Eight

SATURDAY
On How Living Dissolves the Mind

I woke up earlier than other days. I felt a strong premonition that this was going to be my last and my most important day in Arkadia. I could barely think about anything else while I got ready, to the point that I was dressed and waiting before the rabbit appeared at the door. But he did not appear. I had to go myself alone to the terrace. I did not want to waste my time.

“I think that it is about time that you answered a question that I have been asking myself all week.”

“Go ahead, Alice.”

“I will tell you through a slide. It is Thanksgiving Day. As usual, we play grandfather’s games after the meal. He takes a card from the deck, and the rest of us have to divine which card he is looking at. Today I won. Now everyone is taking a nap. If I go to sleep, I will wake up in a terrible mood. I open the photo albums. How odd. Those dresses, those shoes, those hairstyles that I used to like so much now look so strange and ugly. I cannot understand how I could have gone around like that. I have a silly idea. Could we play grandfather’s game with a photo instead of with a card? Would we be able to transmit that sensation of strangeness?”

“Is that the question?”

“Not exactly. What I want to ask is: What kind of mental life do Arkadians have?”

“From what we have learned up to now, you should already guess what the answer is, but I can see in your face that you do not quite get it.”

“Right.”

“I find it curious to talk about the mental life of Arkadians, because as similar as they appear to be to human beings, this is the aspect that requires a special look.”

“You do not say.”

“Let us see. The mental state par excellence of human beings is thought, which has the particularity of being a state that contains ‘something about something.’”

“What are you referring to when you say ‘something about something?’”

“One can think about an ‘apple’ without the thought being an apple. This issue of ‘something being about something different from itself’ is called ‘intentionality’ and it is the difference that is normally established between mental states and any other type of state of the world. Thus, for example, any state of the world, like a chimney, the sun, a mountain, is not ‘something about
something': a mountain is a mountain and nothing else. Thanks to the intentionality of thought, we human beings can have beliefs about nearby things, like the apple that is in front of us, or things that are beyond the reach of our senses, like the milk in the refrigerator, things that are far away in space, like the moon, things that happened in the past, like man’s visit to the moon, things that will happen in the future, like the upcoming Olympic Games, and things that do not exist, like unicorns.”

“So?”

“Let us continue. Suppose that Eric and Catherine are arguing about whether or not unicorns exist. Let us name the thing that they are arguing about by way of the sentence ‘Unicorns exist.’ Eric and Catherine somehow share the meaning of that sentence as the object of their disagreement, and this is expressed with the sentence ‘Eric thinks that unicorns do not exist’ and the sentence ‘Catherine thinks that unicorns exist.’”

“Right, what about it?”

“Well, the content of a thought like ‘Unicorns exist’ is said to correspond to a ‘proposition.’ A proposition is something that is enunciated in a sentence that asserts something and can be true or false. Normally, a proposition is what comes after the form expression ‘think that,’ like Eric thinks that ‘unicorns exist,’ the proposition being in this case, ‘Unicorns exist.’ This assertion, or whatever you want to call it, is something independent from the language in which it is stated. So, the proposition, ‘Unicorns exist,’ is the same as, ‘Los unicornios existen,’ or, ‘Les unicornes existent.’ A proposition is something like a nucleus, but it is at the same time comprised of elements. Concepts are generally accepted as propositions’ constituents, just as the words ‘exist’ and ‘unicorns’ are what constitute the sentence ‘Unicorns exist.’ Therefore, in order to grasp the proposition ‘Unicorns exist,’ both Catherine and Eric should have, among other things, the concepts ‘exist’ and ‘unicorns.’”

“Let us get to the point.”

“The notion of propositions in Arkadia is both much more complex and much simpler than in the world of human beings. In the first place, propositions have no place in Arkadia because Arkadians do not have the right medium with which to represent them. As I have said on other days, Arkadian language can trick you. Unfortunately, language in Arkadia does not appear to be like in the human world, where words refer to objects in the world and the combination of words allows us to say, to represent, states of the world. Therefore, Arkadians cannot enunciate something that may be true or false. The peculiar nature of Arkadian language is its evokative structure. Words do not represent; they do not stand for what they refer to in the human world; instead, they evoke the slifes and kontents in which the words are anchored. Consequently, and in the absence of other mechanisms, propositions cannot be fixed by language in Arkadia. No sentences lead univocally to the slifes that are to be transmitted. And in the
absence of a method of representation that is univocal and universal, Arkadians
cannot determine what proposition they are discussing, what thing they are
talking about.”

“In the real world a ‘fact’ corresponds to ‘Unicorns exist’ or to ‘Unicorns
do not exist,’ right?”

“Do not fall into the language trap. You, as a human, use language to
characterize a state of affairs, be it real or possible, but Arkadians cannot do that
with language. They do it through slifes, and language is only a part of these
slifes. Facts cannot be described with language, only evoked: ‘Water boils at 212
degrees Fahrenheit,’ ‘The sun rises in the east’ or ‘Pregnancy lasts 9 months’ are
not representations of facts in Arkadia, unless we describe the perspektives of
the Arkadians that say so. Consequently, the thing that Erik and Katherine are
arguing about is not characterized by whether unicorns exist or not; instead, this
sentence takes them to the slife in which the point of view is specified and in
which, if the conceptual competence of the slife ‘Unicorns exist’ is instantiated,
we can say that this perspektive of Erik’s intersects with K’s point of view.”

“To what does a thought correspond in Arkadia?”

“In order to understand what a thought is in Arkadia, you have to move to
the context of a slife, its kontents, its associations, and its configuration as
figure/ground.”

“So?”

“The content of a thought is the perspektive derived from a slife, or a set of
slifes, with a particular figure/ground.”

“A thought cannot be a slife. Even human beings can have a slife without
having thoughts, cannot they? Does Katherine have a human thought when she
is eating an ice-cream, going to the toilet, or driving a car?”

“In a way, she does. Let us see. The translation from human thought to
Arkadia slife is not complete and exhaustive. All human thought is translated
into a perspektive, although not all perspektives would be considered a thought
by human beings. Because of the wealth of each slife, and the complexity of the
processes involved, we are still far from being able to create a translation manual
between slifes and thoughts, not even for the simplest human thought. But, who
knows, some day we may have the elements to do that.”

“I do not follow you. What are we referring to by the ‘thing’ that Erik and
Katherine are arguing about? Is ‘unicorns do or do not exist’ an idea or isn’t it?
Is it something that people can discuss?”

“No proposition or an abstract idea is floating around the heads of Erik and
Katherine; instead, it is something that is rooted in the slife background of each
of them. To be more exact, ‘Unicorns exist’ corresponds to a perspektive of their
virtual worlds that was born of a set of specific slifes, and from all the slifes that
have been experienced afterwards and have become associated with one an-
other.”
“How can they discuss about ‘Unicorns exist’ if such a thing depends of a slife background?”

“In one slife a specific kontent was noted and a specific figure/ground was created, with a derived perspektive, that contains all that is relevant in the discussion about ‘Unicorns exist.’”

“‘Unicorns exist’ is an abstract idea.”

“By contrast, in Arkadia everything that counts as a thought, in the human sense of the word, has to be seen as forming a part of some slife or of some connection between past slifes. If we then see in it, from the human point of view, an abstract element, a proposition, that is something that we human beings have put there.”

“How can an abstract idea be created in a slife?”

“As I told you, the kontents of slifes do not appear because of a series of elements in the world, nor because the kontents pre-exist in the kognitive system waiting for something to activate them. They appear through interaction between the world and the kognitive system. The slife that Erik experiences of contents/container before a glass of water is not produced because Erik notes information in the surroundings, nor because an element within his kognitive system is potentially describable by ‘contents/container relationship waiting to be activated.’”

“How is a slife described in order to compare it with a thought, such as ‘Katherine believes that unicorns exist.’ Does she imagine a unicorn in front of her? A herd of them? Does she imagine a day at the unicorn races? And what is the difference between the slife of imagining unicorns, and the slife described by human beings with the sentence ‘Unicorns exist?’”

“I would say that in the case of the proposition ‘Unicorns exist’ we are referring to a perspektive through which, among many other things, Katherine is prepared to accept the presence of unicorns. However, if you want to look at the details about how this proposition is rooted, we would have to look for one or more slifes in which Katherine’s unicorn is situated as figure/ground that connects conceptually with horses, elephants, elm trees, as opposed to fictional contents, like dragons, fairy godmothers, Bug Bunny, etc.”

“I do not know. Let us move to other related aspects of thoughts. For example, what happens in cases when we human beings hear that someone says, ‘I think that this person is courteous,’ in a situation in which someone let us go into the elevator first?”

“The trait of courteousness would not be an interpretation of the slife, but a kontent of the perspektive, with the same rank as any other kontent, like the scent of that person’s cologne. Again, these more conceptual processes have no place outside of the parallel action of the other senses. That is, you will not find a place where the kognitive system says, ‘what has been given me by the senses is a courteous action.’ Instead, this conceptual process is situated at the same
level and is connected to all the other kontents so that the slife contains the kontent of ‘courteousness.’ No ‘courtesy’ data is separated from the other aspects of the slife. We could say that the Arkadian kognitive system comes out into the world and impregnates that scene with the impacts of courtesy that have been seen in the past, in such a way that the kognitive system perceives the courteousness directly from the scene, in addition to the shapes and colors.”

“But what is courtesy?”

“‘Beauty’ and ‘courtesy’ are kontents, elements that have been created in the development of one or many slifes. When Katherine thinks, ‘This painting is beautiful,’ she is not calling upon something floating in her head. She does not decide that the painting fits with something that is a concept of ‘beautiful.’ What she does is connecting the panception of this painting with all the other paintings that she has seen, and especially those that have produced what we could say artistic pleasure. She does not have a concept of beauty in the abstract sense, but all of her life, all the relevant memograms, each one well-structured, with a multitude of particularities, are activated as a context of the slife in which she is panceiving the painting. Therefore, nothing is in the property ‘beauty’ except a slife, or set of slifes, that were felt in a particular way and that were recorded in that way, in a set of slifes that she had in the past. So, in order to think, Arkadians have to re-live, or go through the original moment again, or the set of memograms that are relevant in that situation. No thoughts exist apart from living; instead, if an Arkadian thinks about beauty, the slife context that is activated are all the memograms in which beauty is activated by way of evokation, which is to say that the slife of beauty is re-lived. So, when we say, ‘Katherine thinks that unicorns exist,’ we include what we call ‘thought’ in the context of a situation. We do not need for the Arkadian to write the sentence ‘Unicorns exist’ in a different place, the mind, from where it is happening. The Arkadian does not have the interior space in which to reflect about what happens outside; it happens in the current world, or the past world. When Katherine thinks, in the human sense of the word, she is in the world, either in the current situation or evoking a past slife.”

“Yet despite all these individual particularities, two Arkadians can think something equivalent, right?”

“Yes. Here, as with our examination of kommunication, we can suppose that two slifes are equivalent if the virtual worlds that maintain the homeostasis of both slifes, what we called their perspektives, are equivalent. So, two Arkadians can have an equivalent thought because they have slifes with equivalent perspektives.”

“Then Arkadian ‘thoughts,’ if such a thing exists, do not exist independently from the Arkadians. No abstract thought is prior to the appearance of the Arkadians, or surviving beyond their disappearance, that corresponds, for example, to the ‘contents/container’ relationship.”
“Exactly. The ‘contents/container’ relationship, or the idea ‘Unicorns exist,’ do not exist independently from the Arkadians, and not because the proposition is about whether or not they exist, but because the relationship ‘contents/container’ or ‘Unicorns exist’ is part of the virtual world of all Arkadians, or the world of K, which is the same thing.”

“And if Erik loses the slife ‘Unicorns exist,’ or something from it, then the thought is lost?”

“Yes, it is. The kognitive system of an Arkadian is like an organized file folder of all the situations that have been experienced, and all the knowledge is integrated in each one of its slifes, and in the connections among them. If, for some reason, the kognitive system could not evoke the slife, because it was no longer able to integrate the different parts of the brain involved in the original slifes, the memograms would stop being kognitively relevant; the thought would have been lost, even though the brain preserves the memograms.”

“Okay, I will accept what you say about the description of a thought not being exactly the same as in human beings. However, a thought is one thing, and quite another thing is ‘to have thoughts’ or ‘to reason.’ When we human beings talk about ‘thinking,’ we are referring to things like ‘I am thinking about buying a car,’ ‘I like to daydream about what I will do on my vacation,’ or ‘I am solving a problem.’”

“When Arkadians are carrying out one of these activities, what they are doing is experiencing a present slife and manipulating past memograms, creating new scenes by the combination of evokations. Therefore, to think, to reason is to live re-living. Even when we say that an Arkadian is reflecting verbally, that individual is experiencing a slife, or a chain of slifes. When such persons are talking to themselves, what they are doing is evoking their past with words, lighting up memograms and manipulating them. To think in discourse is thus an interactive activity involving language and the spontaneous activation of the memograms. The relevant thing is that thanks to language, Arkadians can control this process.”

A light breeze picked up. The village was calm, not even a sound from the port.

“Can we translate a thought to a slife?”

“Yes, but with great difficulty. Different basic problems make the translation process difficult, and they have to do with differences between how we characterize human beings and Arkadians.”

“What are these differences?”

“Let us look at the first one:

*Thoughts are separate from the world:* Catherine’s thought that ‘Paris is the capital of France’ does not contain the city of Paris, but simply refers to it.
This is not the case in Arkadia.”

“How is Paris going to be contained in a slife?”

“The first day I said that a slife corresponds to a complex whole that includes the world or a part of it and the kognitive system. The kontents of a slife only make sense when they encompass both the world and the kognitive system. The kontents are not in the kognitive system, nor are they in the world; they appear through the conjunction of the kognitive system, the slife past, and the world. The world provides the objects, the kognitive system provides everything necessary to shape the relevant kontents in the slife. Without the world, the kognitive system can do nothing, and has nothing; without the kognitive system, the individual cannot shape reality nor establish interesting associations. Kontents, and therefore slifes, can only be characterized considering both elements. Remember once more the analogy of phantom limbs. A phantom limb is created through the conjunction of a real limb, flesh and bone, with the brain. When the limb is lost, the patient can still sense the limb; the patient feels it as if it were present. In the same way, if we want to describe Katherine’s slife when she looks at the apple on the table, we cannot say that the kognitive system represents ‘an apple on the table.’ Instead, we have to include properties and elements of the world and activities of the kognitive system. Just by looking in Katherine’s head we will not be able to discover Katherine’s thought that ‘an apple is on the table.’ Instead, we have to analyze the world-kognitive system complex. Consequently, slifes cannot be understood as separate from the world, because they are part of the chunk of world in which the original slife was created. No two media exist, the kognitive system and the world; the slife is the only one.”

“But Arkadians have memories, and they can remember that they thought an apple was on the table, with no need for the apple to be there when they remember.”

“True, but remember that memograms include the imprints left by the slife. Since they are imprints of the original slife, and not representations, the memograms also have to be understood as one part of the world-kognitive system unit. When they are activated, the parts of the brain are activated that were activated when the person had the slife, so it is like reliving the original slife. In one way or another, if we want to describe the slife that is the memory of the original slife, we have to fill the empty space left by the world after it impregnated the kognitive system.”

He stopped talking for a moment and looked at me.

“Do you follow me?”

“More or less.”

“Let us take a look at the second difference:

*Thoughts represent states of the world:* The thought described by the
sentence ‘Catherine believes that Paris is the capital of France’ represents a relationship between the city of Paris and the country of France.

Again, a slife is not a representation of the situation that the Arkadian lives through. The kognitive system shapes reality, instead of creating a representation, outline, or copy of what is happening in the world. When Katherine looks at the apple in the fruit bowl, she has no image or representation of the apple, the dish, and the table. What she experiences is the panceptual activity of kognitive system. In the case of a phantom limb, when the patient describes the missing limb, he or she is not examining a copy or a representation of the limb; instead, they just feel it. Remember the strategy that my grandfather uses to remember telephone numbers. A telephone number can be preserved without it being represented anywhere, since remembering the movements necessary to dial that number on the telephone is enough. While the movements correspond to a typical telephone, that is, as long as the numbers are arranged in the same way and the same finger movement is required, then the telephone number will be remembered, since the conceptual competence of the movement ‘satisfices’ the telephone number. The movement is not a representation of the number. So, if somebody changes the telephone and the numbers are arranged differently, then my grandfather will lose the ability to call that number. Similarly, the kognitive system does not represent reality; it only shapes it and discerns it. As long as the discrimination satisfices the conceptual competence of its kontents, it will not be necessary to represent the situation.”

He stopped again, and looked at me hard.

“Are we doing all right?”

“I guess so.”

“Let us look at the third difference between human thought and Arkadian slife:

*Thoughts are either true or false:* The thought described by the sentence ‘Catherine believes that Paris is the capital of France’ can be true or false.

This condition, as we have seen, is fulfilled in the case of slifes, although it is not objectively expressed in the same way. To be able to say that Katherine has a true slife, we must call upon a kind of true world, a virtual world in which an omniscient being like K would live. This world corresponds to all the kontents that can be revealed in the real world from the perspective of the Arkadian kognitive system, or, the world as seen by the omniscient being K. In those areas in which an overlap exists between the Katherine’s perspektive and K’s perspektive, her slife can be considered true. Okay?”

“If you say so.”

“I also said that Arkadians do not have incontrovertible criteria regarding
the verisimilitude of a belief. To be able to determine the truth of this virtual world in which the Arkadian lives, we must be able to transform their slifes into elements that can be true or false, that can be compared with something of the world that confirms them or denies them. In the human world, this appears to be achieved through language, but in Arkadia that is not possible. Arkadian language does not describe reality because it lacks the ability to represent the states of the world, so it cannot characterize slifes or the world, and it therefore cannot determine the truthfulness or falseness of a slife. However, Arkadians have what we call omniscient guaranties, or K guaranties, that determine the verisimilitude of a slife, and whose values are continuous, not absolute, which is to say that they determine greater or lesser verisimilitude. By trusting these guaranties, Arkadians can attribute verisimilitude to a perspektive.”

Another pause, and another look.
“How are we doing?”
“Well....”
“Let us look at the last fundamental difference between human thought and Arkadian slifes:

Thoughts form part of inferential relationships: Catherine can make an inference between the thought, ‘Paris is the capital of France,’ and the thought, ‘Paris is in France.’

This condition can be established in the case of the Arkadians, but not because slifes are represented in some kind of language of thought. In Arkadia, inferential relationships can exist between two slifes, keeping in mind the specific figure/ground, their konceptual connections, and the capability for transfer among different slifes. For example, the slife:

(1) Which hand has more fingers, the left or the right?

is inferentially related to the slife of:

(2) Both hands have the same number of fingers.

through the slife:

(3) Hands have five fingers.

In general, all Arkadians can make this inference. As we saw, because the perspektive 1 is included in ε, the relationship can be expressed objectively. It may occur that the same Arkadian that can carry out the operation from 1 to 2, will not be able to carry out a similar one that responds to the same human
inferential rules. I am referring to getting from:

(4) Which weighs more, a kilogram of straw or a kilogram of lead?

to:

(5) Both weigh the same.

through the slife:

(6) All kilograms weigh the same amount.

In fact, some Arkadians say:

(5*) A kilo of lead.

and this is because the inferences that they make are based both on their kognitive capability and their slife background.”

“So they do not reason logically?”

“They do not reason following or applying the rules of logic. Their being able to resolve a reasoning problem according to a rule of logic does not mean that we should deduce that they will solve all the reasoning problems in which that rule of logic applies. To reason in Arkadia means being able to transfer the appropriate past figure/ground to a new situation that has not been experienced before. So if the figure/ground corresponds to a rule of logic, it can be used to solve similar problems, but not all of them. As always, it depends on a myriad of factors.”

“Then how do Arkadians reason?”

“By applying the transfer capability of their kognitive system to their slife background. This, like any other kognitive capability, has to be anchored in the nature of the slifes and the application of transfer mechanisms.”

“Can they, for example, resolve syllogisms?”

“Yes, they can resolve syllogisms, but not all types of syllogisms and not all the contents of one type of syllogism. As I just said, logic does not describe the Arkadian way of reasoning, since they learn to reason through the combination of capabilities of their kognitive system and their slife background. For this reason, their ability to resolve syllogisms is not based on the learning of rules of logic, but on the application of figure/grounds to situations. As is the case with other capabilities, they will be progressively more successful in different types of syllogisms, and for different contents of syllogism. In this sense, we can state that their reasoning respects the rules of logic, but that, as we know, is because they are capable of adapting satisficingly to the rules, not because they apply
them.”
“Examples, please.”
“Let us see how Erik resolves a syllogism:

Premise 1: All planets revolve around a sun.
Premise 2: The earth is a planet.
Conclusion: The earth revolves around a sun.

Let us say that Erik has not learned the rules for resolving a syllogism, since what I want you to keep in mind is the natural way, the way determined by the kognitive system, of reaching the conclusion. Erik’s strategy is to adopt a view in his particular world for each sentence and see if they agree. Thus, the first sentence evokes a slife that focuses on, as figure/ground, the relationship between a planet and a sun in a model of the solar system that they had in school, and the surrogate slife that such a slife will apply to ‘all planets.’ The second sentence can evoke a slife in which the kontent ‘Earth’ is situated as figure in the kontent ‘planet.’ How does he reach the conclusion? Not spontaneously. An Arkadian must know what is being asked with these sentences, and so he or she must have seen cases of syllogisms in order to detect that what is being asked is to relate in a reasonable way the terms that are not repeated in the premises. The conclusion corresponds therefore to an overlap of the premises, and the sentence used tries to evoke the terms that are not repeated. Thus, in the conclusion, the two sentences of the premises overlap, and Erik has a slife in which the Earth is focused on as figure in the ground of the relationship with the kontents sun. Finally, the reading of the conclusion evokes a slife whose perspektive is equivalent to the slife in which the two sentences overlapped, and then Erik asserts that the argument is correct. In any case, just because an Arkadian resolves one type of syllogism, it does not mean she or he will resolve all the syllogisms of that type.”

“Could you identify more differences?”
“Yes, a crucial one. Human thoughts have a special quality, our ‘awareness,’ or consciousness of the content of the thought, just as an awareness of the color red, of the sound of a bell, or the taste of tea. In all of these cases something is specific, an activity carried out by the individual that seems a realization of what he or she is thinking, and that is beyond the information of the senses: a mind that observes what is happening in the body and the world.”

“I think I know what you mean.”
“Well, for you to understand how this particularity is different in Arkadia, I am going to use an experiment that is impossible to carry out, but which we can talk about. To begin with, will you accept that a thought may correspond to a slife and its derived perspektive?”

“I will accept that.”
“Let us suppose, then, that the slife, to make things simple, is what may be evoked in Katherine by the sentence, ‘An apple is on the table.’ Let us suppose that, with the help of a wonderful and sophisticated technology that you have available, you disconnect in Katherine’s brain all those areas that are concerned with thinking.”

“If you insist.”

“Yet, despite your having done so, Katherine continues to have the same slife, and therefore, the same thought, and this is because in a slife nothing happens but the activity of the senses, everything that we have called panception.”

“But wait a minute, let us say that Katherine closes her eyes, is not she still thinking, ‘An apple is on the table?”’

“That she closes her eyes does not change anything, for she is still connected to the world with her senses active and functional. The areas of the brain that process those senses are active. Though her eyes are closed, the impact of the apple is still functional, since the imprint activates the memories of apples, what is preserved in the memograms. Consequently, the slife derives a perspective in which the apple appears, and this content is also a recreation of the apple that she just saw.”

“What if all access to her senses was cut off?”

“Then she would not have slifes.”

“Excuse me?”

“In fact, she would no longer ‘be there.’ The key is the deactivation or disarticulation of the connection among the senses and the cerebral cortex. Without this functional connection, no kognitive activity is possible.”

“We human beings have something, a mind, that goes beyond the senses, and if Arkadians are like human beings, they should also have minds, right?”

“Not necessarily. The mind as understood by human beings is an entity that is beyond the mere perception of the world. Somehow, human beings know that we do not need to be connected with the world in order to think; we can disconnect ourselves superficially, closing our eyes for example, and begin a discourse process. In an extreme case, even if the senses were completely disconnected, as meditation experts appear to do, thought would remain intact. But in Arkadia things are not like that. To think is to experience a slife in the same way as panceiving the world. If Arkadians evoke a memogram, they live it as if they were living the original moment again, although with reduced intensity because the chunk of original world is missing.”

“What do we do then with the sensations of, for example, ‘red,’ ‘pain,’ or ‘fear?’ What I mean is, does Katherine have the same sensation of the color red as Erik does? Does an out-of-tune clarinet sound the same to Katherine as it does to a professional clarinet player?”

“As I have just said, Arkadians, like human beings, have subjective sensa-
tions, something that can be described as a perception or awareness of what is happening, a state that has a subjective component. The essence of this something is a quality of what is being experienced."

"Of what does this awareness consist in Arkadia?"

"Just as the quality of a thought is a present view through the past, the quality of ‘red’ or of ‘sweet’ is the consequence of superimposing all the slife background of that Arkadian for those kontents with which the sensation is felt. The awareness of ‘red’ or of ‘Nikole’s beauty’ is not something independent of that slife past. As I said on Monday, when Katherine as a newborn baby looks at this apple, she does not see anything clearly, just vague shapes and colors. However, after a few months, Katherine has subjective sensations that are the consequence of looking at the apple through the whole past of apples and reds. Therefore, the sensation of ‘red,’ the awareness of ‘red,’ is the consequence of an impact in the kognitive system seen through a slife past. Similarly, when baby Katherine looks at ‘Self-Portrait with Pipe and Bandaged Ear’ by Van Gogh, she does not see anything specific, only vague shapes and colors. After a few months, Katherine sees specific areas of color and shapes. As she gets older, Katherine sees new things, especially after studying the history of art. The subjective sensation of the shape of a pipe is the consequence of the overlapping of all past slifes and their kontents of pipe shapes. It is not something inherent to the present of the panception; instead, that pipe is looked at literally through her slife past."

"I am not sure if I understand."

"Allow me to use an analogy. We could say that a banknote for one hundred eukos, the currency in Arkadia, has no volume. But if you pile up a thousand hundred euko bills, the money will have volume, and the volume is the consequence of piling up the bills. In the same way, we cannot explain the quality of the color ‘red’ that is panceived without making reference to a specific slife past of ‘reds.’"

"And pain?"

"The same thing. The quality of a pain is a slife past seen from the current electrochemical phenomenon."

Non-Professor O stopped talking. He took a bottle out of his pocket. It was Tuesday’s perfume. He opened it, splashed some liquid on his hand, spread it around and then gave me his hand.

"Smell it."

"How strange! It is as if I had traveled through time. For a moment I have felt you as I was sensing you on Tuesday. And I have realized that I no longer sense you as I did on Tuesday, even if I thought so."

"That is what happens to Arkadians. They cannot be aware of kontents that they have not experienced in the past, nor how they have changed. An Eskimo, for example, can differentiate between varying shades of white snow, and will be
aware of them, while for any non-Eskimo this would be impossible, even though their eyes and their brain work the same way. And an expert chess player pan­ceives in any game of chess a configuration that is derived from the arrangement of the pieces on the board, of which the expert is aware, while non-experts cannot be aware of it no matter how much it is explained to them. This is due to their respective pasts, and not only some contemporaneous activity of their kognitive systems.”

“Can this awareness be seen, or analyzed, or reproduced?”

“No, for the time being that is impossible. But when we do have the necessary elements, we will be able to include the contents/container relationship, pain or the color red in the characterization of a slife. We will be able to describe that what we are calling the awareness of red is, for a given kognitive system and slife past, the attention to a type of kontent, in such a way that the attention to this type of kontent provokes a situation that is the subjective sensation of what we call awareness of ‘red.’”

The smoke from his pipe came straight to me. Today it had a lot more nuances that it did the first day; I could pick up hints of honey and a light aroma of young mahogany. I looked up at the sky. It was clear, not a single cloud. The slopes of Kuo were such an intense shade of green that it almost hurt.

“Then, that Katherine needs her past to be able to think would mean that telepathy is not possible in Arkadia, right?”

“Exactly. Since all present slifes are a look at the world through the past of the individual, a human thought translates in Arkadia into experiencing the present through the past. The shape of the apple on the table is seen the way it is because it is seen through all the apple shapes that have been seen in the past. Therefore, Erik having telepathy with Katherine would mean that Erik is having Katherine’s current slife, panceiving all the kontents of the situation through all of Katherine’s slife past, which is frankly quite difficult to achieve.”

“Could telepathy exist if somebody were able to transmit his or her perspekive, that is, the virtual world that complements his or her slife?”

“No, because the virtual world cannot be transmitted. It can be shared when kommunication is successful, but no transmission is possible.”

“This also means that the way we saw things in the past is lost forever, right?”

“More or less. The sensations depend on the weight of all the previous sensations, and thus those that have had a continuity in time can no longer recover the original quality. For that reason, childhood is in the distance, separated from each individual forever, since that person, that slife brain that pan­ceived as a child is no longer there, and therefore cannot see the world like it used to. However, an exception exists. The sensations that have not been reproduced maintain the original quality. If at some point in my childhood I ate a kind of muffin that I have not had since, that muffin will preserve its original flavor.
But if I have eaten lots of the same muffins, or substances that interfere with that flavor, the original flavor will end up being lost. The present is a present seen through the past, but the past can also be a present in the future.”

“What I do not see is how we can explain the behavior of the Arkadians, their decisions, their reactions, if we cannot base our explanations on mental states. In our world, when we want to explain why somebody has done something, like why someone bought a new car, or why that child started to cry, why a family goes on a trip to France instead of Italy, we talk about ‘wishes,’ ‘beliefs,’ ‘fears’; we say things like ‘he bought a new car because he was envious of his neighbor’s new car,’ or ‘she started crying because she was afraid to go to school,’ or ‘he decided to take his family to France instead of Italy because he wanted to see the Louvre.’ And that requires a mind, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, it does. The psychological explanation in human beings introduces ‘reason,’ ‘motives,’ ‘wishes,’ ‘feelings,’ etc., that is, mental states that have causal power. That is why human beings are said to be rational creatures. Human actions are carried out because of reasons or feelings that shed light on the behavior of a person and help us to explain it. But do not think that by saying this about the human world we have said everything. To say that reasons are the cause of behavior is problematic. If we consider the fact that we are part of the physical world, then the reasons have to be causes, but the reasons are not physical causes. Physical causes, described by empirical laws, are contingent, while logic or reason is not. As opposed to the empirical laws, a rational law is discovered by reflection, and it is true by definition: it is not an empirical principle revealed by life. A given rational law can be broken or not remembered by the person: sometimes persons may not do what they want, or not accept what they believe. If they were empirical laws, then they could not be broken, for we would always have to behave in the same way. An apple always falls from a tree, unless something holds it up, while we human beings can give a spare coin to a beggar or not give it without any intervention in our decision by the world of physical laws. Consequently, in contrast with the natural sciences, the elements that comprise an explanation of human conduct are established a priori. However, in Arkadia we do not have to make this distinction.”

“How is that possible?”

“Imagine the following situation:

Catherine is eating in a restaurant. During the meal, an alarm goes off. All of the clients look at each other, and look at the waiters, but nobody does anything. Suddenly, the cooks run out of the kitchen and rush toward the exit. A second later, everyone in the restaurant gets up and runs out.

If we wanted to explain what had happened, from the outside, we could say the following:
Catherine thinks that she heard an alarm. Catherine knows that alarms are used to warn about dangers. Catherine does not want to endanger her life. Catherine knows that sometimes alarms sound for no reason. Catherine sees no sign of worry on the part of the restaurant personnel. Catherine calms down. Catherine sees the cooks running out of the kitchen. Catherine knows that when a serious and imminent danger occurs people flee. Catherine decides to flee.

“I get it. In the explanation you have used several references to reasons, beliefs, and wishes.”

“Exactly. In the explanation I have indicated psychological causes like, ‘Nobody wants to endanger their life,’ ‘When faced with imminent danger, you should flee,’ and also knowledge about the world like, ‘An individual knows that nobody wants to endanger their life,’ ‘The people who work in an establishment know the meaning of its alarms,’ ‘A cook has no reason to run out of the kitchen except to flee,’ ‘If someone is running away, probably a good reason exists.’ But language is a trap; do not trust it when we are talking about Arkadians. What we say about them has to be submitted to a precaution that you must not forget.”

“Okay.”

“If we suppose that the same thing has happened to Katherine, we also have to make use of some types of laws. In Arkadia we do not have to talk about psychological laws, but slife laws, whose application does not require that we call upon reason or desires in the sense of psychological states separate from the slifes.”

“What does it mean to say that ‘Do not put your life in danger’ is a slife law?”

“From the human point of view, to consider that ‘to hear an alarm’ is an imminent danger means playing with an enormous advantage, that of language. Let us try to explain the situation that we have devised for Arkadia. Let us suppose that many of Katherine’s slifes correspond to the reference knowledge that Catherine has about restaurants, alarms, cooks, etc. Let us suppose that Katherine has seen people running away from fires on TV. One day, for example, she saw a show with people running from a fire in the city hall of the Island of Gor. If the ‘hearing the alarm’ and the ‘seeing the cooks running’ contexts are linked, determining the explanation by reference to situations that she has recorded in her memograms is possible. Therefore, one can say that the cause is not a singular mental cause, but the relevant memograms that are transferred to the new situation. Do you follow me?”

“I am not sure.”

“If we look at the slifes that gave rise to the relevant memograms, and we can establish an analysis of their occurrences, we will see inscribed there rational and psychological aspects forming part of the slife like just any other panceptual
aspect. The ‘cause and effect’ slife background, in which Katherine learned about a relationship between billiard balls, allows her to understand that the cause of the cook fleeing is that danger exists.”

“I am far from convinced.”

“Let us suppose that in a slife a figure/ground is established that can be described as follows:

(7) In Katherine’s virtual world a kontent can be described as ‘Alarms have the function of warning about danger,’ which is rooted in school slifes in which she was taught that alarms warn about danger, and that people should vacate the place in which they are as soon as possible.

(8) In Katherine’s virtual world a kontent can be described as ‘Alarms often sound for no apparent reason,’ which is rooted in slifes in which she has heard alarms sound in public places even though no danger existed.

(9) In Katherine’s virtual world a kontent can be described as ‘People tend to flee from danger as soon as possible,’ which is rooted in slifes in which she has learned that as soon as a danger appears, people run away.

“So?”

“In the restaurant, perspektive (7) was activated as soon as the fire alarm sounded. However, perspektive (8) was also activated, so at the beginning nothing happened, but as soon as she saw the cooks run by, perspektive (9) was activated, (8) was voided, and (7) took over the situation again, prompting Katherine to get up and run. In other words, the threat is based on a panception of the situation, and the action counts as a slife based on old slifes.”

“Are not we failing to explain the main point, that a danger is perceived and that people want to flee from it?”

“No, because that is already included in all the relevant past slifes.”

“Wait a minute, situations arise in which the past does not count. If someone threatens us, we feel fear, and we will try to flee. This is because we respond immediately to threats, because of the mental causes present at that moment.”

“False. In Arkadia Katherine flees not because she is obeying a psychological law, but because her past is always active. Fear does not make her flee, something floating around her head, but ‘the-fear-in-the-slife’ and the transfer of past slifes in which fear-in-the-slife exists. In these past slifes a panceptual element corresponds to what human beings call the feeling of fear, but it has the same rank as the color or shape of an object.”

“And if we say that Katherine has given her spare change to a beggar because she felt pity?”

“The feeling does not move; instead, its structured past does. When we
explain why the human Catherine gives her change to a beggar, we say that she
does it because she feels pity. This ‘because’ points to a relationship not indi­
cated by an empirical law but by a rational law, that does not depend on the slife,
but on a discipline that we can call ‘rationality.’ But in Arkadia the ‘because she
feels pity’ responds to, or is analyzed, in a set of memograms that prompt Kath­
erine to give something to a beggar, according to the structure of her current
slife. Let us suppose that the original slife is one that Katherine experienced
while playing ball in a park. She saw a child looking at her with a sad expres­sion,
and Katherine realized that the child wanted to play but was too shy to ask.
This ‘feeling of pity’ or whatever you want to call it, is not something that was
floating around her head by itself, but was just another aspect of the slife, like
colors, or shapes. Without the slife, they do not exist.”

“Why does this eliminate the need for psychological
laws?”

“It does not eliminate the need for psychological laws; it just puts them at
the same level as any other type of kognitive process of the slife. What it elimi­
nates is the empirical-rational opposition. If the restaurant-alarm slife activates
the old slifes involving alarms because of its transferable structure, this can have
an empirical characterization. This is so because, to simplify, the memogram has
a characterization, a complex one, true, but one that is also empirical. Therefore,
if the old slifes with alarms bring about a decision to flee, the cause can be
characterized empirically, since the connection between memograms and the
current slife can be established, and the result of the fleeing too. When it comes
time to explain her behavior in detail, we will have to reveal in her those memo­
grams that determined her attitude. Without them, she would not have acted that
way.”

“So, if we find the catalogue of slifes-causes, we will have all the psychol­
ogy explained.”

“Even if such a task is extremely long, complicated and difficult to
achieve.”

“Why?”

“Because the slife in which she sees people in danger flee is a complex
structure, and the slifes in which she sees the cook running away is also a com­
plex structure, and the relations between them are not simple. They reveal a
complex structure in each of the slifes; the revelation also involves many more
unconscious and automatic processes than conscious ones. Not merely ‘because
that happened to me, I will do this,’ but ‘because that, that, that, and that hap­
pened to me, I will do this, this, this, and this.’”

“So coming up with an explanation for each situation is not easy.”

“Exactly. The complete causal explanation of any situation will always be
extremely complex, because all the slifes have multiple causal connections, so
we would almost have to refer to all slifes since the moment of birth. To sim­
plify, we can say that on a given day Katherine experienced a slife whose fig-
ure/ground was ‘people fleeing’ from danger, and another which was ‘alarm-danger,’ and that both, structured in the Arkadian brain, are activated in the slife that she experiences in the restaurant. She understands the situation by reference to these slifes, and then acts in accordance. The explanation does not require that we avoid the empirical, and at the same time we can make a generalization about those connections and characterize a behavior by using shortcuts like saying, ‘Katherine has fled because she felt fear.’”

“Say that Erik wants to light a match, and when he does it he gets burned, and, according to our point of view, he concludes that ‘lighting matches is dangerous’. How can this situation be described in Arkadia?”

“Let us suppose that this situation comprises the following steps, as described by you:

(10) Erik wants to light a match.
(11) Erik remembers where the box of matches is.
(12) Erik sees the box of matches.
(13) Erik lights a match.
(14) Erik burns himself and feels pain.
(15) Erik thinks that lighting a match is dangerous.

What is happening in (10)? To put things in ridiculously simple terms, what is happening is the following. To begin with, (10) does not just appear out of nowhere, but is the product of a previous situation. Let us suppose that someone offers Erik a cigarette, and at that moment he experiences a slife in which he remembers himself smoking. The memory has pleasurable elements, and is followed by a slife in which he imagines himself smoking. He returns to the original slife, adding the new kontent that prompts a modification of that slife so that it becomes another one in which Erik is smoking; what we human beings would call desire. In Erik’s case, a new aspect is added to the panception, as if another object from the world were added. What happens is that Erik is looking at the cigarette, and the slife demands that it be lit, because Erik knows that he has to light the cigarette in order to smoke it. He experiences then a slife whose structure is that of finding a box of matches. That is where the first stage ends. Let us go on to stage (11), in which we have described Erik as ‘Erik remembers where the box of matches is.’ At that moment, what happens is that Erik’s kognitive system tries to evoke a memogram that will indicate to him where the matches are. When he finds that memogram, Erik has a memory of the original slife, or of a recreation of it, in which he sees, for example, the box of matches in a desk drawer. In stage (12), Erik ‘sees the matches,’ that is, he opens the drawer and experiences a slife in which the object in the drawer is focused on and evokes all of those memories of objects in which the term ‘box of matches’ has been anchored. Remember that some of these memories may not correspond
with what other Arkadians, K, or we would call ‘box of matches,’ but, as we said, if these konceptual connections maintain conceptual competence, then we can get along with Erik. In (13), Erik picks up the matches and proceeds to light one, thanks to a series of past slifes in which the gestures for lighting matches became well established, and the only thing that Erik does is to reproduce those gestures. In (14), a part of the combustible material that lighted the cigarette sticks to Erik’s finger; he gets burned and feels pain. This pain appears in the slife, although it is just another panceptual element, like the color of the flame. Finally, when we characterize Erik in (15) as ‘Erik thinks that lighting matches is dangerous,’ what Erik has done is focus on all the slifes in which he lit a match as related to the accident, the burn, that has happened to him as ground.”

“What advantages do we gain with these explanations?”

“This way of characterizing Arkadians allows us to do something that we cannot do with human beings, and that is to understand the ‘because’ of their behavior without having to set up an opposition between empirical laws and rational laws. We can then explain why Arkadians behave in a rational way without having to call upon non-material causes. This is where we find the best distinction for studying the Arkadians. Their behavior is not directed by reasons, but by reasons-in-slifes, how they are characterized and how they are transferred. Everything that we have to say about Arkadian behavior will be defined by the structural characteristics of each situation, and the way in which they are associated slifely.”

“However, it seems to me that you are cheating, because it does not matter if we remove those rational laws if in reality they are included in the original slifes. Suppose that Katherine sees a guy kicking a dog, and she thinks that it is a bad thing to do, a ‘bad deed’.”

“Again, in each slife we can include as many kontents as we want, and among the relations that we establish aspects that characterize associations which human beings call psychological or rational. In one of Katherine’s slifes an association is fixed in which kicking a dog. This is seen as a bad thing, but is explained just as are all the other panceptual elements that have an abstract or kognitive nature. The kognitive system establishes that association as it does any other type of relation, like contents/container, behind/in-front, large/small, friendly/dangerous. The association exists because of the intrinsic characteristics that ‘unpleasant,’ ‘avoidable,’ ‘reprehensible’ may have, and because of the consequences that may result from ‘sounding off the Arkadian who kicked the dog’ or ‘praising the taking care of the injured dog.’ You will say that these consequences connect two situations, the panception of the kicking and the sounding off, that are not connected empirically but rationally. But precisely because Katherine has seen the sounding off of similar situations, she connects these two complex situations, and this behavior adapts smoothly to the kognitive structure of the Arkadian.”
“Katherine can also find something ‘bad’ spontaneously, for the first time, right?”

“False again. Since infancy, Katherine has learned from her family and social setting lots of contents regarding social and moral behavior of which she may not be aware, but which are still present.”

“But ‘bad’ is a moral term, not a panceptual term.”

“False once more. Arkadians do not behave altruistically or meanly because they apply a law or a rule, but because in their particular slifes, on a specific day, they learned that ‘to do such and such is good’ and the good thing that was done is what human beings would call a good deed. Therefore, this particular slife, and those that are associated with it, is the cause of the current altruistic act, and not a general law. The causes of an action are not some ‘laws of rationality,’ but specific events, from the past, and that were subjected to processes that conditioned their occurrence. These conditioning factors can be counted as examples of laws of rationality.”

“Then rationality does not exist in Arkadia without having experienced a life.”

“Exactly. But do not believe that a life, by itself, by the mere chance of being in some place provides the moral and rational contents. As I said on Monday, the kognitive system is born with a strong capability of conditioning the slifes of an individual. It does not come with the contents ‘good’ and ‘bad’ but it comes with the necessary tools to bring about such contents. And such contents can potentially be described from a physical point of view.”

“I do not get that last part about how they can potentially be described from the physical point of view.”

“What I mean is that the slife is a structure potentially describable in the language of physical substances, as opposed to mental substances.”

“Excuse me?”

“Let us see. Among human beings two positions attempt to account for mental phenomena. Some people are of the opinion that nature, including the human body, is material and therefore governed by the principles of physics. They understand human beings in a special way in that they are composed of one material substance and another non-material, or mental substance; an individual would essentially be a combination of mental and material substances. This is what is known as dualism. But, as occurs with the empirical-rational opposition, dualism is far from having done away with the body-mind problem, since how to identify, how to explain the interaction of the two substances remains to be seen. To put it a different way, if the mind is an immaterial substance, lacking the physical properties such as spatial localization and shape, how can it be the cause of effects in the material world, how can it make objects move, and at the same time be causally affected by the world, like when we feel pain from a stubbed toe?”
“That is what I ask.”

“The other human position is known as materialism. Materialists sustain that everything that exists is either material or physical in nature. Minds are in one way or another composed of physical substance. As with dualism, up to the present different routes deal with the ‘one way or another’ detail, but even the most popular position, that the mind is superimposed on the brain, is problematic. Even if materialism is accepted, the problem of the particular relationship between what is mental and what is physical remains, since even physical minds have special properties, like what we have called intentionality, or consciousness, that require explanation, and are not easily accessible by the materialists. The simple proclamation that the mind is not made of mental substance, but is material, like the rest of the world, is not enough to explain the mind’s traits that appear distinctive, if not unique.”

“So?”

“If all human thought is described in the case of Arkadians as a complex activity of the brain, complex but activity nonetheless, and like a part of the world, then describing it in physical terms is possible. We do not have to explain the concept of ‘beauty’ as something mental, but as a situation that an individual lives through at a given time, or as the set of situations or connections among elements of different situations. We do not have to explain the thought ‘Unicorns exist in Pluto’ as something immaterial, but as a situation experienced by an individual. We do not have to explain the idea of ‘freedom’ as something that floats around in a person’s head, but as a situation experienced by an individual. In short, mental states are part of the slifes, and the slifes are states of the Arkadian brain and the world, physical states that are highly organized and describable for the time being only in terms of contents and their distinctiveness, like a storm being a physical state that is described in meteorological terms, and whose characterization has to be done from the perspective of a third person.”

“But pain is not something physical.”

“When an Arkadian gets burned with a match, he or she feels the burn and thinks something along the lines of ‘how unfortunate,’ but that is a ‘body-that-feels-in-the-world’ and not a ‘mind-that-feels-what-is-happening-to-its-body.’ The pain is a specific panceptual characteristic describable in terms of states of a brain, and of a slife past. The causal properties of pain are the causal properties of pain-in-that-slise that depend on the causal properties of all the pains that have been felt in the past. That is, nothing is floating around the Arkadian’s head, pain, that makes that individual decide not to light another match; instead, the specific slife is associated with other slifes that have been followed by others, and thus the kognitive system can transfer these structures to the new situation. On other occasions, depending on the structure of the slife, that pain may prompt her or him to burn herself or himself again, if she or he wants, for example, to demonstrate how courageous she or he is. Pain in a pure state does not exist.
What we human beings describe as the thought ‘how unfortunate’ is not a sentence in a language of thought, but a slife whose figure/ground is the same Arkadian with panceptual characteristics associated with other Arkadians who have experienced unfortunate situations, and that new slife has a reality in the kognitive system that can be described in the language of material substances and their distinctiveness.”

“How then is the mind related to the body?”

“If the thesis is that only to live re-living the slifes exists and that slifes can have a physical description, then we have a direct road to considering that the mind, as separate from the body, is a superfluous concept. We do not need to refer to entities separate from a specific situation to account for the behavior or kognitive competence of an Arkadian. For one thing, everything that human beings explain as mental is explained in the case of Arkadians by their relation with a slife, or a set of them, that has a physical reality, which is the structure that remained in the brain after the original slife, and the subsequent manipulation of that memogram. The human concepts of ‘love,’ ‘beauty,’ and ‘loyalty’ are not mental entities, but a set of situations experienced at some point in the past that remain connected as a potential unit. The beliefs, desires, thoughts are views of the virtual world of each Arkadian, and not sentences in a language of thought, images floating inside the brain, or properties emerging from physical activities. The views are constituted by the dense weight of a slife life. Slifes correspond to phenomena that are physical, and complicated, that can be described as the apprehension of a series of kontents and their structuring in the form of figure/ground. Each slife can be characterized physically, by the description of its kontents, and those kontents, even the most abstract ones, are explained through the analysis of what we have called panception. In consequence, what is mental no longer makes sense as a substance and as explanation, and the mind is no longer necessary. No ‘mind’ floats around, but a structured past of slifes view, analyze, and decide in the present situation. True, a central axis exists, a self, although this self, as we will discuss later, is nothing more than the superimposition of the centrality and unification of all past slifes.”

The breeze had become more intense, along with the cold. The sky was painting itself orange. The town was getting quieter, and I began feeling anxious.

“Does this mean that we can describe the elements that define a particular Arkadian?”

“Yes, but as I said, the description, although possible, will be complex. To describe in a precise way all the elements that comprise a single slife is in itself a task beyond the expectations of any current scientific discipline. In each slife, which occupies only a tiny fraction of a life, an infinite number of relations exist with an incredible quantity of different slifes, and with each one of them relationships are established that substantially change the slifes themselves. That is why the road to explaining all thoughts from the slife perspective is an extremely
long one. Also, we currently lack the necessary elements for carrying out this demanding task. To discover how a thought like, ‘A quark is a basic element of the atom,’ or, ‘Freedom is a human right,’ can be characterized is complicated. It being incredibly complex does not mean that it is impossible. Just as we could examine a mammal embryo and work out something that corresponds to the stomach, or the heart, K can identify the patterns in a slife that correspond to the impact of a contents/container relationship. My impression is that as we further our investigations and get closer to revealing the mysteries of slifes, and as we progress toward a better understanding of kontents, we will be able to discover the mechanisms of kognition. Consequently, we can assume that in the distant future the descendants of today’s Arkadians will have identified each and every one of the particularities that are noted in their slifes. And when that moment arrives, it will be possible to characterize each slife down to the tiniest physical detail. From there, we will be able to explain Arkadian behavior by making reference to the slifes that are behind it, without having to call upon any distinct immaterial substance to explain the intentional, rational, and psychological properties.”

“Let us suppose that we can analyze each and every one of Erik’s memograms. Suppose we have that kind of sophisticated technology available and we are capable of identifying all of his nerve connections. Could we use this description to derive the virtual world in which Erik lives?”

“No. One thing is to physically identify each and every one of the elements that appear in the characterization of that Arkadian brain, but to read there where the imprints come from would be quite another, and more difficult thing. We cannot know to what memories of kontents those connections belong, because the semantics of cerebral engrams is contextual; it depends on what happened originally, since those same neural patterns can encode any imprint. What a neuron remembers today depends on what was noted when it was activated. Nothing of what is recorded in a neuron or a group of neurons is in itself a representation of anything, but is the impact of something from the surroundings or the body. Therefore, knowing the neurons does not explain what they record, what they ‘remember’; we need to know what is happening in the body, the surroundings, the visual field, the audio field, etc. Furthermore, the original imprints may no longer exist and may be now a combination of the originals. If this is the case, to analyze the new ones may be pointless, because the slife history has to be followed in order for the new structure to evoke a color, a place, or a voice. Without the history, the same structure may evoke a different smell or color, a different form or shape. All of this leads us to derive the following thesis:

*Semantigram Thesis*: The perspektive of a given memogram is the result of its slife past.
From this we can deduce that in order to read the biography of a given individual in that person’s memograms, we must attend each one of his or her existential moments from birth, or even before that, and observe and record absolutely all the elements that the brain notes, and how the elements are related with each other, and also record the subsequent modifications of all those traces. For this, the visual field of each situation has to be known, the temperature of the objects in contact with the body, the sounds noted, and those that remain as background noise, the emotions stimulated, etc. This represents an extremely high degree of complexity, and it would be almost impossible to manage it all at the same time.”

“Yes, but suppose that we could do it, that we could reproduce the analysis of memograms in an android, for example. Would we have a clone of the person? Would they be indistinguishable from each other?”

“I will say it again: An Arkadian is literally the slife past that the person has experienced throughout life. This past is recorded in memograms. Therefore, if we reproduce the memograms of an Arkadian, we will reproduce the Arkadian. But grasping just how complex that would be is difficult for us. As I described to you, the neural connections that are included in a memogram do not specify the situation in the world with which they were connected. These connections were established at a given moment and their signifikance depends on the situations with which they connected. No fixed correspondence exists between the current state of the brain and the world with which it was connected. In addition, a memogram is the trace of a slife, but this memogram has been enriched through time with konceptual connections with new memograms. So, even if we could characterize a memogram in a specific moment, we could not determine of which kontent it is a trace. To be able to make the android reproduction the only conceivable thing would be to make a copy of the individual’s body and mind and find a way for each one of its neurons to be recorded along with the setting and the position of the individual, in other words, reproducing the individual’s life step by step. It would probably be easier to reproduce the universe.”

“Okay, but what I want to know is if the android would be the same as the Arkadian. Would they feel the same? Would they be the same person?”

“If all that is recorded could be reproduced in an android, I think that person should be understood as being the same person: we would not be able to differentiate between them. Only at the moment of creation, because later they will each have experienced slifes in which the spatial-temporal localization would be different, and then they would also be different.”

“If that is true, what happens when Arkadians suffer amnesia and do not remember anything about their past, including their name, to whom they are married, what their parents look like, etc.?”

“I told you on Monday that if an Arkadian suffers a temporary amnesia, that person will not lose his or her knowledge. The person knows how to do the
same things as before, how to ride a bike, how to multiply, how to work out a syllogism. The person maintains the capability of what we have called the slife flavor of the slifes; that is, she or he perceives the color red from a unit and appreciates its ‘qualities.’ Only the sense of self has been lost, the sensation of who the person is, what her or his past was like.”

“What would happen if we disconnected Erik from his past?”

“If we were to disconnect Erik from his slife past, he would no longer exist as Erik. This means not only that nothing of what he experiences at that moment would have the same signifikance, neither the subjective sensation, such as the taste of a cherry or the sound of clarinet, nor the sensation of Erik as ‘Erik,’ with a biography, but also that he would barely be able to experience anything at all. Losing his slife past as a context would make Erik incapable of panceiving hardly anything. Therefore, if we were to disconnect Erik from his slife past, we would convert Erik into a baby that is just a few minutes old. The ‘Erik’ of the past would no longer exist.”

“But, if I understand what you are saying, then a huge difference exists between Arkadians and human beings: Arkadians are not free because if what happens to them at a given moment depends so much on what they have lived in the past, then as complicated as the individual history of each Arkadian may be, it would be possible to predict what that Arkadian will do, right?”

“You are right that free will is crucial and that the theory presented here could be in conflict with the indeterminate nature of human thought. What I have mentioned up to now about the Arkadians has been explained by the same science that explains the human world, and especially in this area, all the physical changes have to be explained in terms of physical causes. Immaterial causes have no place in Arkadia, and for that reason the behavior of the Arkadians has to be explained through empirical laws. Consequently, if all decisions made by Arkadians are determined by the laws of physics, then Arkadians are not truly free. However, no matter how difficult it is, I want to convince you that no problem exists in combining these principles with the idea that Arkadians do have their free will, and that they are not automatons.”

“How is that possible?”

“To put it briefly, the free will enjoyed by the Arkadians depends on the unique character of each slife, understood as the combination of an individual, with all of that individual’s history, and a situation.”

“What?”

“Let us imagine a situation in which Erik is reflecting on whether or not he should continue a relationship he is in. He goes over his past, and what novels, films, his friends say about such matters. After weighing the pros and cons for quite a while, Erik experiences a slife in which he sees that the best thing would be to end the relationship. The question you are asking corresponds to: does the explanation of this decision through a sophisticated analysis of the slifes,
kontents, relations, and organization eliminate the notion of free will?”

“I think so.”

“My impression is that the question no longer makes sense if we understand that that moment, that situation, that slife is unique, and that nobody has experienced that specific slife, with that structure, in the past, nor will anybody experience it in the future; not even K has experienced it until now. The complexity and wealth hidden behind every slife history, every personal history of an Arkadian, make each new moment unique, even for K. In the first place, we have the complexity of the slifes, the immensity of the elements that comprise each slife, the magnitude of the relations that can be established between the different elements and slifes. For each situation that is as complex as that, no computation is possible other than the one performed by the Arkadian herself or himself. So many factors have to be considered, that only the reproduction of the situation, the slife, will allow for the unknown to become clear.”

“Is such computation inconceivable? In a few years we may have all the information about Arkadians and their kognition, and we may have computers with astronomical capacities. Would not it be possible to calculate the decision that Erik will make?”

“It would be impossible to reproduce the sequence of circumstances that leads to an Arkadian decision in a way that would allow for the determination or reproduction of someone’s decision at a given moment. Even if we were K, it would be this way, because chance also plays a role in each moment. Maybe in the future the necessary elements and computers will be available to undertake this daunting task. More than the computational complexity itself, is the spatial-temporal particularity in which every individual lives in, beginning with the local setting and including the social and historical settings, which are the elements that configure the past, present, and future of this Arkadian. In short, we can say that each moment of an individual’s life is unique, in both the physical and metaphysical senses of the word. No other moment in the past or future will be the same or equivalent. Therefore, the individual, that sensation of self that shapes that individual, is free in that it is K’s hand that writes the present. In each slife no regularity, no pre-established relationship, and no law, comprise that slife and the decision to be made. Erik is the first in the world to go through that situation, to exemplify the properties of that situation, for that slife. Consequently, Arkadians are free in that they are unique and in that their vital moments are original, and have never occurred before and never will again. Nobody, not even K, can know what may happen in the following moment.”

“Is that the way that starts at birth?”

“In a way. You could say that the more complex the slifes of an organism are, and the more elements they contain, the freer the organism will be, since the degree of determination will be less. That is why animals, who have less rich slifes, are less free, but only less free.”
“Does a self exist taking the decisions?”

“Yes and no, no and yes. We cannot say that an immaterial self exists that decides at each moment, regardless of what a particular situation determines. The impression that it is a self, like a ‘soul,’ that decides is an illusion. This does not mean that Katherine cannot justifiably feel that she is the one who decides whether to go to Crete or Finland for vacation, whatever that self may be, and that she blames her actions on reasons of a psychological or moral nature, and that she considers herself a free agent, able to choose among different actions. This sensation of self as a unit that perceives, thinks, and acts is the consequence of the unity of all the slifes that Katherine has experienced, and the repetition over the years of that unity. It is not something that is outside the slife, like something that observes what is going on and then decides. No. The Arkadian self is in the middle of the slife, forming part of it.”

“Then what does not exist is what we human beings call the ‘soul’ or the self.”

“Let us take this in parts. We could call the ‘autobiographical I,’ the self that allows Katherine to talk about herself and say, ‘I went on vacation to Crete four years ago,’ ‘I used to be impulsive,’ and ‘I have fallen in love twice,’ etc. This self may have appeared in the following way. In the first stages of life, Katherine lives in a world for which she does not need to remember her past. She just lives. But, at some point in her childhood, her parents got out the photo album and started looking at it with her older brother. Katherine went up and saw the photos. Her parents talked about the vacations, and Katherine remembered the vacations. Her older brother interacted with their parents and talked about things he did and said. Katherine wanted to interact as well, but she could not. At that initial point, Katherine did not know what to say. A series of memories had been stimulated in her, but she did not know how to manage them. She saw herself in a place, but it had a complicated name; she saw her parents and herself, but she did not know what to say, nor how, even though she wanted to. She did not like the situation. The next day, she asked her parents to show her the photos, and she started to say things. This is how Katherine learned to manipulate her memories. The past began to flesh out, and, within it, so did she. When an Arkadian has understood this, when the slife in which ‘the self is remembered’ has become a functional memogram, the basis for the autobiographical memory has been turned on forever. From that point on, as Katherine has more and more slifes, the self becomes the flavor that remains of ‘Katherine’s presence in all past slifes.’ Later, the help provided by language will make the memory activities much stronger and more flexible so that she can be much more efficient in her precision of a given episode and be able to access it later and transmit it as she likes. Consequently, the ‘autobiographical I,’ which can also be called the ‘narrative I,’ the self that we can describe, say its likes and dislikes, what it has done in life, corresponds to the konceptual connection
among all the occurrences in which Katherine appears as herself in the slife. When this ‘autobiographical I’ has been established as a konceptual connection, then it can be incorporated as figure/ground of some or many slifes, so that Katherine recognizes it as a kontent. This is also what differentiates Arkadians from animals, because it means they can separate the self from other kontents, and therefore they convert the self into another object, which allows for the end of egocentrism, and the emergence of ‘other.’ In other words, it allows for the appearance of ‘self-consciousness.’”

“Why does that subjective sensation of an self that ‘experiences the world’ have to be ‘conscious?’ Why does the subjective sensation of self that allows Arkadians to say, ‘I am the one that is panceiving this Mozart sonata from the third row, seat number twelve, and nobody else can feel it like I do,’ exist?”

“In my opinion, which is absolutely hypothetical, the appearance of consciousness in Arkadians responds to a biological function that the kognitive system must have in order to be able to get along in the world. To be more specific, consciousness, understood as the subjective property of experiencing sensations, emotions and thoughts as a unified whole, would appear as a result of the need that decisions be taken in a unified and centralized way.”

“What decisions are you talking about?”

“Basically, the centralization of decisions is required in situations in which no possibility exists of making automatic decisions. The majority of biological decisions do not require centralization and unification. You have to keep in mind that the occurrence of a slife involves the intervention of a huge number of processes to which conscious access is not necessary, because they are made automatically. A large part of the kognitive process, as we saw before, involves parallel activities in many areas of the brain. However, in situations that require the assessment of distinct variables whose combination is not calculable through pre-established natural processes, then consciousness appears as a process that can weigh the different variables and make a decision. And the conscious variables are the ones that are relevant for making the decision, although slifes are also comprised of many other variables. To sum up, consciousness would contain those elements of a slife that are necessary for making a decision that cannot be adopted through biological rules or pre-established principles.”

“So, if we were not complicated, we would be neither free nor conscious, right?”

“More or less.”

At that moment the sun set for the last time, although I did not yet know it. The anxiety that I had been feeling off and on all day was now at its peak. I got up from the chair and walked to the balustrade. Down below was the town. The breeze had disappeared. A strange silence reigned that made the church look unreal. Little by little, my anxiety was diluted by the cries of the swallows above me, and the calm of the afternoon. When the anxiety was just crossing the border
to serenity, a glimmer of lucidity struck me. Arkadia did not exist, Arkadians did not exist. Non-Professor O had been talking to me about human beings, about the way he understands being human. That had been the rabbit’s warning. I turned around and saw that something strange was happening. The house, the terrace, the volcano, and the sky that I saw before me were fading slowly, until I could see only what appeared to be the mocking smile of Non-Professor O. I wanted to speak, to move, but I could not.