

## II.

### The Fundamental Desire for Knowledge

1/1

1. Two souls reside, alas, within my breast,  
And each one from the other would be parted.  
The one holds fast, in sturdy lust for love,  
With clutching organs clinging to the world;  
The other strongly rises from the gloom  
To lofty fields of ancient heritage.  
([Faust I](#), Scene 2, lines 1112-1117.)

2/19

1. In these words [Goethe](#) expresses a characteristic feature which is deeply rooted in human nature.
2. The human being is not organized as a self-consistent unity.
3. He always demands more than the world, of its own accord, gives him.
4. Nature has endowed us with needs; among them are some that she leaves to our own activity to satisfy.
5. Abundant as are the gifts she has bestowed upon us, still more abundant are our desires.
6. We seem born to be dissatisfied.
7. And our thirst for knowledge is but a special instance of this dissatisfaction.
8. We look twice at a tree.
9. The first time we see its branches at rest, the second time in motion.
10. We are not satisfied with this observation.
11. Why does the tree appear to us now at rest, now in motion?
12. We pose questions in this way.
13. Every glance at nature evokes in us a multitude of questions.
14. Every phenomenon we meet sets us a new problem.
15. Every experience is a riddle.
16. We see that from the egg there emerges a creature like the mother animal, and we ask the reason for the likeness.
17. We observe a living being grow and develop to a certain degree of perfection, and we seek the underlying conditions for this experience.
18. Nowhere are we satisfied with what nature spreads out before our senses.
19. Everywhere we seek what we call the *explanation* of the facts.

3/3

1. The something more which we seek in things, over and above what is immediately given to us in them, splits our whole being into two parts; we become conscious of our antithesis to the world.
2. We confront the world as independent beings.
3. The universe appears to us in two opposite parts: *I* and *World*.

4/2

1. We erect this barrier between ourselves and the world as soon as consciousness first dawns in us.
2. But we never cease to feel that we belong in fact to the world, that there is a connecting link between it and us, and that we are beings within, and not *outside*, the universe.

5/27

1. This feeling makes us strive to bridge over this antithesis.
2. And in this bridging lies ultimately the whole spiritual striving of mankind.
3. The history of our spiritual life is a continuing search for the unity between ourselves and the world.
4. Religion, art and science follow, one and all, this aim.
5. The religious believer seeks in the revelation which God grants him the solution to the universal riddle which his I, dissatisfied with the world of mere appearance, sets before him.
6. The artist seeks to embody in his material the ideas that are in his I, in order to reconcile what lives in him with the outside world.
7. He too feels dissatisfied with the world of mere appearance and seeks to mould into it that something more which his I, transcending it, contains.
8. The thinker seeks the laws of phenomena, and strives to penetrate by thinking what he experiences through observation.
9. Only when we have made the *world-content* into our *thought-content* do we again find the unity out of which we had separated ourselves.
10. We shall see later that this goal can be reached only if the task of the research scientist is conceived at a much deeper level than is often the case.
11. The whole situation I have described here presents itself to us on the stage of history in the conflict between the one-world theory, or *monism*, and the two-world theory, or *dualism*.
12. Dualism pays attention only to the *separation* between I and World which the consciousness of the human being has brought about.

13. All its efforts consist in a vain struggle to reconcile these opposites, which it calls today *spirit* and *matter*, tomorrow *subject* and *object*, and yesterday *thinking* and *appearance*.

14. He has a feeling that there must be a bridge between the two worlds but he is not in a position to find it.

15. In that the human being is aware of himself as "I", he cannot but think of this "I" as being on the side of the *spirit*; and in contrasting this "I" with the world, he is bound to put on the world's side the realm of percepts given to the senses, that is, the *world of matter*.

16. In doing so, the human being puts himself right into the middle of this antithesis of spirit and matter.

17. He is compelled all the more to do so because his own body belongs to the material world.

18. Thus the "I" belongs to the *realm of spirit* as a part of it; the *material* objects and processes which are perceived by the senses belong to the "World."

19. All the riddles which relate to spirit and matter, the human being must inevitably rediscover in the fundamental riddle of his own nature.

20. *Monism* pays attention only to the unity and tries either to deny or erase the opposites, present though they are.

21. Neither of these two points of view can satisfy us, for they do not do justice to the facts.

22. Dualism sees in spirit (I) and matter (World) two fundamentally different entities, and cannot, therefore, understand how they can interact with one another.

23. How should spirit be aware of what goes on in matter, seeing that the essential nature of matter is quite alien to spirit?

24. Or how in these circumstances should spirit act upon matter, so as to translate its intentions into actions?

25. The most ingenious and the most absurd hypotheses have been propounded to answer these questions.

26. Up to the present, however, monism is not in a much better position.

27. It has tried three different ways of meeting the difficulty: either it denies spirit and becomes materialism; or it denies matter in order to seek its salvation in spiritualism; or it asserts that even in the simplest entities in the world, spirit and matter are indissolubly bound together so that there is no need to marvel at the appearance in the human being of these two modes of existence, since they are never found apart.

6/15

1. Materialism can never offer a satisfactory explanation of the world.
2. For every attempt at an explanation must begin with the formation of *thoughts* about the phenomena of the world.
3. Materialism thus begins with the *thought* of matter or of material processes.
4. But, in doing so, it is already confronted by two different sets of facts: the material world, and the thoughts about it.
5. The materialist seeks to make the latter intelligible by regarding them as purely material processes.
6. He believes that thinking takes place in the brain, much in the same way that digestion takes place in the animal organs.
7. Just as he attributes mechanical and organic effects to matter, so he credits matter in certain circumstances with the capacity to think.
8. He overlooks that, in doing so, he is merely shifting the problem from one place to another.
9. He ascribes the power of thinking to matter instead of to himself.
10. And thus he is back again at his starting point.
11. How does matter come to think about its own nature?
12. Why is it not simply satisfied with itself and content just to exist?
13. The materialist has turned his attention away from the definite subject, his own I, and has arrived at an image of something quite vague and indefinite.
14. Here the old riddle meets him again.
15. The materialistic point of view cannot solve the problem; it can only shift it from one place to another.

7/14

1. How do matters stand with the spiritualistic point of view?
2. The genuine *spiritualist* rejects matter's independent existence and regards it merely as a product of spirit.
3. But when he tries to use this theory to solve the riddle of his own human nature, he finds himself driven into a corner.
4. Over against the "I", which can be placed on the side of spirit, there stands directly the world of the senses.
5. A *spiritual* approach seems not to be able to gain access to the sensory world, the sensory world must be perceived and experienced by the "I" through material processes.
6. The "I" does not find any such material processes within itself when it wants to consider itself solely as a spiritual entity.
7. In what it achieves spiritually by its own effort, the sense-perceptible world is never to be found.

8. It seems as if the "I" had to concede that the world would be a closed book to it unless it could establish a non-spiritual relation to the world.
9. Similarly, when it comes to action, we have to translate our intentions into realities with the help of material things and forces.
10. We are, therefore, referred back to the outer world.
11. The most extreme spiritualist - or rather, the thinker who through his absolute idealism appears as an extreme spiritualist - is Johann Gottlieb Fichte.
12. He attempts to derive the whole edifice of the world from the "I".
13. What he has actually accomplished is a magnificent *thought-picture* of the world, without any content of experience.
14. As little as it is possible for the materialist to expel the spirit, just as little is it possible for the spiritualist to decree out of existence the external world of matter.

8/4

1. When the human being reflects upon the "I", he perceives in the first instance the work of this "I" in the conceptual elaboration of the world of ideas, hence a world-conception that inclines towards spiritualism may feel tempted, in looking at the human being's own essential nature, to acknowledge nothing of spirit except this world of ideas.
2. In this way spiritualism becomes one-sided idealism.
3. It does not come to the point *through* the world of ideas of seeking a *spiritual* world; it sees in the world of ideas itself the spiritual world.
4. With this world view, the one-sided idealist is compelled, thereby, to remain as though spellbound within the activity of the "I" itself.

9/5

1. A curious variant of idealism is to be found in the point of view of [Friedrich Albert Lange](#), which he has put forward in his widely read [History of Materialism](#), he maintains that materialism is quite right in declaring all phenomena, including our thinking, to be the product of purely material processes; but, conversely, matter and its processes are themselves the product of our thinking.
2. "The senses give us only the *effects* of things, not accurate pictures, much less the things themselves.
3. But among these mere effects we must include the senses themselves together with the brain and the molecular vibrations which we assume to go on there."
4. This means our thinking is produced by the material processes, and these by the thinking of our "I".
5. Lange's philosophy is thus nothing more than the story, in philosophical terms, of the intrepid Baron Münchhausen, who holds himself up in the air by his own pigtail.

10/3

1. The third form of monism is the one which finds even in the simplest entity (the atom) both matter and spirit already united.
2. But nothing is gained by this either, except that the question, which really originates in our consciousness, is shifted to another place.
3. How does the simple entity come to manifest itself in a two-fold manner, if it is an indivisible unity?

11/5

1. With respect to all these points of view we must make note of the fact that we meet with the originary and primary polarity first in our own consciousness.
2. It is we ourselves who break away from the bosom of nature and contrast ourselves as "I" with the "World".
3. Goethe has given classic expression to this in his essay Nature, although his manner may at first sight be considered quite unscientific: "We live in the midst of her (Nature) and are foreign to her.
4. Ceaselessly she speaks to us, yet betrays none of her secrets."
5. But Goethe knows the reverse side too: "Humans are all within her and she within all human beings."

12/2

1. As true as it that we have estranged ourselves from nature, it is just as true that we feel: we are in her and belong to her.
2. It can be only her own working which pulsates also in us.

13/12

1. We must find the way back to her again.
2. A simple reflection can show us this path.
3. We have, it is true, torn ourselves away from nature; but we must none the less have taken something of her with us into our own being.
4. This being of nature in us we must seek out, and then we shall find the connection with her once again.
5. Dualism fails to do this.
6. It considers the inner being of humankind to be a spiritual entity utterly alien to nature, and then attempts somehow to attach it to nature.
7. No wonder that it cannot find the connecting link.

8. We can find nature outside us only if we have first learned to know her *within* us.
9. What is akin to her within us must be our guide.
10. This marks out our path of enquiry.
11. We shall attempt no speculations concerning the interaction of nature and spirit.
12. Rather we shall probe into the depths of our own being, to find there those elements which we have rescued in our flight from nature.

14/2

1. Investigation of our own being must give us the answer to the riddle.
2. We must reach a point where we can say to ourselves: "Here we are no longer merely "I", here is something which is more than "I"."

15/6

1. I am well aware that many who have read this far will not find my discussion "scientific", as this term is used today.
2. To this I can only reply that I have so far been concerned not with scientific results of any kind, but with the simple description of what every one of us experiences in his own consciousness.
3. The inclusion of a few phrases about attempts to reconcile man's consciousness and the world serves solely to elucidate the actual facts.
4. Therefore I have made no attempt to use the various expressions "I", "spirit", "world", "nature", in the precise way that is usual in psychology and philosophy.
5. Everyday consciousness is unaware of the sharp distinctions made by the sciences, and my purpose so far has been solely to record the facts of everyday experience.
6. I am concerned, not with the way in which science, so far, has interpreted consciousness, but with the way in which we experience it in every moment of our lives.