

Amazement

Ontological, aesthetic, logical,
existential, epistemological

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The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion, which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.

(Albert Einstein, "The World as I See It.")

In our last two episodes...

Cleanthes: Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but **one great machine**, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions to a degree **beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain**. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an **accuracy which ravishes into admiration all men** who have ever contemplated them. (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*)

Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the **total, transcendent exteriority of the other**, of the beloved. (Emanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*)

The Infinite is non-thematizable, **gloriously exceeds every capacity**, and manifests, as it were in reverse, its exorbitance in the approach of a neighbor, obedient to its measure. (Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*)

Ontological Amazement

Ontological Amazement

That there is **something** rather than
nothing

That this something is **amazing**

Why There is Something Rather than Nothing

by Bede Rundle

<http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/Philosophy/Religion/~/dm/ldz11c2EmY2k9OTc4MDE5OTI3MDUwNw==>

The question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" provoked one of Sidney Morgenbesser's memorable comebacks:

"If there was **nothing**, you'd still be **complaining!**"

Thomas Nagel

A Question of Scale

Quarks to Quasars

<http://www.wordwizz.com/pwrs of 10.htm>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A930296>

Scroll down to the question, "But why is grass green?"



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Okay, that tells us why.



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But does it really tell us *why*?

However far you go back to earlier states, you will never find in those states a full reason **why there should be any world rather than none**, and why it should be as it is.

Therefore, even if you suppose the world eternal, as you will still be supposing nothing but a succession of states and will not in any of them find a sufficient reason... it is evident that the reason must be sought elsewhere.

G. W. Leibniz 'On the Ultimate Origination of Things'

15

not at all prime

19

prime

Why?

Yes, you can prove it. The proof shows it is true. But *why* 19?

Aesthetic
Amazement

An excerpt from J.S. Bach,
Brandenburg Concerto No. 3,
First Movement

An mp3 can be found at:

http://www.classicalarchives.com/bach.html#bach_concert

Scroll down to **Brandenburg Concerto No. 3, Live Rec., Free Play**
(You'll need to register as a free user first.)

This will give you the whole first movement;
I played a 2-minute excerpt.

Online score can be found at:

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/variations/scores/baj3443/sco30059.html#59>

Ballet Mechanique

by George Antheil

At the National Gallery of Art

<http://www.antheil.org/nga.html>

I presented a selection from the QuickTime movie that you can find there.

Logical Amazement

Logical Amazement

That there is **reason**.

That there is **truth and falsity**.

Logical Amazement

That the **axioms** of logic hold.

That **these** axioms rather than others hold.

For example, Distributive Laws:

$$A \& (B \text{ or } C) \leftrightarrow (A \& B) \text{ or } (A \& C)$$

$$A \text{ or } (B \& C) \leftrightarrow (A \text{ or } B) \& (A \text{ or } C)$$

Why are some numbers **transcendental**, and others not?

Yes, we can prove this.

But could you tell, just looking at the sequence of digits?

What is it about **that sequence** that makes the number transcendental?

Why is it π in

$$\text{area} = \pi r^2$$

$$\text{circumference} = 2\pi r$$

and not some **other** number?

1729

Number theorist G.H. Hardy took a taxi from London to the hospital where his friend and colleague Ramanujan was dying of tuberculosis. Hardy noticed the taxi's number, **1729**.

He went into the room where Ramanujan was lying, and, with scarcely a hello, blurted out his opinion about the taxi-cab number. It was, he declared, "**rather a dull number.**"

"No, Hardy! No, Hardy," said Ramanujan, "it is a **very interesting number**. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways."

Based on C.P. Snow, Preface to Hardy's *A Mathematician's Apology*

$$x^3 + y^3 = 1729$$

$$u^3 + v^3 = 1729$$

$$\langle x, y \rangle \neq \langle u, v \rangle$$

$$\langle x, y \rangle \neq \langle v, u \rangle$$

The numbers 0 and 1 are recognized as being special.

But 2 is also: it is the basis for all differentiation.

There is a threefold ontological tension
between and among these numbers:

- 0 no thing
- 1 one thing, unity
- 2 otherness

In Jewish mystical terms:

0 Ein dvar

translation: no thing

1 Ein sof (or is that ∞)

translation: no end

but also no division, hence unity

2 Tsimtsum

translation: contraction, withdrawal

hence division, multiplicity

Existential Amazement

That there is an **I**.

... because our senses deceive us sometimes, I was willing to assume that there was nothing which existed the way our senses present it to us.

... I determined to pretend that everything which had ever entered my mind was no more true than the illusions of my dreams.

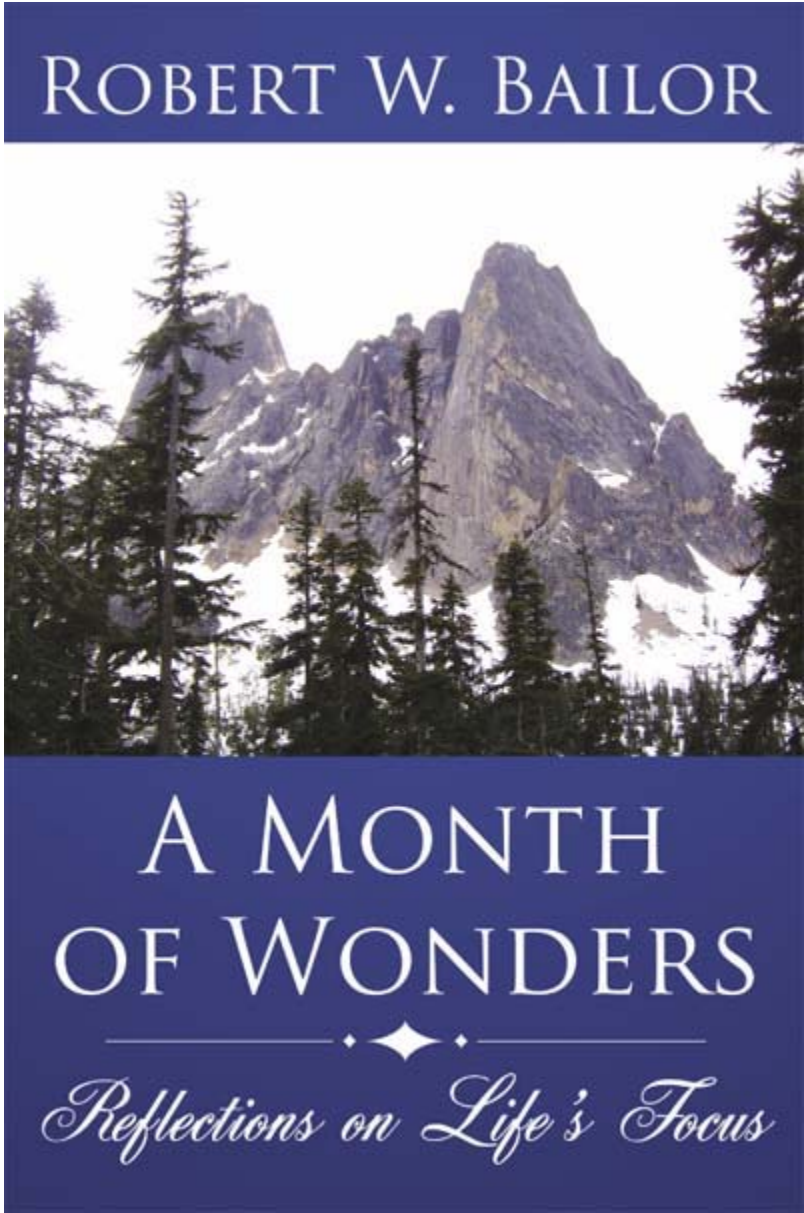
But immediately afterwards I noticed that, while I wished in this way to think everything was false, **it was necessary that I—who was doing the thinking—had to be something.**

Noticing that this truth—**I think; therefore, I am**—was so firm and so sure that all the most extravagant assumptions of the skeptics would not be able to weaken it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was looking for.

Descartes, Discourse on Method

More certainty than amazement?

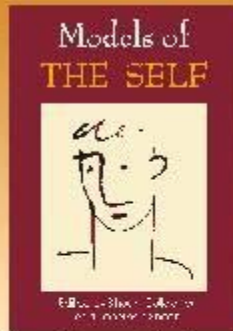
<http://www.authorhouse.com/BookStore/ItemDetail~bookid~40258.aspx>



Wonder about **why I exist**
is not quite the same as
amazement that I exist

The former is rationale and verbal.

The latter can be quite non-verbal.



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Jonathan Shear

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'THE SELF'

J. Consciousness Studies, 4, 5/6 (1997) 405-28
Galen Strawson, Jesus College, Oxford OX1 3DW,
UK

*This essay, from the Journal of Consciousness
Studies and extended peer commentary is also
available in book form:*

http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/strawson_g02.htm

This begins to illustrate
amazement

If only in the struggle to figure out
what "self" even means

A drawing called *I Exist*:

www.artistzareh.com/exist.html

An art photo called *I Exist:*

<http://thousandstars.deviantart.com/>

Interesting points that we probably don't have time for today:

Buddhism and non-existence of self.

Non-existence of individuals on basis of science

The boundaries even between a rock and its environment are constantly changing

What, then, of 0, 1, and 2?

Existential Amazement:
That there is a **You**.

Buber

Ethical implications of confronting
the other

Levinas

Existential amazement

(that there is a You)

+

aesthetic amazement

(that the world is of infinite value)

can be the foundation of ethics.

Hillel, asked to explain the entire Torah while his listener stood on one foot, said:

"What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others. All the rest is commentary."

Talmud Bavli, Tractate Shabbat, 31a

But ben Azai taught a higher principle:

"Man was made in the image of G-d."

Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4

Epistemological Amazement

That we can **know** anything

I haven't found a pithy example of this, but...

The entire history of epistemology in philosophy, from Plato through Kant to Wittgenstein, bespeaks amazement with our **capacity for knowing**.

The field of **cognitive science** is similarly motivated by fascination with our ability to know.

Soc. A square may be of any size?

Boy. Certainly.

Soc. And if ... in one direction the space was of two feet, and in other direction of one foot, the whole would be of two feet taken once?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. But since this side is also of two feet, there are twice two feet?

Boy. There are.

Soc. Then the square is of twice two feet?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And how many are twice two feet? count and tell me.

Boy. Four, Socrates.

Soc. And might there not be another square twice as large as this, and having like this the lines equal?

Boy. Yes.

Soc. And of how many feet will that be?

Boy. Of eight feet.

From Plato's *Meno*.

That we cannot
know anything

The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that **nobody knows whether other people** also have this or something else.

The assumption would thus be possible - though unverifiable - that **one section of mankind had one sensation of red and another section another.** (272)

Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle.-

Here it would be quite possible for **everyone to have something different in his box.** One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. (293)

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*

Our capacity to know ... our inability to know

Have implications for existential amazement
(ethics of encounter with the "other")

for ontological amazement
(technology, stewardship of the earth)

for logical amazement
(our desire to know)

for aesthetic amazement
(our desire to echo)

Amazement

Ontological, aesthetic, logical,
existential, epistemological