it always gets the right message across remains to be seen, nonetheless, at the very least it convey a clear signal that something is wrong, and it slows down the perpetrator for a while. Thus, it seems to indeed be an effective technique to prevent further damage in the underlying oneness.

And therefore, illnesses could concurrently be, upshots of the negligence of the culprits, expressions of oneness reflecting the offerings of the wrongdoers, and retroactions pointing towards more considerate conduct.

Moreover, this would constitute the ultimate assurance that no one could be derelict in their responsibilities without undergoing the consequences in one way or another. And while this guarantees a form of justice, in my view, given how at times on my own trajectory those responsibilities have been almost impossible to figure out and to duly discharge, this state of affairs is enough to justify the implementation of free universal healthcare systems readily available to all.

In the context of oneness, every lack of integrity is echoed either in the small scale, or in the large scale, inwardly, or outwardly. Perhaps the pattern is always the same. First, the dubious deed or decision elicits a sentiment of its impact on the unbrokenness. Then, if that impression is not acted upon, whether obscured by the ego or simply unacknowledged, the violation is eventually mirrored in the physical realm. As long as the link of causality is not recognized, then the cycle will likely repeat itself. However, in the meantime, chances are the circumstances will degrade. If the infractions persist, their undesirable effects will probably get worse, to the point where they might even be evidenced in the health of the perpetrator. This condition might also be recurring, until the causal connection is realized and measures are taken by the offender to rectify the behaviour that leads to the misdemeanours.

Hence, health would be an indication of regard for oneness, or alternatively, of respect of reciprocity, inasmuch as ill-health would reveal the unsoundness of choices or actions in terms of their beneficence to the whole, and to oneself by the same token.

Furthermore, insofar as an individual consistently honours integrity, the intelligence of the continuum could not inflict on them an experience of sickness. A person who never pains oneness would never be sick. As a result, there couldn't be random occurrences of illness.

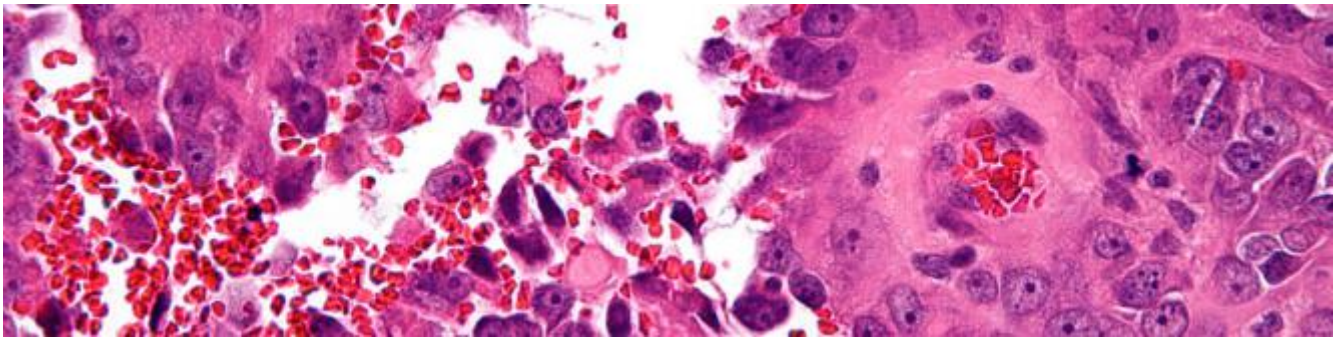
Therefore, I boldly suggest that the origin of diseases, including cancer, reside therein, and so do their cures.

䷀ I Hear a Symphony

Hopefully the notion of oneness, and some of its implications, have been presented in a sufficiently clear manner, and the reader will grant at least some credence to the idea that all things are not only interconnected, but are different aspects of one and the same being.

If the cosmos is trying to direct a symphony, then each individual must play their part. And even if one can suggest the themes or the tenor of certain of the passages, and trust that the cosmos will feature them in the composition, still, the concert entails responsibilities.

In the next chapter, I will attempt to illustrate some of the consequences of less than divinely discharged responsibilities pertaining to file sharing.



5. An I for an I Makes the World Go Bound

䷀ Mine All Mine

I find that file sharing is an eloquent illustration of what is possibly the most striking paradox of oneness.

When files are shared in a consensual manner, so that all parties involved agree to the activity, then it is clearly beneficial to the whole, as the creations have the potential to reach more consciousnesses, and thus better perform their functions. The dissemination gives more people the opportunity to experience the contents, and to profit from its virtues.

However, what characterizes illegal file sharing is that it is not consensual, insofar as the proper rightsholders do not agree to the distribution of the media in that fashion. At the root of every illegal file sharing tree is file that has not actually been shared, but has rather been made public without permission. And so the activity is detrimental to the whole, as it gives more people the opportunity to commit that very same violation as they propagate the media, to further transgress by enjoying the materials obtained unlawfully, and to suffer the effects of the misdeeds. Therefore, for all the leaves of all the branches in each tree, the work of art is debased to a certain extent, as some of its functions are inverted. Instead of elevating those who are exposed to it, it acts as gravity for them.

As a result, it seems evident that according to the extent in which it respects oneness, file sharing is either advantageous or prejudicial. And even when the wrongdoing amounts to nothing more than a few clicks and the engagement of one's attention, without sharing the files with others but only using or playing them, it is sufficient to incur damage.

And the paradox is that, although one owns all of oneness, and has the whole universe at their fingertips, they cannot do as they please with it. Indeed, it is precisely because this oneness is what one is that they cannot do what they want with it, without undergoing the consequences, just like they cannot do as they wish with their own body, without running the risk of harming themselves.

䷀ Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

Most if not all human beings have an organ called the heart. It is part of the circulatory

system and its function is to pump blood throughout the body. Most people never see their heart, but they can perceive it through their body-consciousness, and their ear-consciousness on some occasions. In exchange for the essential services it provides, it has certain demands. For instance, it must be properly fed, and during intense physical activity, it might insist that its proprietor slow down, take a break, or lower their expectations of its capacities. As long as its requirements are met, it gladly discharges its duties, generally in silence, however if one is negligent, they may find themselves dancing to a different rhythm. Moreover, despite being subjected to its restrictions, most human beings are aware that without a heart, they would probably be very sad individuals.

In the context of oneness, similarly, most if not all human beings have an organ called The Beatles. It is part of the spiritual system, and its principal function is to convey musical impressions that typically uplift and inform one about their nature as a human being. While it doesn't appear to be a physical organ as such, most people can nevertheless perceive it via their ear-consciousness, and their eye-consciousness on some occasions. There might not be a consensus on whether or not the services it provides are essential, but still, in exchange for them, it has certain demands. For instance, it must be given proper attention, and in order to be experienced legitimately, it asks that the corresponding license be acquired. As long as its requirements are met, it gladly discharges its rock and roll duties, generally loudly, however if one is not careful and disregards its needs, they may find themselves dealing with various side effects whose nature depends on the circumstances of the offender. Moreover, despite being subjected to its restrictions, most human beings are aware that without The Beatles, they would probably be somewhat sadder individuals, although they wouldn't be aware of it, as they would lack a basis for comparison.

Because of the unifying underlying continuum, things viewed as distinct from oneself are incorrectly viewed. Hence, hoping to somehow cheat this continuum, and get away with it unchecked because nobody else is watching, is akin to trying to trick one's own heart into not loving someone it loves, and nonetheless feel whole. In other words, there will necessarily be attendant signs that something is not as it should.

䷷ Interstellar Overdrive

As an illustration of the potential nature of the side effects referred to in the preceding analogy, I propose the following account of a past adventure in music downloading.

A few years ago, I had an experience that opened my eyes about the consequences of illegal file sharing, and how it can potentially harm even those who only play a passive role in the activities. Back then, some of the arguments in favour of the infringements seemed to make sense, and my stance against sharing files illegally was mainly motivated by the clear yet not completely defined feeling that something about it was fundamentally wrong.

I had been aware of the problems of a teammate of mine who was an avid file sharer.

In the past, he had frequently recounted stories of running into trouble with his computer, having to replace hardware or to reinstall the operating system quite often. At some point, he had started to suffer from severe back pain, which made life very hard for his girlfriend and him during several months, because he couldn't always care for himself. My impression was that his difficulties were somehow all related to his illegal downloading habits, but apart from the fact that, in my opinion, this was evidently stealing, I couldn't justify my sentiment, nor counter certain of the defences.

Some time later, I accepted a new contractual position. My employers were providing me with a brand new laptop, that I had named Interstellar. Its functioning was crucial, as the development environment required for the prototypes I was working on was installed on it. I was nevertheless using the portable to listen to music. There was a podcast which I enjoyed a great deal, and I had assumed that the host had the authorization of the artists to broadcast their music. Typically, I would only listen to each episode once, and maybe twice or more to certain of the songs. But there was this particular segment in one of the weekly downloads that I kept playing over and over, or at least wanting to, as soon enough, the media player I was using began to crash repeatedly. The audio would be choppy or distorted, and eventually the computer would freeze. I tried to diagnose the issue, fearing delays on the job front, but couldn't identify a plausible cause. After a few days of intermittent irritations, I finally made the connection with the troubles of my teammate. So I stopped listening to the episode, and effectively the problems vanished.

From then on, I stepped up precautions prior to downloading or playing content from the internet. So now, whenever I'm about to stream music or view a video, I try to make sure that the media has been posted legitimately before clicking the play button.

Thanks to the world wide web, it has become incredibly easy to access untold amounts of very valuable material. There is often very little barriers, or no barriers at all, stopping one from pillaging vast archives containing all sorts of seemingly important documents. And my opinion is that, generally speaking, this availability is something to be grateful for. I am not suggesting that technology nor service providers are to blame for this situation, but still, one of its consequences is that some essential distinctions potentially get blurred. The boundary between what is necessary and what is superfluous ostensibly loses its relevancy. The union of the attractive and the obtainable renders the undesirable an apparent must-see. The once impracticable now simply clickable might turn the beneficial in the detrimental, indistinctly.

Through those cyber amenities, it is all the more tempting to listen, to view, to try, to experience, and to share, anything and everything. Yet, because something is possible does not mean it is judicious. Indeed, it can be downright injurious.

䷝ No Son Of Mine

Basically, cancer emerges when a cell stops to accomplish its function and hijacks the

surrounding resources for its own reproduction. In this fashion, it forms tumours which grow uncontrollably and can even invade other parts of the organism. In the model of a hierarchy of superorganisms, it is as if a component ceases to play its role, without regards for its peers nor for the organ of which it is a constituent, and sets off on its way to self-aggrandizement and theoretically limitless growth. However, the unwise decision of the individualistic pariah seals its fate. The delinquent and its duplicates are doomed to obliteration, whether it is the superorganism itself that eradicates them, with or without the assistance of allies, or because they will die when their host takes its last breath.

Similar scenarios arise when industries exploit natural resources without caring for the environment. If they plunder without concern for the ecology or the people who inhabit the land, they can deplete entire regions in the name of wealth creation. Personally, I find there is a measure of irony in that phrase. I am not convinced of the good of converting something provided naturally, that has been nurtured over many years, and sometimes countless years, that no one can readily recreate or replace, into something that has relatively little value and short lifespan. This seems especially more wrong if the core motivation is profit for a handful of individuals. Presumably more accurate designations would be wealth ephemeralization, or wealth dilapidation.

Manifestly, there is another paradox in how easier it is to recognize those baddies than to acknowledge similar tendencies in oneself, although they are very likely different aspects of the same reality. Arguably, when most people perpetrate such misappropriations, they are not as blatant as malignant growths or ecocides or environmental disasters. Nonetheless, it is apparently much simpler to contrive holier-than-thou justifications than to take a good look at the mirror that is the world. When I observe my surroundings, I have to accept that this obviously holds true for myself too.

The above examples show that the assumption according to which the resources that the divine makes available can be exploited and enjoyed unconditionally is merely that, an assumption.

Moreover, they demonstrate that in the context of the underlying oneness, unbalanced or inharmonious taking leads to impoverishment. Ostensibly, the individuals involved in the enterprises are enriched, for a while at least, otherwise no one would ever participate in such activities. Yet at the same time, they deplete their environment, which is a manifestation of themselves, or alternatively, of the continuum. Therefore, ultimately, this impoverishes the whole because less and less life and diversity can thrive in the surroundings, and eventually, all are diminished from that deprivation, including the offenders themselves. Undertakings that do not factor in oneness are thus bound to fail. They might seem successful for a limited duration and when considering only a particular scope, nevertheless in the end their impacts on the continuum cannot be ignored.

Presented from another perspective, a consequence of oneness is that taking translates into displacement. Hence, depending on the nature of that which has been taken, on how it has been taken, and on how it is transformed, there can be either increase, or equilibrium, or exhaustion. Clearly, whether or not the spoils can readily be compensated for is a significant factor in the equation. But the crux of the matter is that balance requires that what is taken must be given back, in one form or another.

When one not only maintains this equilibrium, but furthermore employs their abilities and discretionary resources to improve the conditions of other parts the whole, then not only the whole benefits from their magnanimity, but oneself benefits too.

䷨ Love Me Tender

Let's imagine that a man is hungry, and so he wants to eat. It so happens that there is a fruit tree at some distance from his home, therefore he decides to walk over there with the intention of quelling his hunger. As he reaches the tree and looks at it, many strategies occur to him. First, he reflects that he could cut down the whole tree with an axe, and bring it back home. Thus, he would have fruits within reach for some while. But, obviously, once all those fruits would be eaten, then he would have to find another solution, because the tree would be gone too. So, he figures that perhaps he could only cut one big branch, or maybe climb up the tree and cut several small branches. This would afford him fruits for a while, and still the tree would be preserved. Yet, he reckons that if he proceeded in this manner, he would likely eat all the fruits before the tree could grow back its branches, and he would have to come up with another way of obtaining food. The man contemplates refraining from cutting branches, and instead plucking fruits from the tree, as many as can be carried back home. This would allow him to eat fruit for a while, without ever hurting the tree. Nonetheless, should he keep doing so, he would ultimately deplete the tree of fruit, and if there isn't enough fruits to feed him until the next harvest season, he would have to search for something else to eat in the meantime. However, he knows that fruits contain seeds that can produce more trees, which can in turn produce even more fruits, and hence satisfy his needs from one harvest season to the next. So, rather than picking all the fruits, he could leave some on the tree, and hopefully, within a few seasons, there would be enough trees for him to enjoy more than enough fruits. The thought delights him for a moment, and then it occurs to him that others might not see the situation as he sees it. Very likely, some of the others won't take the time to consider the matter as he did, and therefore, they will possibly be tempted to cut down the trees, or chop some of their branches, or deplete them of their fruits. Soon enough, there wouldn't be any more fruits to eat, for anyone, if this was tolerated. The man is dismayed for a second, until he imagines that he could build some sort of walls to protect the trees, so that no one could damage them. The idea inspires him for a short while, nevertheless he abandons the project, as in the end, some of the others could work out a way to break in or break through during his absence, and he couldn't spend all of his time guarding the trees. He keeps pondering the

circumstances, and it seems to him that all the practicable methods involve the participation of others. Indeed, if they collaborated, there would be eventually be enough fruits to quell the hunger of everyone, and moreover, together they could farm several varieties so that no one would have to eat the same kind over and over. All they would have to do is make sure that the trees are well-tended, so that they grow strong, yield quantities of fruits, and engender many more trees. In addition, everyone would have to be taught the value of the trees, and the necessity of taking care of them, so that no one would harm them nor deplete them.

Thus, in taking into account not merely his own needs, but also those of the trees, and those of his peers, the man actually figures out a solution that is beneficial to the whole and to himself alike. Whereas the mentality of everyone for themselves likely leads to exhaustion of the resources, a philosophy based on the respect of oneness leads to improvements from which the whole can derive profit.

䷤ In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida

Over the years that follow, the man implements his plans, and effectively succeeds at establishing a thriving and plentiful orchard that provides sustenance for all the members of his community. Prosperous and gratified, he eventually decides to leave his land and go on a sabbatical on a remote desert island, to enjoy well-deserved time off, ponder the meaning of life, write about his experiences in fruit farming, and also because he has a hunch that the hiatus might constitute a useful device should an author ever undertake to recount his story.

Quite some more years later, having profited from the career break, the man returns to his land, eager to discover how his brainchild has evolved while he was away. Already from the distance, he is enthralled to find countless more trees, of seemingly infinite types, shapes, and dimensions. Hurrying to the edge of the plantation, he is overwhelmed by the spectacle offering itself to his eyes. He can barely contain his enthusiasm as he examines the fruits and notes the wide range of varieties, not only from tree to tree but sometimes on the same tree. Spotting one never seen before pome, he extends his arm and plucks the object of his delight, and his amazement turns into sheer incredulity when an exact copy of the fruit immediately grows in its place on the branch. He takes a bite out of the fruit, and is charmed by the taste, yet all that time he keeps his gaze on the miraculous pome, considering the implications of this instant cloning capacity of the tree, which apparently means that it cannot be depleted. Thinking that he must somehow have travelled to an earthly version of the Garden of Eden, he resumes his progress towards his home, hoping to get some rest after a long journey. But there is no doubt in his mind that, as soon as he regains his top form, he will investigate and work out what has happened to the grove during his absence.

Following a few days of settling back into his house and putting it in order, the man is finally ready to explore the orchard, and he sets out to conduct a visual inventory of the trees and their fruits, so as to better understand what is going on. However, on closer inspection of

the area, his original excitement is somewhat mitigated. An important number of trees are in various states of dilapidation. This seems especially frequent in the younger ones, although some of the older ones also show deterioration. Clearly, contrary to one of the principles he had established in the past, not all trees are properly tended to. Indeed, it looks as if many of them are not taken care of at all. Furthermore, visibly, a significant quantity of trees haven't produced fresh fruits in several seasons, and many have stopped growing. This preoccupies him, and his sentiment is that the negligence shown to the trees is probably what has lead to this strange condition. This would moreover explain the fact that, if his memory is correct, some of the trees, younger and older alike, have even vanished altogether.

The man samples the quality of the fruits from time to time, as he walks in the grove, never really accustoming himself to the amazing duplication capability. He finds that most fruits are very good, as expected, but some are not quite mature yet. Still, his vast experience in fruit farming affords him the confidence that, given more time and better care, almost all trees, if not effectively each and every one of them, would yield excellent fruits. Nevertheless, while he strolls on the footpaths of the plantation, he is growing increasingly concerned by another peculiar observation, namely, that whereas certain trees have ostensibly barely been touched, others are surrounded by disturbing amounts of half-eaten fruits, discarded on the ground. In addition, he is surprised by the low attendance overall. All proportions respected, there are not that many visitors. Granted, some trees have gatherings around them, plucking fruits, but seeing how the orchard has grown over the years, he reckons that there should be a lot more people enjoying all it has to offer. The majority of trees attract only the interest of a few passersby now and then, and generally not in a way that a crowd forms, and it appears that many trees receive very little attention, if they receive any at all.

Figuring that he has learned all he could from the hike, the man decides to interrogate one of the visitors, so as to get a different perspective on the situation.

“Excuse me young man, would you mind answering a few questions ?” asks the man as he approaches the visitor.

“No problem !” replies the other, “I don't have that much time,” he promptly points out, “but as long as it is only a few questions, I suppose I can help you,” he further explains, “you need to know how it works ?” he then enquires.

“Ahem... not really, no,” the man chuckles.

“Oh, sorry,” apologizes the visitor, “I assumed you were new around here,” he justifies.

“In a sense, I guess I am,” responds the man, slightly perplexing his interlocutor, “but in fact, I established this whole orchard, many years ago,” he reveals as he reflexively scans the surroundings.

“Oh, I see !” exclaims the visitor, mechanically imitating the gesture, “wow ! You must

be so proud," he submits after a moment, "especially now that it provides fruits to the whole world," he adds with obvious admiration.

"What ?" reacts the man, "I didn't know that," he states, once again puzzling the other, "I am just back from a self-imposed exile on a desert island, you see," he declares, noting the expression of confusion of his interlocutor, "I have been away for several years," he stresses.

"I understand," the visitor assures, nodding his acknowledgement, "so, what is it you'd like to know ?" he soon queries, seeming in a hurry.

"Well, for starters, how come there's so few people around ?" wonders the man, visibly concerned.

"What do you mean, so few ?" chortles the other, frowning in surprise.

"Oh, I'm sorry," offers the man, "you see, before I left, the orchard wasn't as big as it is now, but it was more crowded," he recounts as he quickly looks at the people in the vicinity, "so, I would have assumed that we would have more visitors by now," he proposes.

"I see," first answers the guest before taking some time to consider the circumstances, "the irony is, I'm relatively new here," he confesses, smiling with embarrassment, "but to the best of my knowledge, it's always like this, or almost," he asserts, "I guess it is a consequence of instant cloning," he then suggests after a short while.

"Ah !" utters the man, slowly shaking his head in understanding, "it makes it easier to gather fruits," he reckons, "I suppose people share their harvest with others ?" he hazards in an interrogative tone.

"Well, there is quite a bit of that going on, yes," hesitantly corroborates the visitor, "but what I mean is, ahem... surely, you must be aware that you don't need the trees to clone the fruits ?" he asks in a tentative voice.

"No, I didn't know that !" replies the man, manifestly shocked.

"Here, let me show you," carries on the other as he proceeds to give one fruit from his basket to his host, and just as the older man grabs the pome, an identical copy automatically appears in the hand of the visitor, "there you go !" he cheerfully announces, "it's as simple as that," he comments.

"Wow !" exclaims the man, "this is amazing !" he remarks.

"As you can imagine, people clone fruits between themselves all the time," explains the visitor, pausing to let the idea sink in, "they don't have to come here to do so," he eventually points out, "in fact, there are many meeting places now where people can share fruits in this manner," he further notes.

“Is that so ?” reacts the man, stupefied by all he is learning.

“You bet !” the visitor insists, “actually, I would be curious to discover how many of us get their fruits in this way,” he adds with amusement, “I believe the numbers would surprise many,” he opines.

“But who is tending to the trees ?” wonders the man, noticeably worried.

“Tending ?” responds the visitor, visibly ignorant of the matter.

“Yes,” the man maintains, “this is one of the core principles of the orchard,” he gravely emphasizes, “we have to tend to the trees so they grow strong and productive,” he declares in an authoritative fashion, “if people don't come here, they cannot take care of the trees,” he ultimately states.

“Oh, I see,” the other mumbles, averting his eyes from those of his interlocutor, “I don't know who is tending to the trees,” he then admits somewhat nonchalantly.

“Basically, the rule is, if you pluck, you tend,” continues the man, “it seems that some do some of the work,” he mentions as he once again scans the area, “but clearly not everyone is doing their part,” he deplores, shaking his head in disapproval.

“I guess that many of the tenders have stopped coming around here, like many others,” the visitor proposes, “after all, they too can get all they want via instant cloning,” he tries to justify.

“Why do you come here then ?” queries the man.

“Well,” begins the other, “I like to introduce my friends to new tastes,” he shares with a smile, “in fact I have some kind of a following now thanks to that,” he claims, his expression revealing a touch of self-satisfaction, “you know, people get bored of eating the same fruits day after day,” he stresses after a moment of reflection, “it's like it just doesn't feed them as much after some time,” he comments, appearing slightly puzzled by his own observation.

“I guess it means you must be around here fairly often ?” asks the man.

“Indeed,” replies the visitor, “I come here pretty regularly,” he confirms, grinning as he once more glances at the surroundings.

“And how often do you tend to the trees ?” the man enquires.

“Well,” first utters the other, “sometimes I do, but...” he notes, hesitating for a second, “not always,” he vaguely confesses, “as a matter of fact, in the beginning, I noticed that some people seemed to do it systematically,” he proceeds to recount, “I imagined that it was their responsibility to take care of the trees,” he candidly goes on, “considering how many people don't do it, it made sense that some were designated to do it,” he points out, “but I couldn't

figure out who decided whose responsibility it was," he lastly remarks.

"It's everyone's responsibility," the man asserts with conviction, leaving his interlocutor speechless, "few trees are this well-tended, you know," he eventually resumes, examining the tree closest to where they are standing.

"Really ?" reacts the visitor, "I wouldn't know," he adds after a short while, "I generally choose the most visible trees," he explains, "either those that are taller, or most colourful, or those that have a crowd around them, or the ones people are talking about," he enumerates.

"I see," answers the man, "speaking from my experience of today, I can assure you that some of the less prominent trees yield very tasty fruits," he then states confidently.

"I suppose so," the visitor recognizes, "but there are way too many trees to check them all out," he carries on, "you must surely be aware of what the world has been going through over the last few years," he hints, his interlocutor looking at him with interest yet remaining quiet, "the global financial crisis, the high unemployment rates," he emphasizes with visible concern, "everyone is always in a hurry," he opines, frowning in perplexity.

"Ah, yes," concurs the man, nodding in agreement, "it has come to my attention on my way back here," he recalls, "many seem to say it is as if days are shorter," he suggests after a brief deliberation, "people have less time," he ultimately hazards.

"You can say that again !" the other responds with evident vexation, "and now that you mention it, I should really be going," he immediately announces, "so, unless you have more questions..." he stresses, signifying his intention of continuing his activities.

"Oh, I see," the man acknowledges, "no, no, I'm all done, thank you !" he kindly offers, "you've been very helpful," he finally comments.

"The pleasure was all mine," the visitor politely declares, "see you later !" he bids as he swiftly leaves the area.

"Farewell !" reciprocates the man, watching the visitor as he hastens away and stops at another tree.

䷝ Best of Both Worlds

Seeing that the sun will soon set, and reckoning that his time has been employed in a productive fashion, the man decides to return to his home, satisfied of his day, despite some of his findings. As he retraces his steps, he remains preoccupied by the matter of the instant cloning of the fruits. Regardless of the perspective from which he approaches the question, something definitely doesn't add up. He remembers what he has learned during his sojourn on the desert island. When he had originally set foot on the remote paradisaical location, he had trusted that he would at last be free to enjoy a well-deserved vacation from his work at

the orchard. He had pictured long hours of lying in the sun and not doing much of anything else, and in fact, there had been quite some of those in the beginning. Indeed, in retrospect, there had probably been too many of those. Nevertheless, soon enough, it had seemed as if all of nature was conspiring against him, by means of irritating incidents or manifestations, in order to put him to good use.

As he strolls in the grove, the man reminisces about how it had started. At first, he had used his boat as shelter, dragging it onto the shore and turning it over so as to have a roof at night. But it had fast become clear that a more permanent camp, and especially one which offered better protection against surface water when it would rain, was necessary. The man knew that a couple had once lived on the isle, long enough to ascertain that no one else was inhabiting the small land. He eventually found the log cabin that they had built, and as the coast guard had told him, it was in a dilapidated state. On the officer's recommendation, he had carried the proper tools and materials along with him, so less than a week later, he had a comfortable solution to the wetness issue. At that point, he had believed that he could take it easy. Yet, most of the time if not always, something had cut short any sunbathing sessions, exploratory excursions, or similar attempts at leisure activities. It had been as if life, through clouds, rain showers, wild animals, accidental wounds, or other occurrences of the annoying kind, was insisting on goading him back inside the little wooden house.

Advancing on the footpath, the man smiles knowingly, but at the time he had no idea of the causes of the happenings. He recalls that, once in a while, he would sit at the table and write some of his memories of his life at the orchard, like he had projected to do. The process was usually pleasant, yet it asked for concentration and effort, and considering that he had plenty of months ahead of him, and the freedom to employ them as he saw fit, it was often more tempting to escape outside and delight in the luxuriance of the island. However, it had appeared that his liberty was all relative, and that the events compelling him inside were not about to stop. Nonetheless, the days flew by in this manner, spent between looking for food, trying to discover the available resources and how he could best use them, followed by the occasional halfhearted autobiographic labours.

The man is reminded how, contrary to what he had assumed, finding something to eat had not always been easy. Although there were many fruit trees, his harvesting expeditions had frequently been under-rewarded, as he would spot merely a few fruits within easy reach. On one occasion, he had finally caught a hare in one of the snares he had laid near the cabin, but what he had first celebrated as a blessing had turned out to be a bane. His cooking of the creature had been interrupted by the rain, so he had rushed inside to savour the meal, yet he had found the taste repulsive, and moreover, he had been sick a few hours afterwards, likely because the meat had not been thoroughly cooked. In any case, the ordeal had disgusted him from repeating the experience, and he had removed the traps. He had never really liked the idea anyhow.

Cheerfully progressing in the plantation, the man remembers his unsuccessful fishing outings, which had only yielded fish once. He had been so happy to see something edible in his net, that he had rowed to the dock and hurried to the house to prepare the bass. He had found the flesh chewy and bland, but it was a change from fruits. The images were still vivid, as the following night had been marked by an unforgettable incident. A severe thunderstorm had swept across the island, waking him up and preventing him from going back to sleep. It had lasted until the morning, when the sun had eventually pierced through the sky. Then he had seen that the wooden cabin had been damaged. Thankfully, no water had leaked in, yet the roof needed fixing. Wondering about the extent of the havoc the elements had wreaked, he had quickly surveyed the area. While several trees had been knocked down, the ravages were not as important as he had first feared, however, the hurricane had left a nasty surprise for him. Emerging from the forest on his way to the shore, he had been shocked to see that his boat was gone. In his haste of the preceding day, he had neglected to moor the dinghy. If the loss of his net and of all his fishing gear had not posed that big of a problem, that of his means of returning to the land had dismayed him. The coast guard had assured him that he would patrol the region at regular intervals, so the man was not anxious. Nevertheless, going back at will wasn't possible anymore.

As he watches some of the visitors departing the grove, the man muses that the sorry event had not been without positive effects. For one, in order to avoid wasting time, and any associated disappointment, he had decided to restrict his sustenance-seeking efforts to food that could readily be gathered, such as fruits and nuts. Furthermore, he had created a tool to make harvests easier, consisting of a pole at one end of which he could fit his machete. Thus, he could cut fruits and even small branches without having to climb up the trees. Given that his plan was to stay for only a year or so at most, he didn't take care of the trees. After all, he was supposed to be off farming duties, and it seemed pointless as no one would suffer from it anyway, because, just as the couple had reported and the coast guard confirmed, the isle was uninhabited.

In the orchard, the man is delighted by the sights, which includes varieties of trees that he has never seen anywhere before. They remind him that after many moons on the island, he had finally become bored. He had been everywhere, examined every corner, tasted every berry, and tried every apparently fun activity. He had wanted to go back home, but either he would miss the ship of the coastguard when it was due to police in the vicinity, or the crew wouldn't notice him. He couldn't figure out why they didn't respond to his fire signals, so he reckoned that they didn't understand that he was stranded. Although he had been confined to the cabin more frequently than he would have liked to, his writings hadn't progressed that much, and certainly not as much as he had originally projected. He had squandered a lot of time sleeping, and getting depressed about the circumstances.

The man remembers that at that point, it had occurred to him that he might be forced to remain on the isle for much longer than he had initially intended. Hence, he had resolved

to resume caring about the trees, and to generally be less prodigal with the resources. He had also realized why the couple had tilled part of the land, and he had resigned himself to grow corn using a bag of seeds that the couple had left in the house. Similarly, he had recognized that investing more attention in his writing was a much wiser approach, as the undertaking usually kept him entertained and even enthusiastic. And he had acknowledged that, all in all, things could have been far worse. Indeed, apart from the fact that he didn't have the liberty to return to the grove, his life was good, his needs were met, and he had less responsibilities. Nonetheless, every once in a while, he had been feeling gloomy at the prospect of having to live his remaining years in the forest, stuck inside the cabin more often than not, reminiscing about fruit farming. However faint, the hope of seeing his home again had allowed him to go from day to day, week to week, and month to month.

Grinning as he ponders the past, the man recalls how he had started to notice causal relations between how he employed his hours, and the various incidents and manifestations that so irritated him. As time had gone by, it had become irrefutable that there were periods during which all was well, or almost. The food was plentiful, the corn was growing steadily, the annoying happenings were few, and he wouldn't miss the scheduled patrols of the ship of the coastguard, although it still wouldn't answer his beckonings. And this always matched the phases wherein he was cheerful and inspired, happy to work in the cornfield, and focused on his writing. But then, on occasion, his unsuccessful attempts at attracting the assistance of the officer and his team would discourage him. At those junctures, he would feel dispirited and hopeless, and as a result, he would typically stop tending to the maize, and abandon his autobiographic efforts. He would waste parts of his days sleeping and brooding, frustrated of being a prisoner of fate, angry at himself for having forgotten to duly moor his boat and for having chosen to travel to the island in the first place, afraid of being marooned forever, and yearning for the freedom to go back home. Throughout such painful episodes he would find less food, he would undergo more mishaps, he would miss his rendezvous with the ship, or the coastguard would not show up, and when he would finally return to the field, he would discover that some calamity or another had struck the corn plants. Nonetheless, as he would resume working and writing, joy would eventually animate him again, and a more positive phase would begin, Moreover, he had come to understand that the bothersome occurrences were not random, but corresponded to his own excesses, for instance in indolence or greed. Thus, while he could celebrate the good times, whenever he would eat too much or relax in the sun for too long, or when he would neglect his farming duties or his writing, then maybe insects would attack the maize, or animals would ransack part of the field, or rain showers would rush him in, or fruits would be harder to spot, or other comparably vexing difficulties would upset him.

The man proceeds between the rows of tree, enjoying the spectacle for a moment, and then remembers how, at long last, he had realized that he had to compensate for whatever he took from the isle, by giving back to an equivalent amount. That meant taking care of the

cornfield, and writing diligently. Furthermore, it had become obvious that this had been the main factor in the tremendous success of the orchard, as, although he had not been aware of it, tending to the grove and educating the community more than offset what the trees would yield. In addition, considering how he had only seen the ship of the coastguard when he had preserved the give and take balance through sufficiently persistent agricultural and literary efforts, he had imagined that the officer and his crew would respond to his signals once his writing would have been completed.

Still walking in the plantation, the man recollects how those events, combined with his prolonged isolation, had ultimately enabled him to recognizes that, paradoxically, he was an integral part of his environment. Throughout his countless misadventures and endeavours on that island, an undeniable pattern had emerged, namely, that he had to act in symbiosis with his surroundings, or undergo the consequences, sooner or later. The unexpectedly demanding circumstances had made it possible for him to realize that whenever the fragile equilibrium between the ecosystem and him was threatened by his actions or his decisions, there would be direct repercussions on his own situation. And he had seen them in their various forms, be they farming misfortunes, or irruptions of wild beasts, or uncooperative weather, or at times even his health had been impacted. However, by the very same token, he had discovered that when he undertook to improve his milieu, the amelioration would systematically be reflected in his own conditions, in one form or another.

As he reaches the edge of the grove, the man reminisces another episode. He had been toiling hard and writing steadily ever since the last patrol, and he was about to finish what he had projected to write. He had figured that he could relax a little, as his memoirs would be complete well before the ship would visit at the end of the week. He had started sleeping late and taking time off to stroll around the isle, basking in all the sun he could catch. Within a few days, the document was done, so he had taken the afternoon nap that he had fancied forever, and then he had celebrated the feat with a sumptuous meal. Later that evening, he had gone for a short promenade, and slipped under the covers early. The same night, he had been woken by a loud rainstorm. Feeling sick at having ingurgitated too much food, he had run outside to vomit. The following morning, still upset by the indigestion, he had stayed in bed even longer, and when he had opened his eyes, he had seen that the wind had sent his manuscript flying, presumably while he had hastened out. He had swiftly risen to examine the pages, only to discover that some of them were missing. Hurrying outside, he had been shocked to find them all, irremediably marred by the rain. Right on the spot, he had known that he had to rewrite them all, so without losing an instant, he had set out recreate each of the paragraphs that he had laboured so arduously to compose the first time around. Writing day and night, he had discharged the task just as the coastguard was due to police the area, and he had rushed to the shore. Reaching the edge of the forest, he had seen the ship in the distance, but he had arrived too late, as the boat had swiftly vanished out of sight. Crushed by the heartbreaking outcome, and disappointed at himself for his lack of judgement, he had

nonetheless kept his calm. Anger and frustration were pointless, all he had to do was decide on something else to write, complete that undertaking, and carefully preserve the give and take equilibrium until the next patrol.

Nearing his home, the man recalls how, a few weeks before his return, not knowing at that time that he would be back so quickly, when he had begun to write down his musings as they pertained to his life on the island, the yield of the earth had significantly increased. The occurrences had inspired him to invest more of his hours in relating his experiences. He could visualize himself in the orchard, sharing his stories with others, so that they too could profit from his observations. As the days had passed, the process had convinced him that his protracted sabbatical would soon end, and that devoting himself to spreading his knowledge was the most beneficial utilization of his capacities and resources. And effectively, as he had finished writing his account, the ship had docked at last, and he had been able to go back to his land.

The man ponders the current state of affairs as he enters his home. If all his years away on that island have made anything clear, it is that taking without giving back diminishes the whole of life. Therefore, no matter how magical or convenient instant cloning may appear, it is not exempt from the mechanics of integrity, as he likes to refer to the principles. Actually, it merely hides the true cost of not preserving the balance, displacing it somewhere else.

䷝ Cat Food

As mentioned earlier, the fact that an experience is available does not guarantee that it is desirable. And whereas sometimes the ensuing damage is obvious, at other times it seems that the causality between the activity and its implications can be obscured.

In the fictional example of the orchard, one could readily imagine that the availability of fruits, and indeed of a practically infinite number of sampling opportunities, would lead to smarter consumption decisions. But having access to everything under the sun doesn't mean that one has enough disposable attention to taste all of it, nor that they will necessarily end up with a selection of better quality or that is more appropriate to their needs.

When one has no choice, then they have to make the best of what is allowed. If one is given one choice between a number of options, then presumably, they will attempt to choose wisely. At first glance, increasing the number of options should translate into better choices, but this doesn't take into account other factors, like how one evaluates quality, and the time they have to do so. That is to say, having more alternatives might mean that each alternative receives less attention before a decision is made. Yet, quality is not always easily discernible on first experience. Hence, when attention is one of the limiting factors, then quantity might become an obstacle to quality. Ostensibly, removing all restrictions on the total of choices, so that one has access to all the options, provides the ideal solution. Still, at closer inspection, this only displaces the problem. If an alternative does not stand out after a first taste, then it

might be more tempting to look elsewhere than to repeat the experience.

In the world of art, and perhaps especially so in the field of music, the quality of some creations cannot always be immediately recognized. Possibly, the production values may be more apparent, however only after sufficient amounts of attention have been invested in the works can the depth be fathomed and the richness be perceived. Manifestly, certain pieces of music are unconditionally pleasing on first listen, but soon lose their attractiveness, which by no means indicates that they are worthless. In contrast, others take the listener on a journey that cannot be fully appreciated until all of its passages have been properly digested. If one gives them the repeated listens they require, then the music grows on them, yet, on the other hand, listening to them only once doesn't do them justice.

In fact, plausibly, a measure of the greatness of art is precisely that the more one gives it attention, the more they receive its richness in return. Or in other words, the depth of an artistic creation would determine its lasting value, and the richness one derives from it would be a function of the attention that they invest into it.

So, during the process of selecting which music one will acquire, while having access to quantities of choices might seem preferable, it can also become the prime reason why quality material is unwittingly disregarded. Arguably, illegally downloading huge numbers of music files based on the rationale that it will enable one to make more enlightened buying choices rather defeats the point. Instead of taking a chance on a feeling, and investing their attention in one place, one potentially ends up with too much music to give due consideration to. This makes it all the more tempting to skip ahead instead of hearing entire compositions, just like some of the visitors in the magical orchard take one bite and discard the fruit. Or similarly, instead of giving repeated hearings to albums and artists, exploring other alternatives might look more attractive. If the rewards of musical experiences are function of the attention that is invested in them, then attention is wasted in sampling material whose quality cannot be duly distinguished in this manner, and thus, ultimately, time too is squandered. Moreover, conceivably, one might not be hungry anymore when the moment to decide comes. And very likely, what is finally picked is what is pleasing on first experience.

Whereas what is wanted might be superfluous and leave one where they are, what is needed is necessary and allows them to thrive. Therefore, just like quality might get lost in quantity, having that which is wanted by virtue of being instantly pleasing, might entail that the necessary is lost in the superfluous.

Hence, inasmuch as unrestricted availability does not improve how one employs their attention, it contributes to the fastfoodization, if not of the works of art themselves, then at least in the experience of art. In such a culture, artistic creations are very likely perceived as disposable objects that don't have to provide light as long as they entertain one's attention, just like fast food fills the stomach but is rarely the most nutritive alternative.

I propose that a different and plausibly more fruitful strategy in selecting which works of art to experience would be to simply trust serendipity, and the intelligence of one's milieu. Personally, some of the artistic discoveries that I treasure the most have been made in that fashion. For example, back when I was studying at Université Laval, a very kind graffitist had written « *King Crimson Rules* » in various locations amidst the many paintings that beautify the walls of the underground passageways which connects the buildings of the campus. This eventually inspired me to buy a first album of that band, which is still one of my top three favourites. « *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,* » and « *The Matrix,* » the first movie of the trilogy, were recommended by friends. While dumping garbage bags, I chanced upon a book relating events of the life of painter Mary Barnes that a housemate had thrown away in the container. I bought IQ's « *Subterranea* » double album when the cover art caught my eye at the store. The preceding night, Yes' Steve Howe had repeated the word subterranean over and over in a dream.

Indeed, if everything is a manifestation of oneness, then it follows that oneness knows precisely what one needs, and fortunate findings and timely suggestions might just be the reflections of this intelligence.

䷿ A Pleasant Shade of Gray

If the consideration given to illegal downloads doesn't devalue the material itself, fact is that this outflow of attention, when measured from the standpoint of the creators, might become their motivation to adjust their artistic output. That is to say, understandably, some may be swayed to change their approach if their efforts do not attract as much attention as they feel they deserve.

As a consequence, rather than bringing intelligence that inspires, or heals, or innovates, to the mind of the individual, some works of art risk becoming vehicles for less noble values, in the name of accessibility, and in the hopes of attracting more attention.

While the impacts of this slipping from the effective towards the merely pleasing may not be important on a small scale, when the conditions fostering this phenomenon become widespread, then levelling is likely too occur.

> *« (...) by averageness and leveling down, everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone. (...) by virtue of an insensitivity to all distinctions in level and genuineness, and in providing average intelligibility, opens up a standard world in which all distinctions between the unique and the general, the superior and the average, the important and the trivial have been leveled. »*
>
> [source : Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*]

It seems that a significant component of the efficacy of art resides in how it allows the artists to express their individuality. Arguably, the degree to which they do so is what gives their work its relevance. Their creations can thus be reflections of actual existent entities that observe and share their perspectives on realities, whether common or personal, but that are nevertheless valuable mirrors and benchmarks. Hence, whenever expression of individuality is suppressed from art, be it for the sake of accessibility or other reasons, then the loss is not only personal but common.

䷶ Black Light Machine

> *« In popular culture, our musicians sing to us in our own voice; in mass culture they shout what we want to hear. »*
>
> [source : Robert Fripp, *Aphorisms*]

If art is an expression of human nature that brings to mind intelligence about what it means to be human, then as such it potentially yields tremendous influence on how people perceive their world and their place and role within it.

That is to say, if, wittingly or not, willingly or otherwise, individuals rely on works of art to confirm their own experiences, understand their own existence, and shape their own realities, then it appears essential that art be first and foremost genuine, and devoid of any corrupting agendas. And so, in a culture where artists simply tell people what they want to hear, the risk is that this debasing of the nature of art entails a debasing of the individuals themselves. Motivations for doing so are easily imagined. For instance, as mentioned earlier, certain artists might hope that their creations receive more attention. Pecuniary concerns, or fear of retaliation, could also be compelling factors.

As a result, conceivably, in a context where strong levelling is taking place, some truths might never be expressed. Whether because the circumstances translate into of constraints of format, or perceived propriety, or successful trends, when the intelligence conveyed by art is degraded in order to meet the demands of markets, then certain important elements of its message may be systematically censored at the source. And in this manner, art stops being a faithful reflection of truth.

In terms of the underlying oneness, this lack of integrity necessarily impoverishes the whole. It gives rise to other lacks of integrity, echoed at various scales in the behaviours and attitudes of people as they shape their realities. When the reference has flaws, chances are it will transmit those flaws to those who depend on it.

䷶ Don't Bring Me Down

If the nature of works of art is debased, and their inherent value diminished, it follows that the functions they fulfil are also impacted.

As suggested at the beginning of the chapter, media files shared illegally constitute an excellent illustration of how some of the roles of works of art can be affected.

With respect to their spiritual purpose, that of maintaining people's inward connection to the source of their existence, when artistic creations are corrupted, their influence on this connection might become negative instead of positive, and presumably, links are weakened rather than strengthened.

As a matter of fact, the decision to circumvent the rules and enjoy materials obtained illegally harms the relationship between the culprit and the artist from whom they steal. In other words, one wouldn't try to take illegally from someone they consider their kin, or their true friend, but transgressing anyhow harms any kinship, just like any justification or reason invoked for doing so obscures the natural bond. If this persists, then one will feel increasingly remote, and eventually, infringements will look and feel innocuous, and as such, permissible.

By the same token, one distances themselves from the whole. They choose to care less about the whole in order to satisfy themselves, and in so doing, they damage their relation to the whole. Hence, the works of art corrupted by virtue of having been obtained illicitly end up doing the opposite of what they should do, and whether one sees the source of existence as the humanity superorganism, or as the oneness from which everything derives, their bond to it is obviously degraded.

Ultimately, instead of inducing the spiritual elevation that comes from removing what masks unseparateness, and from strengthening the bond to oneness, artistic media obtained illegally lowers the audience, and in this fashion, the whole is brought down too.

䷷ Beds Are Burning

In a similar manner, if art is an essential element of the feedback loop through which society stays on course towards the establishment of institutions that better respect human nature, then when art is devalued or corrupted, the retroaction it provides is misleading, or potentially worse, missing. A self-regulating mechanism cannot operate appropriately when its information about its current condition is invalid. Therefore, if art stops reflecting truth, then society is in danger of straying or stagnating, and the aims of the collectivity cannot be duly accomplished.

If the broadcasts of the loudspeakers that are supposed to echo the intelligence of the swarm direct attention away from the real issues, then the appropriate corrective measures cannot be implemented.

䷷ Come Together

> *« The cold truth is that the individualist creed of everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost is principally responsible for the distress*

in which Western civilization finds itself (...) »

[source : Charles Austin Beard, *The Myth of Rugged American Individualism*]

Given that it was originally published in 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression, the above quote seems all the more relevant.

While individualism has its worth, namely in how people develop their talents, skills, and personalities in the pursuit of its objectives, when pushed to the extreme of everybody for themselves, then its effects are definitely negative.

In the context of unseparateness, the objectives of independence and self-reliance that individualism promotes are revealed as ideals rather than as achievable goals. Ultimately, in oneness, there cannot be such a thing as an individual that is independent from everything and everyone else. In other words, complete independence and hence, complete self-reliance, are simply not possible.

Nonetheless, obviously, this limitation is not self-evident. As a consequence, as long as the individual is deceived by the illusion of separation, those ideals might appear desirable, and in their attempts to realize them, it is likely that one will be tempted by the extremes of individualism, at some time or another. Independence and self-reliance can be actualized to a certain degree, yet because of oneness, they cannot be implemented at the cost of symbiosis and endosymbiosis without engendering adverse effects. This implies collaboration between individuals, and cooperation with the ecology, and hints at the notion that civilizations that don't have collaboration as one of their foundations can never evolve beyond certain levels of efficiency, prosperity, and peace. Conceivably, such cultures are destined to undergo cyclical growth and decline, as people obtain increasing levels of independence, but do not recognize the necessity of cooperation, and end up being confronted with the destructive backlashes of the excesses of individualism. If that is so, then in order for those civilizations to reach new highs, they must acknowledge the inevitability of enshrining collaboration as a permanent principle, and not only as a temporary solution.

In the example of the magical orchard, this would correspond to the situation wherein people want to enjoy quantities of fruits of all varieties, without ever tending to the trees. As the trees would stop producing, stop growing, and eventually disappear, then instant cloning notwithstanding, newness and freshness would vanish too. To thrive, frugivores would have to learn to cooperate with the trees and take their requirements into account. Or if not, then they would have to modify their diet, which would entail starting over, while new sources of nourishment are found, adopted, and developed, which would lead to the same conclusions that those new sources of food have to be taken care of, lest they stop yielding their boons.

In terms of file sharing, the situation translates into wanting to experience as much as possible without ever having to support the creators. And paradoxically, this wanting is what

makes the needs of the creators one's own needs. When this is not understood, justifications are easy to contrive, for instance, that plenty of other mediavores must already be satisfying the needs of the creators, or that in the digital world, rightsholders incur no additional cost from illegal copies, or that they should better protect their creations, or that if something is seemingly available for free, then why pay ? And the answer is that the difference between viable and impracticable creative endeavours is a function of the number of people who act in this selfish way.

The internet makes it clear that there is an astonishing number of talented artists that would love to have the possibility of dedicating themselves to bringing their beauty into the world. However, what might be less obvious is that, until the right opportunities arise, many of them have to work the equivalent of two full time jobs, that is to say, they must hold the proverbial day job to support their artistic endeavours. Understandably, many of them give up along the way, not because their output is sub-standard, but rather because the occasions to falter abound, the lifestyle is burdensome, and the constant investment of themselves that growing their enterprise demands is not always rewarded as they would expect. They realize that when their creations are finally complete, there is still a tremendous amount of energy required before the fruits of their efforts receive the attention they deserve, not to mention generate income.

For some less known artists, the difference between thriving and quitting might not be as big as can be imagined from the outside. While they strive to keep going until they obtain their break, the discouraging discovery that their precious work is being distributed without authorization could be sufficient to slow the engines of creation down to a temporary, if not permanent halt. And manifestly, in certain instances it will be the last straw.

Presumably because there are artists who do extremely well and accumulate fortunes, it is tempting to believe that most of their peers achieve similar results. However, the maths reveal that this might be more of a myth than that of the starving artist. As an illustration, in the field of music, a quick internet search suggests that average album sales are much lower than the lowest certification levels, and furthermore that for those who are signed to major labels, musicians are not the ones who profit the most from the operation.

In other words, even when seemingly insignificant from the perspective of the sharers, their violations have very real repercussions in the lives of the creators themselves.

If too many individuals abuse the artists, either the whole artistic offering will end up being levelled, as proposed earlier, or the number of active, efficient artists will diminish, or both. Ultimately, the overall positive influence of art on society will decline, as some of the truths that should be expressed remain unvoiced, lesser values are promoted, and bonds to oneness are weakened.

Whereas increasing support to artists likely leads to circumstances wherein they feel

encouraged to express their individuality even more dramatically, and thus wherein their art is more efficient, leaks in the support chain potentially engenders the exact opposite effect. If, as creators find themselves in a position where they have to choose between their needs or those of others, a significant proportion of them overlook the function of their art in order to secure support, then the whole artistic offering slips towards expressing individualism, in its less desirable aspects, rather than expressing individuality, in its most beneficial form. That is to say, if, because of the state of play, too many artists employ art as a means of attaining independence, and deliberately reduce the quality of their output to do so, then, regardless of whether or not the operations are successful from an individual or business standpoint, they tarnish the entire artistic offering as the underlying message becomes that art is but another lucrative activity, and that its actual purposes are secondary.

Ostensibly, the line between expressing individuality and expressing the less desirable aspects of individualism can be tenuous. Yet, in practice, if the boundary is easy to cross, it is not because of being poorly delineated. To the best of my knowledge, most if not all creators have a clear, innate awareness of which changes compromise their works of art, and which changes serve them. In the context of oneness, plausibly, artists are inspired media that best address the requirements of the whole. Hence, any external factor, including the artists own needs, that distorts those visions contributes to impair the resulting creations. And while this doesn't explain all flaws, the ones that ensue from consciously disregarding the instructions of oneness harm the mirror in such a way that its reflections of human nature are bent.

Therefore, the infringing acts of illegally accessing media, and of sharing them without authorization, not only create repercussions of their own in the lives of the wrongdoers, but they hurt the whole artistic ecosystem in such a way that the support given to those whose responsibility it is to supply contents is also impacted. Added together, the non-consensual deeds of the violators create conditions wherein the quality of the overall artistic output will tend to decrease, the thus corrupted medium will be less effective and will possibly corrupt parts of the audience in turn, and artistic undertakings will probably end up being perceived as a mere moneymaking processes.

Ultimately, the consequences of illegal file sharing hurt not only artists and mediavores but everyone. By making it harder, and in some cases actually impracticable, for creators to communicate their messages, those infractions damage the whole of society. Their insidious effects undermine the artists by sending them discouraging signals, and affect the audience members who are offered art of lesser value, and which doesn't fulfil its functions as well as it could have. In this fashion, the infringements constitute as many outflows of energy in the development process of the collectivity, and hinder its natural evolution. Depending on the overall magnitude of the transgressions, society experiences slowdown, stagnation, or even recession, and those movements, or lack thereof, reflect the measure in which people value the extremes of individualism, and must learn the necessity of collaboration.

There is untold beauty struggling to enter the world, but it is struggling to emerge, and it needs the support of everyone in order to see the light of day. The choice could scarcely be more obvious. At one end of the spectrum, its everyone for themselves, at the cost of global growth, social harmony, and the diversity that this potential beauty would bring. In contrast, through cooperation, more people can experience more growth, more people can have access to more beauty that speaks in their own voice, and social harmony is therefore favoured.

䷩ Up Where We Belong

Whether they take the shape of hoping to reach new levels in relationships, or wanting to bring work-related projects to fruition, or seeking to graduate from school, or other similar aspirations, anticipation and the corresponding motivation are significant factors in personal development. Thus, it is a common experience to envision the future and long for it to arrive sooner.

In such circumstances, apparent shortcuts look all the more tempting. Nevertheless, in trying to speed up the process, one must be careful not to cause repercussions that create the exact opposite result. Because everything and everyone derives from the underlying oneness, even committing what are ostensibly victimless crimes can amount to shooting oneself in the foot, and end up losing time, and losing ground. Regardless of the rationalizations one might contrive to justify the courses of action, bypassing restrictions can have direct consequences on the various dimensions of one's personal sphere, including the material and the spiritual.

As explained earlier, in the context of the unbrokenness, it is those deeds and decisions that don't accord with this continuum that engender adverse effects. If one takes something that is not given and uses it as they see fit, without proper consideration for the needs of the rightful owner, then they disrespect and harm the continuum, and hence injure themselves.

Because of the foundational role of oneness, illegally sharing media files translates into displacement, pretty much like the abusive exploitation of natural resources. While offenders might temporarily be under the impression that what is obtained via such means enhances their lot, it is probably because the actual upshots are not readily noticed in their immediate surroundings. Nonetheless, the unbrokenness preserves the balance, and depending on their situation, the culprits possibly become aware of small scale catastrophes that hamper them in seemingly unfair ways, or of opportunities that vanish incomprehensibly, or perhaps they have to cope with health issues. However, the impacts might be even worse insofar as they have no recognizable manifestations in the physical world, yet affect the individuals in more subtle ways, for instance by impeding their personal development, keeping them confined in realities wherein they have to go through the same lessons over and over again, in wearying psychological retellings of the myth of Sisyphus.

When one is confronted with hardships, suffers setbacks, or becomes sick, the causality between violations and their aftermaths can eventually be worked out, although this is not

guaranteed. Still, when the indicators are primarily psychological, and find their echoes in one's social environment, and how one relates to it, comprehending the mechanisms can be much more difficult.

Conceivably, personal development can be modelled as moving upwards in a hierarchy of subjective worlds wherein, although the conditions are always optimal inasmuch as they pertain to the lessons which must be learned, those conditions grow increasingly favourable in terms of allowing unhindered progress. Or in other words, the cosmos consistently offers a context that allows one to enhance their understanding, and systematically increments its cooperativeness as one goes up in worlds.

In that perspective, while sharing files unlawfully might translate into securing better material circumstances, the consequences of the infringements might be that one remains at a relatively less cooperative, more obstructive level in their hierarchy of worlds. So, instead of naturally ascending, through their participation in the whole, towards a reality wherein one's peers and society at large are more inclined to collaborate with them, one would stay at the level they know, never becoming aware of how simpler things could be, and wondering why certain experiences are possible for others, and not for them. Any advantage obtained from the infractions would be offset by the ensuing delays in their personal development. Worse, as long as the mechanism is not discerned, this might turn into a repetitive pattern, and one might come to think that this is how the world works for them, stop trying to improve their situation, and stay at a particular level far longer than necessary as a result.

Thus, securing better material circumstances might not be as relevant as ascending in one's hierarchy of worlds. By the time one realizes what is going on, the delays incurred and the energies invested might far exceed the actual requisites for one's growth. The net effects of the misdemeanours would be that the distance to one's objectives is perceived to be much greater than it actually is.

In contrast, the approach whereby one would avoid all such apparent shortcuts would yield constant progress, and would ultimately be the most rewarding development strategy towards ever improving worlds.

䷝ Available Light

As illustrated in the previous sections, the combined impacts of illegal file sharing hurt the musical ecosystem in several ways, by affecting the value of works of art, the intelligence they convey, and the functions they fulfil. This in turn impacts the entire society negatively.

Whether or not the offenders recognize the causality connecting those transgressions against oneness with the physical dimensions of their repercussions, in the spiritual realm, they nevertheless drift towards a world wherein the light is of lesser quality. It may seem as if they have improved their lot, gaining access to new intelligence without defraying the cost,

yet the fact remains that their surroundings are poorer because of it, and hence are less apt at providing them with more of the material they crave and need for personal development. And if there is truth in the proverb, ill-gotten gains seldom prosper, then even what has been acquired illegitimately won't serve their interests.

For the want of an experience of elevation without the corresponding expenses, those who commit the infractions actually travel to a world wherein such experiences are harder to come by. From their own subjective vantage point, the intelligence they seek is less present in the spheres they consider to be worthy of attention.

The mysterious powers of attention are such that what one focuses their attention on, they bring more of in their reality. When one experiences works of art, it is precisely because they want to bring more of the intelligence the creations convey into their world. In essence, this is how personal development is realized. With this generally come an heightening of the senses and a feeling of well-being that constitute incentives to repeat the operation, in this manner addressing the necessity of spiritual growth. So, understandably, the urge to obtain more material of this nature is strong. Yet, if this is accomplished through disrespect of the underlying unity of all things, then the cost is displaced, and instead of shelling out the price of the experience, one will have to expend the efforts required to once again attract the light that has become obscured, and is needed for further evolution.

In contrast, by choosing to properly support the artists, and therefore encouraging the creation of additional vehicles of intelligence, one not only secures immediate advancement, but also contributes to a future wherein more materials of comparable value will be readily available from the same sources. By tending to the trees, one can not only harvest fruits now, but they can foster the production of more objects of delight in the years to come. And to the measure in which artists are leading the way, exploring the territory as they evolve towards freedom, then by sponsoring them one motivates them to leave footprints on the road ahead. As one moves forward, those footprints will be available to guide their steps. Plausibly, this effectively corresponds to the shortest path that one hopes to find in less laudable strategies.

䷝ Right Now

Those processes of exploration can be very demanding undertakings. Works of art are typically the expressions or the echoes of the transformations that artists have gone through. Ideally, the media encapsulate those experiences and convey their intelligence in such a way that they not only have value for the artists and their audience, but serve the betterment of the whole of humanity. Ultimately, they reflect all the wisdom the creators have gained on their unique path.

Nowadays, the internet and technology in general make an unbelievably wide range of such contents available. Hard-won lessons resulting from the investment of countless hours of painstaking efforts and personal sacrifice can be obtained in just a few clicks. And while it

is a commendable achievement in itself, this state of affairs also opens the door to cultures wherein something fundamental and valuable is lost, namely, the notion that experiences are privileges that must be earned.

Through virtual environments, all sorts of restrictions become readily circumventable, and the temptation to access everything immediately is all the more harder to resist. In those contexts, it seems natural to rationalize the entire ecosystem into a paradigm where creators are providers of media files that have little incremental production cost, and thus where, as long as bandwidth is paid for, infringements are victimless crimes. In commodifying what are essentially perceptual, aesthetical, and spiritual experiences, their meaning and purpose are potentially obscured.

Consequently, and paradoxically, in an epoch of unprecedented, and often unbridled, availability of artistic material, the whole question of why people seek those experiences is overshadowed, and the answer simplified to banalities whereby all distinctions of function and value are blurred into the concept of entertainment. Furthermore, it appears that many mediavores don't know how to recognize which experiences to favour, just like many people ostensibly don't know which food is healthiest. Along similar lines, during a conversation on a social network earlier this year, it came as a surprise for me to discover that a contact of mine, an experienced and prolific musician, had manifestly not the slightest idea of why he and others were making music.

However, the crux of the matter is that the purpose of artists is not to sell physical or digital supports, but it is rather to create repeatable and hopefully enlightening experiences. And likewise, what the audience members acquire are not such supports, but the privilege to undergo those experiences, and hence to benefit from them. Understandably, in an attempt to spend enjoyable moments, one can overlook the fact that works of art convey intelligence, and require an investment of attention. And while convenience combined with infringements obviously allows one to be exposed to all they want, when they want, this nonetheless does not ensure that they will become aware of what they need to be aware of, when they need to be aware of it.

That is to say, because of the necessity of personal growth, and the limits of attention, the experience one wants might not be the most appropriate for them. For instance, trying to access too soon a certain intelligence whose signification one cannot properly grasp probably constitutes a waste of attention, and seeking to relive lessons already outgrown is plausibly not the most constructive use of one's energy.

Still, for personal development to be achievable, at all times, what is most suitable for one's growth must be available in the present moment. And for personal development to be achieved, this option must be chosen without injuring oneness in the proceedings.

In this perspective, the restrictions that one is confronted with are never arbitrary, but

are rather the expressions of the intelligence of the underlying oneness which in this manner ensures that one can receive what they need. And therefore, in duly earning the privilege of an experience, one likely obtains the intelligence that better corresponds to the conditions of their progress at that particular time.

䷷ Map of the Problematique

Over the last decade or so, illegal file sharing has manifestly become widespread, and the overall magnitude of the infringements hints that they might be the echoes of a deeper problem. Perhaps an examination of the context from which the phenomenon has emerged can provide a better understanding of the state of affairs.

In my view, the prevalence of illegal file sharing is indicative of a collectivity plagued by the excesses of individualism. It is an unmistakable sign that the everyone for themselves approach is rampant, covertly if not overtly. It is the reflection of a well-meaning culture that publicly acknowledges the necessity of self-improvement, yet has still not learned to refrain from undermining itself when no one is watching. It is the logical consequence of a system that promotes having over being, wherein possessions are given more value than strength of character or nobility of purpose, and whereby adherents are incited to believe in an illusory freedom that purportedly comes from material wealth, rather than being educated in the art of liberation that results from self-betterment. It is the symptom of an ideology that rewards short-term thinking, favours competition over collaboration, and celebrates celebrity for its own sake. And ultimately, it is the stigma of a society that idealizes a world of separateness, which oneness suggests cannot exist.

While there was undoubtedly a time when a movement towards individualism was the appropriate reaction to the circumstances, it would appear that this phase of the evolution of civilization is reaching its natural completion. Not that individuals have to yield to absolute monarchies, dictatorships, token democracies, or generally grant to governments the powers to interfere at levels where they would override individual rights and responsibilities. On the contrary, the gains of the recent years must be consolidated, and the proper autonomy of the individual must be asserted, particularly where it is still being debated, decreased, or denied. However, concurrently, it is crucial to avoid going too far and overstepping the boundaries of what is beneficial in the name of the principle of individual liberty.

As humanity grows increasingly aware of itself through the world wide web, the global culture is gradually awakening to some of its inherent contradictions. People come to realize that there's a point past which the individualistic attitude becomes inconsistent with human nature, which is social in its essence. Regardless of how tempting it might be to rid oneself of the seemingly arbitrary authority of law, or of what looks like the ideological interference of governance, or even of the ostensibly dogmatic influence of religion, one must nevertheless remain mindful that those factors are all expressions of the underlying continuum. In other

words, if the interventions of such institutions actually prevent human beings from harming one another, from harming themselves, and from becoming the victims of the culture they would prefer to implement, then presumably, a degree of interventionism is precisely what is required.

Because of the foundational role of oneness, every gain in individual independence that comes at the expense of this unbrokenness is in fact a loss that leads to situations wherein progress is effectively more difficult. As a result, conceivably, the extremes of individualism eventually engender the conditions of their own demise. The more a system encourages the approach of everyone for themselves, the more its partisans impoverish their milieu as they help themselves rather than helping one another, the less their milieu can afford to support them, and the more cooperation with their milieu becomes a necessity, manifestly defeating the whole point of self-reliance.

This essay frequently references cancer, and using the disease as a metaphor for illegal file sharing is obviously not accidental. It constitutes an apt allegory for the individual who, in their quest to obtain more intelligence, autonomy, and creative power, exceeds the limits of what serves their own cause. Their unregulated appetite turns them into a stealthy drain of energy that undermines the society of which they are a functional part. Yet perhaps more significantly, the illness represents not so much the offenders themselves nor their violations, but the mentality that makes the infringements appear justifiable, that very same mentality that is likely at the source of many other unsatisfying aspects of the current global state of affairs.

Evidently, the great recession that has been affecting the world since December 2007 is not attributable to illegal file sharing alone. However, the same mindset that motivates such illicit activities could very well be a determining factor of the financial crisis that is probably at the origin of the downturn. While I want it all and I want it now is a compelling formula insofar as lyrics for rock anthems are concerned, it could also work as the infamous credo of the takers economy that characterizes the global social landscape. If the credit bubble and its collapse can be imputed to the voracity of both the borrowers and their lenders, considering the ongoing aftermaths of the crash, there are clearly more adequate strategies than that of impatient, unbridled acquisitiveness, not only in terms of improving the collective situation, but also one's own.

That same attitude is reflected in various other circumstances. For instance, it can be observed on the social web wherein, although more communication tools than ever before in history are available, communication itself is not necessarily improved. When censoring and banning require only a click or two, then it becomes tempting to proceed in order to win an argument, or to avoid what are perceived as annoyances. Whenever the channels are being used without due consideration for what they actually stand for, in order to serve the aims of the individual, then communication is hindered, and something is lost.

> *« In countries and epochs in which communication is impeded, soon all other liberties wither; discussion dies by inanition, ignorance of the opinion of others becomes rampant, imposed opinions triumph. »*
>
> [source : Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*]

Hence, it seems that in this context also, ironically, instead of leading to enhancements in how one relates to their milieu and in what they gain from the interactions, individualism that is not counterbalanced by genuine regard for others creates conditions exactly opposite to those it aims to attract. Peculiarly enough, it can even warrant curtailing of the freedom of speech, in the name of individual liberty.

Therefore, all in all, although not completely worthless, individualism is by no means the panacea that cures all the ills of being. In my view, its relevance mostly resides in how it emphasizes the necessity of developing one's skills and talents, and in how it contributes to better delineate the rights and responsibilities of the individual versus those of society. Still, when pushed to its extremes, it fosters illusory values that are not rooted in the underlying reality of the oneness of all existence. When unrestrained by an understanding of the truth of the inherent interconnectedness of all individuals, it damages the social fabric and makes progress harder for everyone. And when it is allowed to devolve into a prevalent everyone for themselves approach, it promotes the temporary enrichment of a small number of people at the cost of the impoverishment of all the others, which utterly defeats its point inasmuch as it recreates a structure wherein the vast majority of individuals are subjected to the power of the few, and moreover have little institutional control over them because of the way in which they have been allowed to worm themselves into the backbones of society.

An author in need of a dystopian scenario to justify the subjugation of the masses in a civilization gone wrong would merely have to portray a few influential individuals inclined to exploit others for the sake of profit, and tell the story of how they have planted the ideals of individualism in the collective consciousness, in an attempt to solve the difficult part of the divide and conquer equation. Thus, despite advocating individual freedom, the baddies would in fact pave the way for a covert dictatorship wherein the masses would readily sacrifice the strength of their solidarity for the promises of individual independence, which ultimately can only be relative and bounded by the requirements of oneness.

Nonetheless, such a script would itself overlook the actuality of the unbrokenness that gives rise to all things. Back in the real world, the deplorable state of affairs would not be the Machiavellian feat of a handful of unscrupulous individuals, as much as the reflection of the attitude of the masses themselves, and the consequence of a global culture that has reached a turning point.

䷷ Carry On Wayward Son

Although it seems that in certain regions of the world, for example where democracy isn't properly implemented yet, movements that claim increased autonomy of the individual and respect of human rights must retain their strength, in other areas, the boundaries of the benefits of individualism have already been overstepped.

The global social landscape suggests that humanity is confronted with the upshots of systems that mirror the individualistic mindset, instead of corresponding to the reality of the underlying oneness of all that exists. As a result, those organizations must be adapted so that that they accord to this continuum and serve its requisites. It appears unavoidable that the collectivity must rebel against those institutions until the reforms have been duly carried out, lest it destines itself to repeat cycles of growth and decline whereby similar structures keep being recreated under various guises, always at the disadvantage of the individual.

Hence, it is individualism itself that must yield, but not to its byproducts. Rather, it has to surrender to the more fundamental ethics of oneness. The global culture has to conciliate the rights and responsibilities of the individual with the implications of oneness. This means that symbiosis between individuals, communities, and nations, must be fostered, and so must their endosymbiotic relationships to the larger entities of which they are constituents, such as the ecology of the entire planet. In terms of the hierarchy of superorganisms, the cells, the organs, and the systems, must acknowledge and accept that they are components of greater wholes, and that the affiliations entail that the needs of those greater entities hold as much priority as their own.

Therefore, ultimately, individualism must give way to humanity itself, both the quality and the ensemble. The part must admit that, although the whole and the part have influence over their joint fate, as long as the requirements of the whole are not met, the part will have to undergo the repercussions in one form or another. In the same manner, individuals must recognize that they are accountable to others as well as to society, and that their satisfaction is intrinsically linked to those of their peers. Nevertheless, complying for the sake of blindly following rules, obsequiously bowing to authority, or resigning oneself to the dictatorship of economics, would be missing the point. On the contrary, the motivations for conforming to the demands of oneness reside in how this represents the shortest path to both personal and collective objectives, facilitating achievements without causing adverse effects that manifest themselves as global crises, catastrophes, or ideological monsters and their proponents.

The beauty of the phenomenon of oneness is probably most strikingly revealed in how the implementation of the necessary global changes amounts first and foremost to bringing internal changes at the level of the individual. As people eschew the everyone for themselves mentality, cease to adhere to individualistic ideologies, refuse to pursue egocentric aims that harm parts of society, and resist being driven by selfish urges, their interactions will undergo

transformations that will find their echoes in the world at large. Alternatively phrased, it is their interconnectedness itself that will be positively impacted by what indeed constitute as many expressions of increased respect towards it. In turn, this movement towards oneness will likely be reflected in all of its aspects.

When the global circumstances apparently conspire so that individuals must entertain a mindset whereby, in order to find the energy to go on participating in a system, they have to pretend that there is no better approach, and that the system will recover on its own, as if magically, even if no one alters their ways, least of all themselves, then, plausibly, breaking down is actually the responsible response, after which the realization that it is the mindset that should be shed can come naturally. Once this has occurred, genuine transformation can take place, beginning with the acknowledgement that it is not possible for the individual to enter into society to further their own interests, without taking the interests of society into consideration, just as the cell cannot ignore the needs of its peers and of the organ of which it is a component without experiencing the repercussions of its self-centredness.

Conceivably, what those external conditions are effectively indicating is that time has come for people to learn to work together, not only at the individual level, but at every level. What the global landscape asserts is that global issues cannot be properly addressed from an individualistic perspective, and that they must be dealt with from a global perspective. This signifies that nations too must stop advocating the everyone for themselves mentality that they favour in their policies, if not in their official discourse, and that they have to recognize and accept that sovereignty ends where relationships with the whole start. Just like there is only one Earth, one atmosphere, and just as all the waters of the world flow into each other, the fate of nations are inextricably entwined. While this manifestly encompasses ecological concerns, the oneness of humanity further implies that no nation can ignore responsibilities towards the international community without witnessing a worsening in the overall state of affairs, which believably entails inland consequences, for instance in terms of commerce.

In the same manner that individuals must adjust their mindsets to the requirements of the underlying continuum that unites them all, nations must also adapt their policies to the necessities of oneness. Thus, they cannot enter into the world to advance their own interests, without taking the interests of the other nations into account. Political leaders must realize that they have an obligation to ensure that each and every nation can play their part in the global symphony, as establishing a symbiosis involving all nations is the only way to secure continued and peaceful development for all. Short-term nation-centric thinking that actually displaces problems rather than solving them must be replaced by long-term, world-centric, mutually beneficial strategies, lest latent conflict be nurtured.

The increasing understanding of the collective dimension of existence brought about by the unprecedented accessibility of information, for example through the internet, calls for a corresponding paradigm shift in the global culture. It seems unavoidable that the peoples of

the Earth, knowing that they have to share common spaces and resources that are finite, will have to institute some form of central governing body. The functions of this administration would be to address the questions that cannot be answered legitimately by only a group of nations, and then to determine the appropriate policies with which every nation would align its own. This in turn suggests that international relations would have to be based on a new set of values, preferring solidarity over national progress, and that all nations would have to acknowledge the worth of helping one another, not only after catastrophes, and not only in principle, but in the bookkeeping and the indicators. In the same fashion that individuals are led to the recognition that material wealth is not the decisive factor in their liberation, there has to be an equivalent realization in the global mentality that the gross domestic product of a nation is not a measure of the quality of its growth, nor a measure of its standard of living, that itself is not an accurate reflection of the quality of life of its citizens, the improvement of which should be the ultimate objective of any government. Therefore, aggressive nationalism must also yield, not to economics and materialism, but to humanity.

Any system that promotes superficial values and illusory ideals that do not accord with human nature and the underlying oneness cannot bring forth individual freedom but merely subjugation of people to undesirable aims and the aftermaths of their pursuit. The boundary of sovereignty, where relationships with the whole start, is located in the heart of each and every one of the habitants of Earth, who must themselves bow down to their own humanity and to the necessity of integrity, if they are to be healthy and at peace. And that means that when individuals feel they must repress their individuality, or that they must trample upon one another in order to be able to express their individuality, then something is wrong with the system they adhere to. Hence, nations, in fulfilling their responsibility of ensuring that each and every one of their citizens can participate in the whole, must not foster, and even less impose, systems wherein individuals have to rely on twisted mindsets or bottles of pills in order to discharge their duties. Rather, strength of character and nobility of purpose have to be honoured, and not simply regarded as aesthetic objects, but encouraged because they lead to both personal and collective success. Indeed, they should be considered hallmarks of success insofar as the individuals who embody such qualities ultimately represent the true wealth of nations, and thus, that of the world.

䷱ Spoonful

While researching how the Golden Rule in expressed in various traditions, I discovered the allegory of the long spoons. This parable, which has become part of the folklore of several cultures, illustrates the difference between heaven and hell. It depicts people eating with long spoons, and whereas on the hell side they are starving, on the heaven side they are sated. It seems particularly appropriate to present it at this point in the essay. Hopefully, the adapted version that I propose below will convey the message as clearly as the original.

At the end of a long and prosperous life devoted to spreading his knowledge about the

proper tending of magical orchards, a man ascends to the firmaments.

He first visits Hell, and the scene he discovers there horrifies him. He can see row after row of trees, all laden with sumptuous fruits, yet the people standing around the trees all are emaciated and pale, and they moan in hunger. As he gets closer, he realizes the predicament they find themselves in. Each person can pluck fruits from the trees, but both their arms are splinted with wooden slats in such a manner that they can't bend either elbow to bring the fruits to their mouth.

Saddened by the sight, the man leaves, his heart broken by the tortured groans of the poor people who are surrounded with food but cannot consume it.

Next, the man decides to visit Heaven, and he is shocked to find the very same setting he has just witnessed in Hell. However, in sharp contrast, the people in Heaven are standing between the rows of trees, cheerfully talking with each other, manifestly not suffering from hunger. As he gets closer, he is amazed to see that there too, each person has both their arms splinted with wooden slats, preventing them from bending their elbows.

Perplexed by his observations, the man wonders how the people have managed to eat. And as he watches attentively, one of the heavenly being plucks a fruit from the nearest tree, extends his arm towards the woman next to him, and feeds her ! The grateful recipient of the kind gesture thanks the benefactor, and returns the favour by selecting a plump pome with which she proceeds to feed the other.

The man suddenly understands. Heaven and Hell offer exactly the same conditions and circumstances, but the crucial difference is in the way people treat each other.

Gladdened by the realization, the man runs back to Hell to share the solution with the poor souls trapped there. He reaches one starving man and explains to him that he does not have to go hungry, and that if he feeds his neighbour, the other will surely return the favour and feed him.

“You expect me to feed the detestable man standing at my side ?” angrily answers the hungry Hell dweller, “I would rather starve than give him the pleasure of eating !” he asserts contemptuously.

The man then realizes that even in the firmaments, the underlying oneness from which everything derives ensures that those who respect it can enjoy themselves in Heaven, while the others have to dwell in Hell.

䷝ Universal Garden

If civilization has indeed reached a turning point where it must choose between global collaboration or global decline, then perhaps it is not a coincidence that the internet should

emerge at this precise time in history. The web is manifestly one of the most important tool available to humanity in the establishment of cooperation on a worldwide scale.

And just like in the case of the miraculous orchard, because it is everyone's garden, the internet should be everyone's responsibility. This doesn't only mean playing by the rules, but also educating others, and making sure everyone understands the inestimable value of what the world wide web makes possible in terms of communication, personal development, and individual expression. Doing so will guarantee its perennity and ensure that all can benefit from its wealth.

To enjoy the fruits, one must tend to the trees. By using what is available respectfully, and by interacting in a constructive manner, everyone can do their part and help bring more beauty into the world.

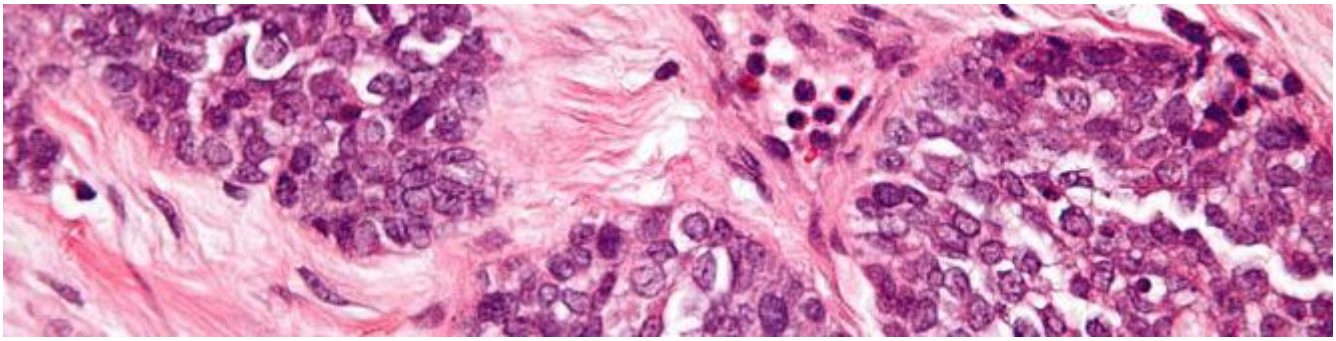
䷝ New State of Mind

Hopefully, the ways in which illegal file sharing might affect the personal sphere of the offenders as well as the collectivity have been sufficiently well illustrated, so that it is clear to the reader that any advantage coming from committing such misdemeanours will always be negated by their aftermaths.

Likewise, I trust that the necessity of transformations in individual mentalities and the global culture in order to bring about continued and peaceful growth for everyone has been duly demonstrated.

In the last chapter, I will suggest avenues for improving the technological state of play, and highlight some of the initiatives that currently foster, or could eventually promote, more cooperation at the global level. Finally, I will propose the basis of a philosophy that accords with the ethics of oneness, and I will provide examples of how it could be applied in various fields, before concluding the essay.

69



6. Alternatives Rock

䷀ Deus Ex Machina

In my opinion, considering the reality of the underlying oneness, illegal file sharing is essentially a reflection of the egocentric tendencies of human beings. Therefore, while there is perhaps no definitive solution to the problems that those activities pose, the state of play can nevertheless be improved so as to decrease the overall magnitude of the infringements.

Just like there is ultimately no physical foolproof way to guard the trees of an orchard from thieves, technology cannot provide some uncircumventable means of protecting digital content from illegal sharing. Obviously, as long as a media file can be played on a computer, then the playback can be recorded and saved in a format that allows unrestricted access, and the resulting file can thus be distributed freely, regardless of the original barriers.

However, technology can certainly be put to good use in related areas, and supply tools that make identification, moderation, education, and incitation simpler. Intervention in these four areas manifestly accommodate the unbrokenness by helping people to avoid committing misdemeanours, and moreover equipping them to participate positively in the ecosystem, so it looks as if it could indeed contribute to enhance the situation.

For one, video sharing sites and media file hosts could implement verification methods, similar to that of a popular micro-blogging service, through which official channels could be authenticated and appropriately badged. This would make identification of legit material all the more easier, and hence prevent a significant quantity of violations. In the same fashion, creations added by verified sources could also be marked in players when shared.

Whereas the staff of such sites cannot monitor themselves all the contents uploaded to their servers, users could nonetheless be enabled to do so. For instance, each and every user, and not merely the rightsholders, could be given the option of reporting potentially unlawful material. After a number of reports, channel owners would be notified and offered the chance to justify the questionable uploads, or educated and eventually penalized should they fail to evidence their legitimacy. Another approach would be to train some users, and to grant them the privilege of moderating newly added media files. In order to preclude abuse, and evaluate the reliability of the moderators, every new file uploaded by an unverified source would need

to receive enough approvals before it is permitted to go live. One motivation for becoming a moderator would be to experience new creations ahead of everyone else.

Likewise, media sharing websites could provide readily sharable educational resources to which their community of users could refer and link as required in their interactions with offenders. The materials could include site rules, relevant excerpts from copyright laws, and present the consequences of the infractions, not only in terms of further participation in the activities of the site, but also with regard to their impacts on society at large. Therefore, the community could discourage illicit uses, and moreover promote a rationale that encourages constructive and respectful enjoyment of collective spaces. Along these lines, internet service providers could be involved in this educational task force, and asked to supply clear, as in not easily ignorable, information to new clients as part of the sign up process, and to infringers upon notification of their misdemeanours.

Lastly, as hinted in the introduction to this essay, technology can definitely be applied to the implementation of management systems that handle automatic accounting, making it possible to develop services that reward those sharers who play by the rules with monetary incentives, thus contributing to the reduction of piracy, and helping artists in a consensual manner. Considering the important increases in levels of adoption of social networks in the recent years, it seems that such solutions could achieve substantial success nowadays.

And Justice for All

Seeing how the internet manifestly transcends the concept of international boundaries, the harmonization of copyright laws around the world appears to be necessary in the aim of addressing the problems of piracy and illegal file sharing. Otherwise, even if there remained only one rogue state, it would theoretically be enough to provide a loophole through which wrongdoers could carry on their damaging activities, although the delinquent country would probably be soon denounced and pressured by its peers. In the prospect of improved global cooperation, this is an excellent illustration of a domain wherein solidarity should supersede sovereignty, for the sake of the common good.

The WIPO, the World Intellectual Property Organization, is a specialized agency of the United Nations whose mission is to encourage creative activity, and promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world. One of its tasks is to further the development and harmonization of intellectual property law amongst its 185 member states. In the United States, the Digital Millennium Copyright Act is an implementation of certain of the treaties administrated by the WIPO. The Copyright Directive is an equivalent in the European Union, that led to various enactments from its members. This agency looks set to bring about much needed changes in the field of copyright enforcement, and hopefully more of the signatories of the treaties it manages will enact appropriate legislation in the near future. Still, ensuring that the public interest is reflected in those laws is the responsibility of the citizens, and of

the advocacy groups representing them.

Given how, just like water and the atmosphere, the internet is intrinsically a common resource, perhaps a complementary measure could be implemented. Conceivably, from the perspective of the law at least, cyberspace could be considered a republic, wherein rules and regulations are uniform, regardless of the location of servers and users. For one, this would make the existence of safe harbours for pirate sites impossible. Because of its pervasiveness and its nature as an instrument of communication and exchange, this virtual zone seems to be the perfect candidate to become a global property. It could be placed under the custody of the United Nations, presumably the UNESCO, or another of its agencies, to guarantee that it stays freely accessible to everyone, and never falls under the control of corporations, nor of a handful of nations. Alternatively, it could have a government of its own, pretty much as any other commonwealth, and as such, it could be the structure from which a first attempt at a global governance of a world resource could emerge. This would also allow netizens to have a direct say in its evolution, and exert influence on how adapted it is to their rights and needs.

Necessarily, the custodians or the governing body of this common property would be invested with the powers to enforce its laws internationally, either with the cooperation of existing local organizations, or through a work force specifically created to handle the tasks. Furthermore, the authority in charge of the internet could collaborate with internet service providers around the world in the implementation of a graduated response protocol, which appears to be an effective and fair method of reducing illegal file sharing. Also known as the three strikes policy, this procedure requires providers to throttle, or temporarily suspend, or disconnect access to infringers upon their third violation in a certain period.

䷝ Brave New World

The implications of oneness call for a shift in mentalities, not only within the scope of illegal file sharing and its aftermaths, but beyond, so as to encompass all activities. So as to promote increasing harmony with this underlying continuum, the transformation must take people away from individualistic tendencies, and guide them towards ethics that are rooted in the acknowledgement that all existing things appear interconnected for the simple reason that they are different aspects of one and the same being.

Therefore, in order to experience prosperous progress, humanity must strive to foster a global culture based on values that reflect the actuality of this being. Individuals have to be encouraged to care for this entity in its many manifestations, be they physical or psychical. In other words, a new mindset must be favoured wherein actions, words, and even thoughts must express respect towards this being, whether one is interacting with it through people, or things, or places, and even in spirit. Plausibly, the maths are deceptively straightforward. When one harms oneness, the whole suffers. When one serve oneness, the whole profits.

I am not quite convinced that naming such a philosophy, turning it into an ism, is the

cleverest approach at this point. Nevertheless, it seems worthwhile to mention symbioism, which could be presented as a refinement of individualism wherein individuals can further their own interests, but only insofar as they do not hurt oneness in the process. In this moral stance, individual goals can serve the betterment of individuals, as long as they also serve the betterment of their peers. That is to say, when individuals enter society, they must take the interests of society into consideration, and not just their own. Obviously, individuals can still oppose institutions and external influences, however they must do so in accordance with the ethics of oneness, which means that they have to respect the people involved, and that the resulting situation has to benefit the collectivity, and not merely themselves.

Building on this foundation, I propose a philosophy of endosymbiotism, to underscore the importance of ecology, and to stress the pervasiveness of the greater being that expresses itself in all manifestations, and not only through people. In this school of thought, individual goals have to serve not only the person and their peers, but must also meet to the requisites of the greater entities of which the person is a constituent, such as the ecology of the planet. Hence, when individuals interact with the world, they have to take the interests of the world into consideration.

In the remaining sections, I will try to illustrate how endosymbiotism would translate into various domains of human activity.

䷚ Sleep Walk

First, in the aim of drawing distinctions between what might harm oneness, and what might serve it, I will relate a few observations pertaining to oversleeping. To the best of my understanding, the intelligence of the oneness would like me to get up and out of bed as soon as I wake up. However, I have this habit of remaining under the covers for a while, to enjoy the warmth and reflect upon current concerns, which frequently leads to another period of sleep. Whenever my consciousness is thus suspended for too long, consistently, my computer stops functioning properly for some time when I finally start to work. Perhaps the operating system behaves erratically, or a specific and especially needed application stops responding, or other similar annoyances occur. Given reciprocity, according to which one undergoes an equivalent of what they offer to others, I have come to recognize that, through such bothers, the intelligence of the underlying continuum is hoping to make me realize that it cannot use me as it would like to in those occasions, just like I cannot use my computer as I wish to. In religious terms, this would be a sin of sloth, whereby one wastes time that could have been employed to help the collectivity, and had conceivably been planned for a particular purpose.

On these grounds, I would advance that using substances such as recreational drugs and alcohol, which impair the normal activity of the mind, causes comparable problems, and is ultimately detrimental to oneness, as well as to the consumers. Therefore, any activity that assists in the distribution, and plausibly the promotion as well, of substances of this kind is

damaging to the whole. Although ostensibly symbiotic to some, the relationships wouldn't agree with endosymbiotism. Nonetheless, this doesn't imply that the people involved should not be helped at all, quite the contrary in fact.

䷓ I Won't Back Down

In the arena of social transformation, in my own experience, every attempt at bringing forth change that was not backed with complete compliance with the ethics of oneness has failed to meet the totality of its objectives. In contrast, those undertakings which have been properly sustained by the required conduct have been successful. In other words, outcomes depend on the degree in which one respects oneness, not only during actions, but also until one becomes aware of their results. In some contexts, electoral races for instance, this means that efforts might be completely negated by one's own wrongdoing. In practice, this can be observed in various situations, for example when demonstrators have recourse to violence or instigate riots, when politicians resort to personal attacks, or when activist factions quarrel between themselves. Such behaviour generally turns against the participants and the causes they defend. The endosymbiotistic view suggests that demands which serve the development of the whole, are asserted firmly yet with regard for all parties involved, are supported by the people when called to participation, and meet the requisites of the institutions, will likely be rewarded with proper consideration and eventually produce the desired effects. Progressive minded people should therefore endeavour to educate and mobilize instead of condemning and polarizing, avoid violations against oneness, and particularly eschew the tactics of their adversaries when they employ questionable methods.

䷓ Three of a Perfect Pair

In my experience of the world wide web, the duplication of channels, communities, and projects, to the point of redundancy, appears to be a feature of the territory, in general if not as a rule. In the context of endosymbiotism, this raises the question of the value of diversity versus that of solidarity. While writing the present essay, I developed the habit of consulting the I Ching on a daily basis, via the site linked below. One particular morning, chapter 8 was suggested by the Oracle as an answer to my interrogation regarding the flavour of the day to come. The following quote stood out as relevant to the reflection :

> *« If a man has recognized the necessity for union and does not feel strong enough to function as the center, it is his duty to become a member of some other organic fellowship. »*

[source : Ask the Oracle, *Holding Together*]

The internet makes it somewhat easy, or at least possible, to create groups and forums even though there are already various equivalents in existence. Similarly, forking projects is relatively simple at the current state of technology. In theory, this implies that the offering

increases, and that a greater range of experiences is available. However, in practice, this can translate into barely active social networks, and unfinished or derelict software. Moreover, such occurrences of duplication are often indicative of schisms in communities. Ultimately, in many of those instances, neither diversity nor solidarity are actually served. The power in numbers is reduced, the social fabric is undermined by the communication breakdowns, and innovation is delayed or compromised. Presumably, this is an echo of individualism wherein leading is perceived as more laudable than assisting, and having things one's way is deemed preferable to interacting harmoniously. In contrast, it seems that a culture which recognizes the worth of participating as a member would improve its capacity to bring forth diversity that works.

䷝ Show Me the Way

Considering the current circumstances characterized by widespread illegal file sharing and piracy, and their unfortunate consequences, the idea of an endosymbiotistic ecosystem wherein art is not only allowed to flourish, but is acknowledged as one of the cornerstones of the development of society, appears especially appropriate. The recent years, despite all their wrongs, have provided a few hints at some of the features of such an environment. For one, it would favour direct interactions between artists and enthusiasts. Those relationships would mainly be motivated by a genuine community of interests rather than by commerce, and the symbiosis would be based on the necessity of self-betterment. The artists would function as pathfinders who would present expressions of human nature as tools for self-understanding, sources of inspiration, and templates for creating ever refining futures. In return, enthusiasts would support the artists in order to protect their integrity against possibly biasing external influences, such as institutions and corporations, and to enable them to progress ahead and explore the territory. Thus, another distinctive component of this interdependence would be crowd funding, via which many artists are already given the means of fulfilling their mission, and that will hopefully grow from an emerging trend into a permanent fixture of the cultural landscape. One of the merits of this financing method is to afford artists freedom to operate without risk of seeing their work compromised by the interventions of an intermediary, for instance a record label, therefore increasing the chances that the resulting productions will meet the needs of the audience. Plausibly, this environment would promote the removal of some of the filters, deliberate or structural, that skew or obstruct the messages that certain works of art would otherwise communicate. In this fashion, it would encourage authenticity and originality, as impracticable creations would be made feasible. For the ecosystem to be endosymbiotistic, the artists would have to align their output with the ethics of oneness, and hence foster corresponding ideals and propose advancements that accord with its principles. In turn, the collectivity would benefit as the enthusiasts would conceivably be prompted to uphold those values, and would then propagate them through their interactions with others, leading to a truly efficient society that recognizes and comply with the actual conditions of human beings, their inherent interconnectedness, and their situations and functions within

the greater whole.

For my own part, I don't care as much for possessions as for the instruments and the resources required to realize my visions and bring them into the world. In fact, many of the things I own constitute encumbrances with regard to the creative process, inasmuch as they demand maintenance time and energy that I would prefer to dedicate to creation. I suspect that many other artists share this perspective.

䷀ Faithfully

The question of religion seems like a particularly interesting one. From the perspective of individualism, any figure of authority is potentially an interference, or an impediment that restricts independence, and which must be belittled or even eliminated. In my opinion, this is the main motivation behind movements against established religions. However, whether or not such institutions are authoritarian is in fact a matter of attitude towards them, and not one of essence. In other words, as long as one apprehends them as organizations whose aim is to impose their belief system, then one will probably perceive their adherents as arrogant advocates, or their blind followers. In contrast, if one approaches them as valuable sources of knowledge about life transmitted from generation to generation, then interactions with their representatives will likely be more profitable, not to mention less conflictual. From the point of view of endosymbiotism, most if not all religious traditions provide extensive instructions on how to relate with oneness in mutually beneficial manners. They typically promote values that accord with the ethics of the underlying unbrokenness, such as compassion, forgiveness, kindness, and reciprocity. Furthermore, they generally teach methods of harmonizing oneself with oneness, for example by means of worship, prayer, meditation, or similar rituals. That's not to say that all their disciples have reached perfection or are above wrongdoing, but still, those customs exemplify the preservation and fostering of oneness. Consequently, attempts to expel religious institutions, or their activities, or their expressions, from one's reality, will plausibly harm the unifying continuum, most of the time if not systematically, and will thus impoverish one's existence. Conversely, an inclusive disposition, or at the very least sufficient tolerance, and a genuine curiosity about what those organizations and their manifestations stand for and the wisdom they perpetuate, will agree with oneness, and by the same token enrich one's life, if only in terms of increased access to cultural diversity.

䷀ The Mystical Potato Head Groove Thing

With regard to alimentation, endosymbiotism implies veganism, on the rationale that destroying or harming life necessarily violates oneness. This does not only mean eschewing meat, poultry, and seafood, but also any food obtained through the exploitation of animals, like dairy products, eggs, and honey. Following the same logic, plants that must be killed to be harvested, by opposition to those whose fruits are picked, or to those that are harvested at the end of their life cycle, should be avoided too. Hence, while vegetables such as potatoes,

carrots, and onions, should be shunned because they must be uprooted in order to be eaten, cereals do not pose this problem. Presumably, Jain vegetarianism, which is founded on the concept of Ahiṃsā, the avoidance of violence against all living things, constitutes a thorough implementation of these principles. Beyond dietary concerns, adherence to ethical veganism, that is to say, rejecting the use of animal products, for instance leather, fur, or wool, for any purpose, would be called for as well.

䷀ Big Money

In the area of economics, the trend favouring sustainable development and responsible management of renewable resources is obviously endosymbiotistic. While more exploitative, short-term approaches can deplete natural resources to cater to the demands of the markets without addressing the needs of the ecology, long-term, considerate strategies that are based on collaboration with the environment ensure its perennity, and that of the sources of wealth it supplies.

An endosymbiotistic banking system would require that its profits be distributed to all citizens, and not only to a limited number of shareholders. This suggests a structure wherein banks are owned and operated by nations, rather than by private interests. Moreover, banks would have to adhere to the ethical banking philosophy, also known as sustainable banking, so as to implement social and environmental responsibility in their investment policies. This seems particularly relevant if individuals are to be offered the means of respecting oneness in matters of personal finances. Given that banking has become an essential service and that a majority of people cannot function without such intermediaries, having no option other than to use privately owned banks, whose objectives might not always accord with the underlying unbrokenness, for instance if they first and foremost serve the interests of their shareholders, possibly place certain persons in a situation where they have little alternative but to be liable towards the underlying continuum through their transactions involving those institutions. In contrast, banks administered by nations could ensure preferential conditions to their citizens, notably in terms of mortgages. They would therefore likely attract significant financial flows, and the resulting profits could go directly to the coffers of the state, benefiting the whole of the population. In addition, branches would plausibly be more sensitive to the specific needs of regions.

Along the same lines, but at the international scale, whereas borrowing and repayment between nations is presumably always symbiotic, it might not always be in accord with the ethics of oneness. As an illustration, one can imagine a republic that has accumulated great power through a combination of cheap labour, large population, frequent disregard of human rights, neglect of environmental protection laws, absence of effective democracy, and forceful annexation of some of its neighbours. Should such a country rise to prominence in the global economy, so that several other states would become indebted to it, then those states would find themselves in a plight where they would have to contribute to harming the whole if they

wanted to repay the dishonourable lender. In other words, they wouldn't have the option to meet their obligations in an endosymbiotistic manner. However, the law could be amended to comply with the underlying mechanics of the world, for example via a clause that would allow countries to default on their debts to their peers that don't satisfy certain standards in human rights protection or environmental management. Thus, the value of the integrity of the whole would be favoured over that of the advancement of nations.

What a Wonderful World

While there are already initiatives that promote global development objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals formulated by the United Nations, and meetings of the Group of Twenty, humanity has yet to give itself a permanent institution whose mission is to determine and enforce a global development strategy. In light of oneness, the establishment of an organization that harmonizes the growth of nations so that they combine into positive contributions that benefit the entire civilization appears imperative.

This administration would reflect the interests of each and every state, and necessarily, in an endosymbiotistic approach, it would also be charged with the responsibility of ensuring that its policies and directives accord with the requisites of the ecology.

The existence of a global council of this sort seems especially relevant to supervise the management of common natural resources, notably water and the atmosphere, so as to avoid situations wherein some countries could use their economic power to control the availability of those resources, therefore potentially impinging on the right to life that is asserted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This would enable the central governing authority to secure breathable air and drinkable water for every human being.

Give a Little Bit

> *« Whate'er of us lives in the hearts of others*
>
> *Is our truest and profoundest self. »*
>
> [source : Johann Gottfried Herder]

In conclusion, if the ongoing crises which characterize the global landscape are indeed the reflections of a culture that encourages self-centred approaches to life in society, then it seems that a movement towards altruism and magnanimity could provide a way out of this takers economy.

Should more individuals tend towards the values of endosymbiotism, whether or not they are successful at implementing the philosophy in a strict manner, overly individualistic mentalities would gradually wane, people would be inspired to give more to the world than they take from it, and ultimately global prosperity would return, plausibly quite rapidly.

Perhaps some of the major economies could lead the way by forgiving a portion of the debts owed to them by some of the nations that are hit most heavily by the crises ?

Beyond the justifications, illegal file sharing is damaging to the infringers, the artistic ecosystem, and as a result, the whole of society. Just as a cancer, it is parasitical. However, the analogy doesn't mean that there is no cure for the problem.

In the context of oneness, and of the reciprocity it entails, individualism is possibly the worst stance to adopt, as it is choosing to have others treat oneself without consideration.

Presenting individualism in purely abstract terms renders its fundamental flaw evident. Structures built upon its principles cannot be systematically combined with one another to create a coherent greater whole, because, intrinsically, individualistic structures don't take other structures into consideration.

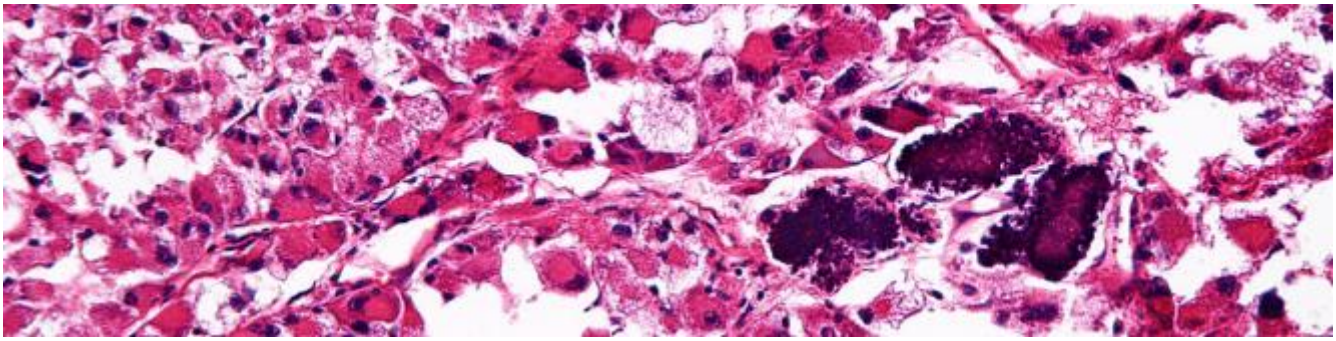
In contrast, endosymbiotistic structures naturally combine with one another, and thus can constitute building blocks using which coherent, harmonious wholes of ever increasing magnitude and complexity can be constructed, because, inherently, they take the requisites of the larger entities with which they unite into consideration.

Therefore it appears that, for humanity to prosper in a manner that is peaceful and fair for everyone, endosymbiotistic approaches are to be favoured, at every level, be it individual, national, global, or otherwise.

䷀ Encore

This concludes the formal part of this essay. In the remaining pages you will find verses related to some of the topics explored earlier, links, credits, a disclaimer, a short biography of the author along with contact information and details about some of his other publications, and the license under which this document is released.

69



7. Verses

䷀ The Mechanics of Miraculous Vigilant Outgrowing

This chapter presents four poems written between the summers of 2010 and 2012, and which all illustrate some of the matters discussed in the essay.

« *The Mechanics of Karma* » offers a look at self-betterment from the point of view of the individual who is discovering the function of restrictions, and how they allow one to shed the misconceptions and illusory objectives that forbid them from reaching a more enjoyable world.

Penned to accompany a lyricless piece intended for a string quartet and several others acoustic instruments, « *Asking for a Miracle* » was finished a few weeks prior to starting the redaction of the essay. It comprises two distinct movements, the first of which hints at how plights are an essential element of the human condition. The stanzas of the second passage address the concern that motivated the inquiry, illegal file sharing in the context of oneness, and suggest that the solutions to individual predicaments reside in an approach that seeks to unite rather than to separate. The title « *Takers Economy* » is taken from this poem.

« *Vigilance* » was also written as a complement to an instrumental composition. Using the metaphor of an equilibrist crossing a chasm, it depicts the experience of a person nearing the completion of a long-drawn and demanding undertaking, and highlights the importance of remaining wakeful and disciplined during those crucial periods, until consummation and realization of the desired outcome. It corresponds to the parable told in chapter 5 under the heading « *Best of Both Worlds.* »

The last of the four pieces, « *Outgrow*, » attempts to summarize what is plausibly the most productive attitude towards limitations, as proposed in the section titled « *The Shackles of the Spirit* » of the fourth chapter.

The Mechanics of Karma

How long have I hankered
For the right way to go
How far have I wandered
To know what I now know

Laying under the moon
Rising up with the crow
And the wail of the loon
In the rain or the glow

How many ups and downs
I had to lose the count
Just as with forms and nouns
To keep climbing the mount

How many times I slipped
Escaping restriction
Expecting to be tripped
By disguised protection

To hell and back again
I journeyed so often
The tempter of his den
Titled me denizen

And all the times I yelled
At the gates of heaven
Why was freedom withheld
Why were no signs given

Through trials I learned the laws
Governing ascension
And got rid of the flaws
Hampering progression

Never I thought I'd shed
This world that never was
Yet where my path has led
Suddenly there I was

Trembling on highwire
Goaded under duress
Across straits so dire
That I had to witness

Known doors becoming walls
So walls could reveal doors
To magnificent halls
And infallible floors

䷢ Asking for a Miracle

sister Jo is in tears
her best friend died on her
after so many years
lost her fight to cancer
the ghost rings at her door
seeing no one out there
she crumbles to the floor
please spare her from despair

brother Bill generous
shares his blessings daily
though strong and courageous
he sometimes grows weary
routine never ceasing
hasn't he earned reprieve
must his words keep paving
the return of his Eve

on his own poor Kerry
wants to move overseas
to join his friends merry
and once more be at ease
can't you extend his range
of creativity
so he can bring the change
he's so yearning to see

and Peter is dismayed
by his circumstances
all his efforts unpaid
never bring his chances
lightworking all day long
good deed after good deed
little he does is wrong
why shouldn't he be freed

Alysson is in hell
or so suggests his name
a boy meaning so well
why should he miss the aim
hankering for a break
from his predicament
why can't he, for his sake
find steady employment

Persephone is flawed
or so she seems to think
why couldn't she be awed
and recognize the link
in how failings define
perfect trajectories
designed to intertwine
and resolve the stories

Kimmie is yet buzzing
planning for this and that
always multitasking
she wears more than one hat
isn't she deserving
for all her energy
why can't she be reaping
the desired synergy

and Gary is teaching
inimitable voice
that of heaven reaching
we have to make the choice
the mystery within
hints at the solution
the answers lie therein
pray confirm his vision

Eloura is upset
in her understanding
she is right on target
so she shuns the warning
blind as to the error
that causes her illness
she shoots the messenger
save her from this darkness

Eva too is lonely
upsurges of anger
and sudden enmity
are nothing to help her
in her soul restlessness
friends coming and leaving
can't you in your kindness
grant the peace she's craving

Chris is often tired
undertaking the vow
a pure land required
in the here and the now
an eight-year wide desert
whirlwind of creation
can't you with him concert
and back his solution

the church of the joyful
has for only dogma
happiness bountiful
solves all enigmata
some shout their bliss aloud
but vain simulation
dire needs doesn't shroud
please still their affliction

and how many do share
that which is not given
hurting the ones who dare
pluck the fruits of heaven
thus their mirror is bent
takers' economy
when their merit is spent
pray ease their misery

and as their world crumbles
wrongdoing they deny
when the setback humbles
they blame the gods on high
eyes open by chagrin
angels fall from the sky
teach them that there's no sin
is the tempter's best lie

all the friends of freedom
hoping for more justice
a new kind of kingdom
with no king nor malice
cannot they realize
that it is in their hand
that they must strive to rise
to reach the promised land

in judging wrong and right
and punishing the foes
among themselves they fight
of conflict in the throes
how hours are wasted
in wars horizontal
prizes never tasted
efforts detrimental

love is the only choice
upward the only road
finding our own voice
yet partaking the load
we're bound by objective
endeavour vertical
together supportive
attain the pinnacle

can you allow this wish
superorganism
must we first relinquish
our skepticism
is faith spoilt by blemish
merciless obstacle
or must we accomplish
our own miracle

䷷ Vigilance

increasing are the stakes
as i approach the hall
one slip is all it takes
and from heaven i fall

unconcerned by the flakes
straining against the squall
stable despite the quakes
determined to stand tall

vultures hover in wakes
their squawking won't appall
reminded of my aches
i stay clear of the brawl

nor will slithering snakes
by their hissing enthrall
dwelling on past mistakes
only prolong the crawl

ongoing at all times
whether i wished or not
unaware of my crimes
ended up in a knot

forgetful of the rhymes
i lost sight of the plot
unheeding of the chimes
i gave all to my shot

crossing the great divide
provide steady progress
don't mind that it's too wide
do the next step address

don't let the slightest sign
fade away unnoticed
consent and realign
and forever persist

don't watch the spider trap
the fly heralding change
keep on bridging the gap
while success is in range

avoid the distraction
resist the temptation
lest precious attention
be drained to oblivion

for want of a cheap thrill
feel the pull of evil
indolence does mind kill
the rule is primeval

what's another setback
for us life's do-overs ?
it's learn to duck the whack
or redo the hours

fate blesses the wakeful
and spares them from torment
beautiful dutiful
earn your golden moment

until ultimately
at the end of the wire
appearing suddenly
in regal attire

the guardian of the hall
beckons you with a grin
smashes down the last wall
and bows to let you in

䷚ Outgrow

That which you can't abide
Embrace as if a friend
Once you two have allied
No thing will make you bend

That which you can't escape
Welcome as a teacher
You will never espouse
More talented lover

That which you won't challenge
Can't ever make you wise
But that which you surpass
In freedom makes you rise

That which you merely change
Comes back in a new guise
But that which you outgrow
Won't again meet your eyes

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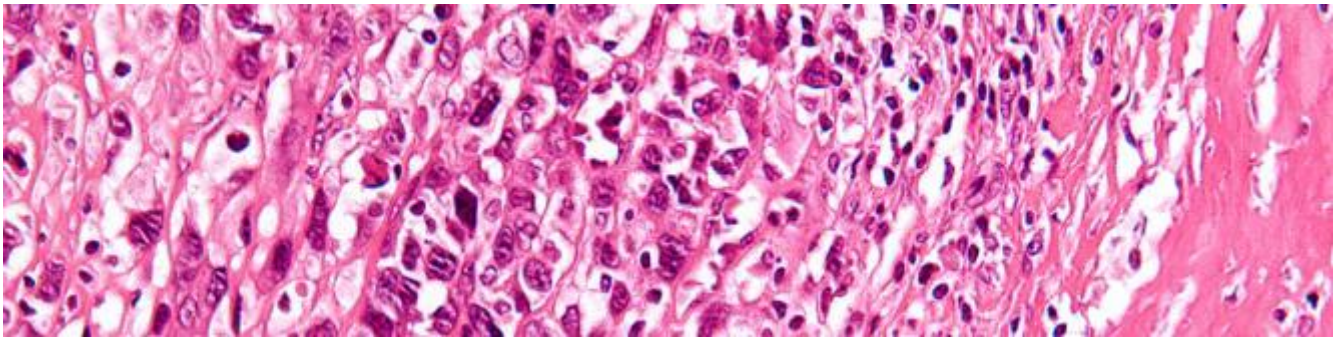

8. Links

The State of Play

- *U.S. Copyright Office – Copyright Law: Chapter 1 - § 106 . Exclusive rights in copyrighted works*
- *File sharing* entry in Wikipedia
- *Hedonic music consumption model* entry in Wikipedia
- *Music Business Research – About Dr Peter Tschmuck*
- *The Impact of Music Downloads and P2P File-Sharing on the Purchase of Music: A Study for Industry Canada*
- *Ipsos / Oxford Economics Report – Economic Consequences of Movie Piracy – Canada2011*
- *Profit Leak? Pre-Release File Sharing and the Music Industry*
- *Fair use* entry in Wikipedia

Ars Divina

- *Videos – Sri Chinmoy*
- *Joint attention* entry in Wikipedia
- *Children Need Touching and Attention, Harvard Researchers Say*
- *Vincent van Gogh* entry in Wikipedia
- *H. P. Lovecraft* entry in Wikipedia
- *Eight Consciousnesses* entry in Wikipedia

Oneness

- *Ubuntu (philosophy)* entry in Wikipedia
- *Quantum Theory Demonstrated: Observation Affects Reality*
- *Quantum physics says goodbye to reality – physicsworld.com*

- *Quantum Enigma » Notable Quotes on Quantum Physics*
- *Force (Star Wars)* entry in Wikipedia
- *Fictional universe of Avatar* entry in Wikipedia
- *Biological neural network* entry in Wikipedia
- *Democritus* entry in Wikipedia
- *Naked mole rat* entry in Wikipedia
- *Self-similarity* entry in Wikipedia
- *United Nations* entry in Wikipedia

䷚ An I for an I Makes the World Go Bound

- *Leveling (philosophy)* entry in Wikipedia
- *The Root Investigates Who Really Gets Paid in the Music Industry*
- *The Musical Disconnect: An Average Album*
- *Allegory of the long spoons* entry in Wikipedia

䷚ Alternatives Rock

- *World Intellectual Property Organization* entry in Wikipedia
- *Digital Millennium Copyright Act* entry in Wikipedia
- *Copyright Directive* entry in Wikipedia
- *UNESCO* entry in Wikipedia
- *Graduated response* entry in Wikipedia
- *Jain vegetarianism* entry in Wikipedia

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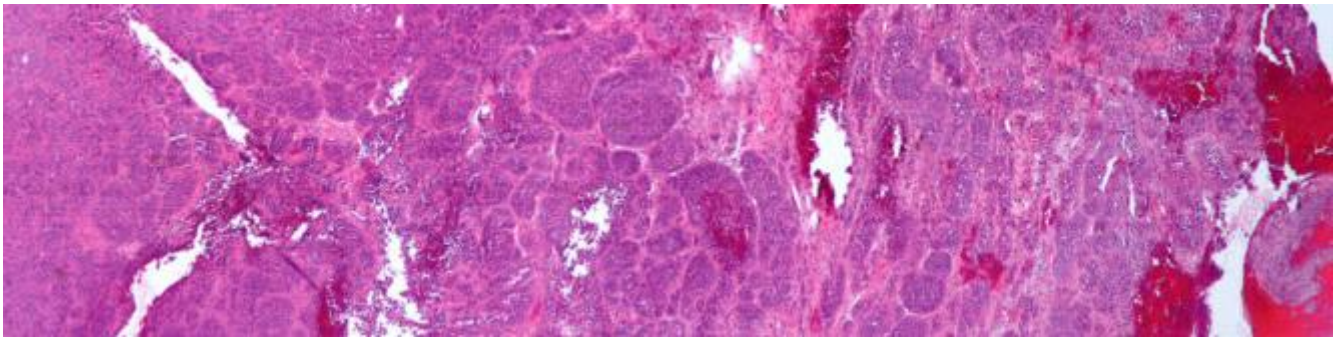

9. Credits

Epigraph

excerpted from *Dhammapada : The Sayings of Buddha*, translated by Thomas Cleary

Images

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  - *3 : Kaposi sarcoma, patch stage* by LWozniak&KWZielinski
  - *4 : High magnification micrograph of the herringbone pattern in a malignant peripheral nerve sheath tumour* by Nephron
  - *5 : Very high magnification micrograph or an epithelioid angiosarcoma* by Nephron
  - *6 : Very high magnification micrograph of a desmoplastic small round cell tumour* by Nephron
  - *7 : High magnification micrograph of an alveolar soft part sarcoma* by Nephron
  - *8 : Very high magnification micrograph of a high-grade osteosarcoma* by Nephron
  - *9 : Very low magnification micrograph or an epithelioid angiosarcoma* by Nephron
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  - *11 : Very high magnification micrograph of a dedifferentiated liposarcoma* by Nephron
  - *12 : Low magnification micrograph of a high-grade osteosarcoma* by Nephron

Software

- *Open Office*
- *Freemind*
- *Gimp*

䷀ Fonts

- *Linux Biolinum*
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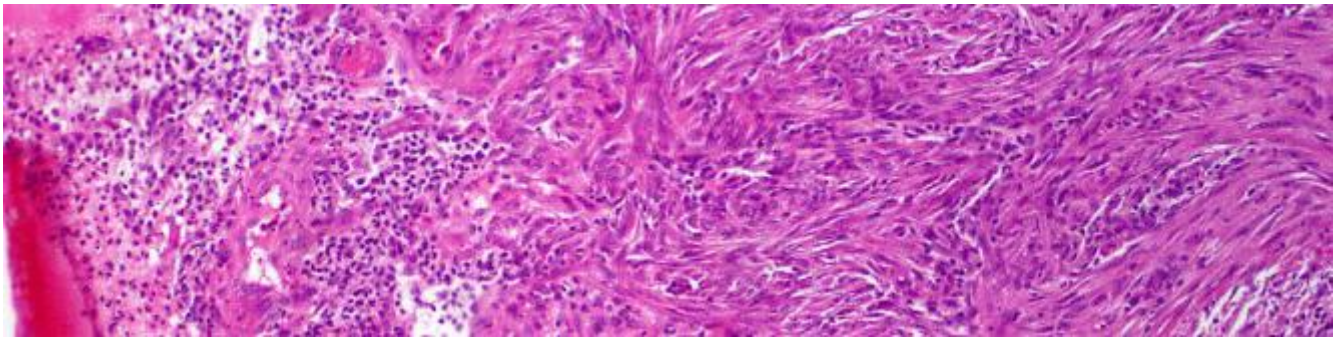

10. Disclaimer

䷚ The Politics of Fiction

In chapter 4, the sections entitled « *Stranger Than Fiction* » and « *Attention All Planets of the Solar Federation* » are works of fiction inspired by certain of the salient events of the 2011 Canadian Federal Election Campaign. Names, characters, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination, or employed in a fictitious manner. « S*uper Unleaded* » is a subjective account of the plausible upshots of the outcome of that same election. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events in those three sections is intentional, as the aim of those passages is to suggest the existence of the superorganic structures depicted therein in reality.

The stories related in « *Love Me Tender*, » « *In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida*, » and « *Best Of Both Worlds* » are works of fiction. Characters, places, events and incidents described therein are the products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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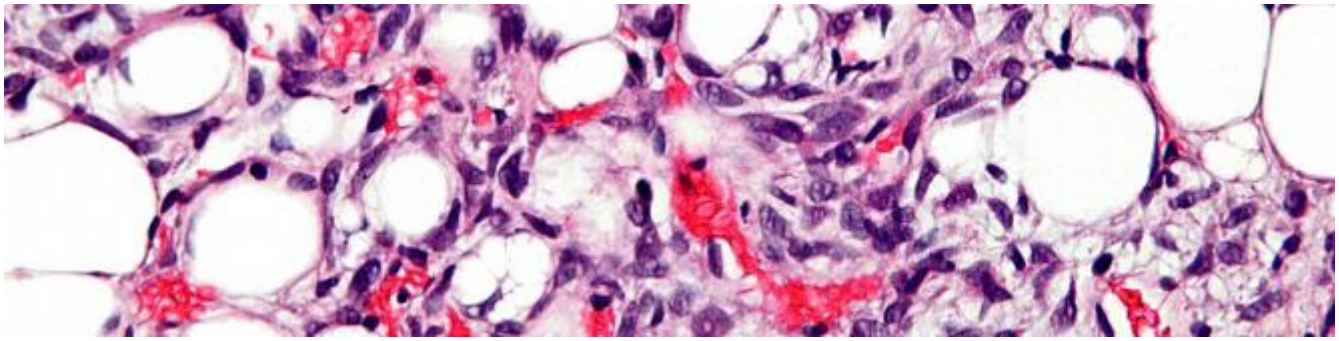

11. About the Author

Biography

Christopher Stewart loves to try his hand at various artistic endeavours, but if there's one discipline he's perfecting, it must be the art of blooming late.

He has studied for a long time, played football even longer, spent a significant part of his life developing software, and invested most of the remaining hours in the pursuit of his ideal of creating meaningful music in the context of a rock ensemble.

He has founded the prolific yet still album-less progressive rock outfit Poligraf in 1998 and has never been quite the same since.

He has been practising Buddhism dead-seriously since the mid-nineties, until he finally awakened to the fact that it teaches living happiness.

His interests range from psychology, physics, and philosophy, to mysticism, divination, the arts and the creative process, and, obviously, multitasking and clichés.

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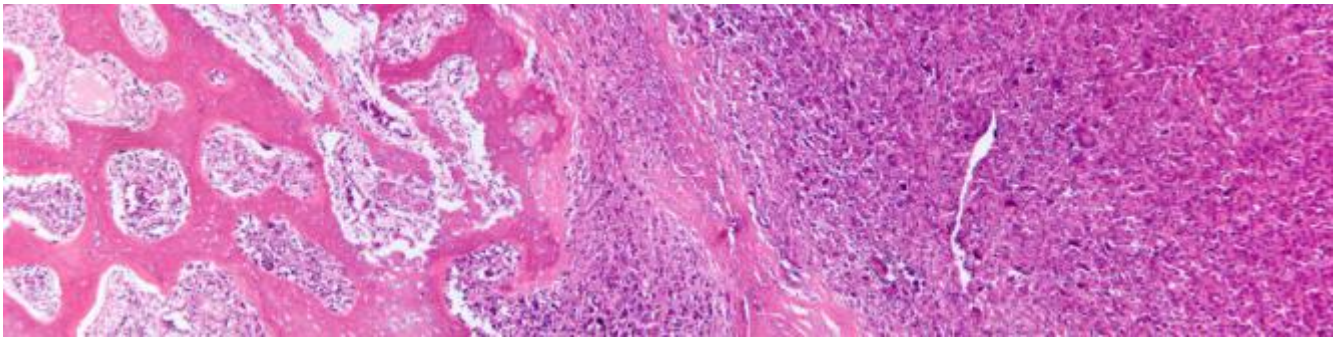
Publications

On the Meaning of Sin
The Threshold Series

69



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