

0.2 Preparation and assumptions

This is a book Isaac Newton¹ might have enjoyed. It has mention of planets and orbits, which he himself studied: he provided to science the mathematics of how they move. It also might have struck a chord with his private metaphysical pursuit, solar alchemy. He was curious about the connection between the solar system, physical alchemy (which he practised, it being the intuitive understanding of qualities of matter as a reflection of the state of Enlightenment, Eternal Life or Infinite Wealth, whichever came first), and wise words from ancient texts.

This book does not search in bibles or old mystical treatises for prophetic words and encrypted advice, however. The ancient world before written history is where we shall apply *some* speculation, primarily as to how people of pre-history observed and interpreted the world. We shall also spend time reading at the very edge of history, in Sumer on the Euphrates of 5,200 years ago, where the first texts are preserving for us something of humans' earliest ideas, or memories of such things. Knowledge of the past which reaches us in written or preserved form we shall call History; times before that are necessarily Prehistoric, but we must avoid any connotations of ignorant, sub-human and wild, that often get attached to this word.

Our primary theme will be to do with objects of Earth's celestial world—the Sun, Moon, stars, planets—and some of the fascinating consequences their observation and discussion have had on human society. But one thing leads to another, and we soon find it necessary to deal with metaphysical topics and Man's search for meaning; we must visit human consciousness and the very fabric of Reality.

One subject that arises in a search for meaning that may extend as far as the stars is, naturally enough, astrology. This book makes 3 important assumptions about astrology. First, that the essence and certain important details of astrology may have been lost or distorted over time. Second, that there was and may still be something of real value in it, though perhaps not in an obvious way. And third, that subtle influences of a non-physical or little understood physical nature may be at work, alongside common-sense processes we think little about.

This and other subjects will arise that seem to dwell on the very fringe of common sense, let alone the fringe of Science, where sensible and serious books should never linger. We must be careful however, that where severe doubts may cause reflex reactions and premature end-of-discussion, we are

1. English scientist, 1642–1727. (Relevant notes and references will appear at the bottom of the page like this.)

not throwing the archetypal baby out with the bathwater. With a little patience, leeway and the proper context, even the strangest notions may be put to bed comfortably with the rest of the family.

For even today in the Space Age, the way we observe and decode the world around us is as coloured by our adopted beliefs and unquestioned hand-me-down explanations as ever. And so many things in the world are taken for granted: those involving mystery, where superstitions are adopted; or phenomena the study of which has been deferred to Science and needlessly complexified; or the common, mundane things we all see without asking ‘Why?’

There is *always* a need for more questions, suggestions, deeper exploration and new interpretations. While we might be satisfied that certain facts and truths have been etched in stone, we should not be surprised to find they were written on water. And where we are happy with a single, final definition, we should not fear the legion of unfamiliar alternatives. In this book we reveal, suggest, provoke; things obvious, things difficult and knotty, things uncommon, things folklorish, things outrageous, old and new—we shall shake all kinds, a little, to see what drops out.

The main topics of this book, even without the occasional digression, are themselves vast; we must settle for some abbreviated treatment and leaping over common or dull areas. Hopefully, the fresh insights offered will make up for slight loss of subject detail.

Finally, we might refer to a custom in ancient times when Greek philosophers got together for a discussion or *sumposion*. Before they started, they agreed how serious and sensible they would be, and diluted the wine accordingly. Here, each chapter has its own dilution level or degree of restraint, as indicated by the TONE. At the lowest level we are not boozing but celebrating: the Muses allow joy but not indulgence.

0.3 Science and the cutting edge

This is not a scientific paper, so a deconstruction of evidence, precedents, methods, proofs and application is not required. It is also not a text with any base in superstition. It may rave a little, but that shall not hinder our progress; we travel light so the gentle reader, who does not yet know where we are heading, can flee at a moment’s notice, and return when the dizziness subsides. Its structure is also not along the usual lines of scientific presentation. This is not for lack of coherency or through laziness; it seeks to preserve the manner of its development as a record of *exploration*. Although some essential tidying and sectioning has been done for the sake of clarity, the book was in fact a work of discovery: the author did not know until the

end, what the end would be. The structure thus reflects the earnest progress towards *some kind* of conclusion.

In any case, it is inspired by, and adheres to, the dictum of Plutarch (Metrius Plutarchus) epigrammed at the end of Part III, that

The mind is not a vessel to be filled,
But a fire to be kindled

and cares little for self-justification; either the gap between minds is sparked or it is not. But a quick word of epistemology is in order.

The scientific method is a very cool, clear, fairly consistent and reliable tool for the pursuit of knowledge. It is, perhaps surprisingly, a very *particular* method. There are two problems though, which are important to consider before continuing.

First is the seat of authority and final judgement that Science (the school which applies the scientific method) has assumed for itself. In a world where the physical is greatly outweighed by the metaphysical (meaning, value, feeling, volition, thought itself, the Mind—these make us different from machines upholding physical laws), Science is eager to exceed its counsel beyond the former.

Imagine a court declaring a land-mine ‘correct’ in operation, finding no fault in the components, and praising the efficiency and elegance of the mathematical, quantum-mechanical and economic models applied. At the inquest, the limbs of children were identified ‘ingeniously’ by DNA testing, the quantities of blood, wailing, et cetera being ‘adequate and highly rated to type’. This bitter example in the imagining highlights some of the issues: please step back and consider.

Second is a technique used by Science to help enable theory to be framed from experiment. Named Ockham’s Razor, it is used to cut away explanations extra to needs. Clearly, an unending pile of less and less likely explanations, and longer and longer strings of likely but partial explanations, is undesirable. This sensible approach is widely used, but the possibility of abuse and unintentional amputation is a source of concern. At any point in the ongoing and easily unconscious application of the Razor, pressures social, political, financial and egotistical may be applied, along with the influences of laziness, prejudice and lack of imagination. We can only wonder what partial or strange explanations have been lopped which were not only correct, but insightful into Reality.

The guitarist and hippy Jimi Hendrix coined in 1967 the slogan ‘Are you experienced?’ Science is often proud of the fact it is based on experience, and not fantasy. Mysticism has the same claim. These two are usually seen as the opposing camps, each approaching Reality with a different registry of

tools, facts, techniques, masters, anecdotes, errors. But it was not always a heresy to want to measure the size of angels; nor to spiritualize the effects of photons (both modern Science and modern Religion find this sort of thing repugnant). And consider the *anti-Razor* of Newton's contemporary, the scientist Gottfried Leibniz, which suggests that God created the world with the *most* possible entities. These wonderful notions of inclusivity and richness are suggestive of a greater context in which both Science and Mysticism could—without jealousy, arrogance, deliberate obscurity, clandestine ritual, propaganda and inelastic assumptions—work together and enrich each other. It is perhaps overdue that we begin in earnest and honesty to study, measure and respect things of 'faith', and likewise to praise and wonder at the divine in equations. It is perhaps a matter of survival...