

Revelation vs. Reason
(A two-fall match)

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“So, what’s the big deal?” Peder sat on the barstool next to Two-Charlie. “A new thing is revealed to us, and we reason about it, right?”

Through the tall screened-in windows, a warm, moist breeze blew thru the bar. Across the frontage road, Lake Geneva glimmered in the afternoon sun.

“What in the hell are you talking about?” Two-Charlie had just come in for a quick Kraut-dog and a sixer to take back to his boat. The sun was already past its apex on the lake, and he had no interest in getting drawn into another philosophical debate with the two-tall twits. The last one had cost his friend, Johnny from Chicago, a front tooth.

“Revelation. You know, like . . . like when we found that Trish really liked girls—and I mean she really likes girls.” Peder exaggerated a wink.

“Do you always have to be such a twit?” Mary slid sideways between two boat bums seated at the crowded summer bar. “Hey Crissy, grab me a couple Old Styles.” Her voice was barely heard over the ruckus by the foos’ table where some college newbies were rocking it. “Who are you to judge?” She challenged Peder.

“Who’s judging? I was just wondering if I could watch one of the matches.” Peder laughed. “But, it’s not me this time,” he thumbed over to the pool table where the other twit was seriously engaged with what looked like a converted Mormon who wore black pants with a white shirt. Outside of the half-empty beer bottle in hand, a loosened tie was the guy’s only casual consideration.

Mary followed his gesture. “What’s he sayin’ to the white-collar?” She noted the other tall twit—the worked-tanned Alex—leaning forward in his particular way of conversation. He could somehow appear eager as a newbie student or forceful as a tenured prof on a roll—all with the same bearing.

“Actually, it’s the Collar who started it. Something about this Mormon guy named Hugh Nimble and human reasoning vs. divine revelation. I’m pretty sure the guy didn’t drink before he met Alex.”

“Yeah, and neither did you. Grab the beers, and let’s rescue the poor lad. Besides, it’s already three, and I gotta get back by six.”

The spot they chose was situated behind the electronic dartboard near the front door, which allowed a normal conversation to run about beneath the din of the crowded bar. Sliding between the pulsing dancers in their summer's best, Mary politely stood over the four-top the boys were using for a bench. The stale smell of old beer mixed with warm breaths of lake water and sunscreen was oddly pleasing. Pleasantly relaxed, Mary turned to the conversation.

"Yeah. . ." leaning in, white-collar had to raise his voice to press a point, "he actually says it's the sixth century BC where the age of the Sophic begins." He was referring to a paper by Nimbly.

"The what?" Alex crushed the empty beer can, tossing it nonchalantly into a grey 30-gal garbage can next to the front door. Nodding his thanks, he readily accepted another from Peder. "What's sophic?" He looked at Mary.

"It's a Greek thing meaning those skilled in thought or wise. Probably closer to the Russian concept of the intelligentsia during Solzhenitsyn's time."

"What?" Peder smiled at the irony. "The Bullshitvek college of useless thought?" Showing his scant regard for the history of those events, he brushed his blond locks to one side.

"Well, actually for Nimbly," the Collar seemed a bit abashed. "There's the Sophic and the Mantic. They're old terms for someone who seeks truth through science, which is human reasoning, and one who seeks it through divine prophesy or revelation."

"By truth, you're referring to truth of existence." Peder clarified. "Like, why all this shit is here?" He waved his hand about.

"Yeah, but like, more to the *authority* side of it." The Collar looked at Peder. "It may appear like bullshit to us now, but back then, this was new ground to explore."

"We seek answers from authority." Alex connected with a nod. "As Franklin says: Humans will be ruled by either God or tyrants."

"Right, born to be subjugated . . ." Mary laughed and turned to the Collar. "Throughout history, humans have generally come to the conclusion they are not in control of their exitance. They serve someone or something. Now, whether that someone or something gives a shit is a matter of endless debate. Hi, I'm Mary." She stuck out her hand. "I teach AP English and Mythology. "

“Hey, Mary. I’m Stephan. I’m stayin’ up here with my cousins. I’m from Utah, and no—not Mormon” He fiddled with his tie, “I just got off work at the Abby Resort.”

“Well, I’m his big sister.” She pointed a deeply polished red nail at Alex, “Our moms got a place up here over by Lynn pier.”

“Cool.” Stephan accepted a fresh beer from one of his dart-shooting friends. “I think the Russian things right, although the Russian Orthodox Church also had a thing called Sophism where Sophia meant Devine wisdom. Which leads us back to the initial point.” He turned back to Alex to resume the impromptu colloquium. “In the sixth century BC, it was the Greeks who first posited the matter of seeking truth outside any divine influence. It was Parmenides of Elea and his sidekick Zeno, I believe, along with his cabal of Eleatics’s.” He stood as some young women in bikini tops and sheer cotton skirts entered. He winked at Alex before sitting back down. “Anyway . . . it was Xenophanes of Colophon that had asked, and I paraphrase: How can any mortal being hope to know how truth is manifested. Is it by our own efforts or by some divine revelation? And more importantly, what role can our sense faculties play in the acquisition of true knowledge?”

Peder laughed, shaking his head. “Yeah, the School of Eleatics. Wasn’t that founded by Billy Clintons’ favorite Greek, Parmenides? The guy who famously shrugged: Hey dudes, whatever is—is.”

Mary answered the questioning look on Stephan’s face, politely filling him in. “Ex-Pres Clinton. It was during the 1998 Lewinski trial that he famously stated his odiferous defense: ‘It depends on what the meaning of the word ‘is’ is.’”

“Right, I heard about that.” Stephan smiled, then quizzically looked over at Peder. “Parmenides, you were sayin’?”

Peder nodded. “Yeah, Greek dude ‘round 550BC. He stated that whatever one encounters must be reality. So, no make-believe realities as nothing can materialize from imagination. Parmenides wanted to declare that all things in existence are holistic in nature.

“How’s that?” Stephan ran his hand over his head. “That sailed right over me.”

“Being . . .” Alex picked it up. “The dude was talking about the static state of being—being meaning anything that has popped into existence—basically, it is what it is and nothing more. Regardless of change, the core essence of a thing is its reality. In physics, this is akin to

the Law of Conservation of Matter. Fundamentally, this law does not allow something to either be created or destroyed because energy and matter are interchangeable.”

Peder took it back up. “Yes, and Parmenides cautioned not to judge reality by the senses, only through reason. Both science and the religious types see material things as existing in a temporary state, so you can’t just use facts. The problem with just using facts is that politicians like Billy-Bob—and the ever-imaginative press—twist facts to their purpose. So, what you see or hear may not be the whole truth—this was Parmenides point.”

“Well,” Alex stepped out the door and lit a cigarette. “I’m not as cynical as that, at least not until my third whisky, but I’d ask: is it the logic that’s fallible or its application?”

As she came out to join him, Mary thoughtfully considered the multi-colored vacationers plying the crowded street. “Twain said that before you bother to even store data, make sure the circumstances aren’t already garbage—garbage in garbage out—no matter the system applied.” She joined Alex, who took a seat on the picnic bench in front of the bar and accepted a smoke.

“There is that . . .” Alex nodded as the others joined them, “To me, what seems a little closer is an old adage that— mathematics can’t lie, but mathematicians can. But back to your point.” He nodded at Mary. “Methods of inference, be it deductive, inductive, or abductive, are all heavily reliant on how specific the empirical data is.” Alex ticked three aspects off his fingers: Deductive reasoning—where the data’s accuracy guarantees the conclusion’s accuracy. Inductive—making a prediction based on specific instances. And finally, abductive—a best-guess scenario based on general realities.” He turned to wave at the sky over the lake.

“Suppose a thousand people see UFO lights in the sky. In that case, we can *deduce*, amongst other things, that there is a source for the lights. By their odd movement, we can *induce* that the lights may not be a natural phenomenon. We can even *adduce* that they are UFOs of alien origin and still not delineate the truth of the event.” He turned back to the group. “When we look at the scope of the universe, how big it actually is, the complexities are so massive that for some, it’s reasonable to think we are not alone in it. But without any supporting outside revelation, this would be a spurious supposition. The point is that logic alone is limited. It is impossible to explain fundamental reality simply because all the causal elements are unknowable—local or not. To David Hume’s point: to have a Law of gravity, you would have to see its effect under all circumstances. It’s an argument that—like, over a hundred years later—Einstein’s relativity theory agreed with. The skepticism in science doubts *anything* that does not

come to us empirically. Science in itself simply cannot weigh in on things that can't be counted or tracked.”

“Skepticism of science?” Peder scoffed, “Contrary to what the female of the species may believe, men like things in neat little bundles, and logic brings order out of chaos. The answer to ‘how does that work’ must-make-sense. Just because some religious adept says its magic is not a basis for applied truth. Science builds her laws from regularities—things that behave consistently regardless of the observer—where the application of knowledge can make a difference. For the adept, the passing of a comet *may* herald an omen, where the layperson *believes* the omen heralds good/bad tidings and modifies their behavior. Divine revelation is a matter of interpretation, and that’s a matter of reason.”

“You guys are so silly.” Mary shook her head. “Divine revelation is just man’s ego, applying everything that happens around him as though it were some kind of personal manifest destiny. Jeez, give a guy a little power, and he thinks he’s the center of the universe. Look, the gods were petitioned mainly to shed some light on the consequence of action. Like, if we attack these guys over there,” she points at some guys over there, “will the gods of war be on our side? Help tip the balance?”

“Yeah. . .” Peder nodded impatiently. “Whatever. Look, in modern times, with reliable data, we certainly *can* reason out what actions will lead to success.” He turned to Stephen, “From the observations on blackbody radiation, human reasoning uncovered the photon energy packets this Planck dude called Quanta. From there, human reasoning developed the electron subshell theory, which is the basis of the Periodic Table. This very table provides for a myriad of advancements improving human existence beyond anything even the most forward-thinking person before the twentieth century could have possibly conceived.”

Alex raised his beer. “Not to mention the advancements in brewing.” The twits toasted each other.

“I’d say that’s one for reasoning.” Stephan wet an index finger before marking an imaginary scoreboard in the air.

“Perhaps.” Alex eyed Stephan, unconvinced. “Remember the adage used earlier, that math doesn’t lie?”

“Yes,” Peder interjected, “You were alluding to the idea that the facts don’t lie—although we already have shown that they can. What about it?”

“Yes,” Alex nodded, “I agree that outside of some kind of context, facts by themselves are useless. Mary, when you mentioned the consequences of action, who were you referring to the gods petitioned or the petitioner?”

She thought about this for a moment. “I get it, you’re asking this because the gods are perceived to always have their own agenda, and that agenda is usually unknown to the petitioner.”

“Unless that person’s petition is in line with God’s plan,” Stephan added. “The Bible tells us that.”

“True,” Mary responded with a kind smile. “But that’s not the case in most mythos; I say most because I don’t know them all. In the mythology I know, the gods are always capricious—whimsical. And like the humans that created them, they can be impulsive and play games with people’s lives just to be entertained. Think of the term Procrustean bed.”

“I’m not familiar with that term.” Stephan looked at her inquisitively.

“It basically means a set of laws or conditions that everybody must conform to that is by nature arbitrary. This guy Procrustes—son of Poseidon—liked to rob people. He set up this inn that boasted a bed made to fit all travelers. When a guest lay in the bed, they would be stretched if they were too short; if too long, pieces were cut off until they fit.”

“So, no disclaimer.” Peder offered, all seriousness aside.

“No.” She laughed.

“So,” Peder took it up, “the issue here is not-in-so-much reason capability, but a trust issue. As I see it, the problem with finding the toat is that humans are limited in their ability to see all the . . .”

“Toat?” Mary eyed him askance.

“Yeah, Truth of All Things —ToAT.”

“You just made that up.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did.” Mary grinned, “Toat is slang for totally—or short for totally amazing—that my AP kids use all the time.”

“Well, maybe in a place where people get their kicks from chugging mash whisky and watching combine demolition derbies.”

Alex sat up. “Cool—is that a thing?” The twits grinned at each other.

“Yeah . . .” Mary sighed in resignation, “it’s a thing . . .”

“Peder, are you inferring to ToE—the Theory of Everything?” Stephan quickly interjected before it got too silly.

“Yes, but not just limited to the materialistic side of reality. Although ToE was to encompass gravity, it was never solved. Adding to the electromagnetic field theory of the late 1800s, ToE—AKA the unified field theory—appears on the scene just after Einstein’s relativity theory. In fact, I believe he’s the guy who added the term unified.” He looked at Alex, who just nodded in affirmation. “Anyway, ol’ Albert was trying to prove that electromagnetism and gravity were just aspects of the same field.”

“What field, like a field of study?” Stephan asked.

“No,” Alex stood to let some people pass in the crowded space. “A field is an area that responds to some type of force. We currently understand three main ones: Electromagnetic and strong and weak nuclear forces. The problem is that large objects respond to gravity, whereas atomic particles respond more to the field surrounding them. Think particle spin, where the orbit of an electron is determined by its deflection off a magnetic field.”

Right.” Peder continued. “So basically, we humans are limited in our ability to understand whole truth—or causation.” He eyed Alex before continuing on. “In any event, we can reasonably predict specific reactions.

Stephen did not appear to be very enlightened.

“Whatever, Nye-Guy.” Mary swatted away at the science-laden air. “Essentially, Stephan, the concept of Divine Revelation is that only the supernatural, a being above the natural world, can have a complete perspective *of the* natural world. The problem early philosophers had is not that they didn’t believe in the Divine, it just that revelations supposedly coming from that quarter were not all that reliable.”

“Reliable for what?” Alex rejoined. “God is static, unchanging—all of creation reflects this. There are no inconsistencies in the material makeup of the universe. If there were, we would be unable to make predictions—no theories. Ever since the first microscope revealed what lay underneath our macro-observations, science types have been cataloging the different forms that appear. Due to integrated adaptation, there are countless variations. The theory of single-source evolution was inductive reasoning at best.”

“Here he goes with that design crap again.” Peder threw up a hand.

“What’s your point?” Stephan cracked another beer. “I mean, where does the Divine come in?”

“In our ability to see and understand it,” Alex answered, bypassing an ongoing argument that usually consumed the twits drinking time.

“I don’t follow.”

“Peder was just joking about ToAT. The idea of understanding creation is reliant on our understanding of God, and the only way to understand G-O-D is through his word—hence revelation. There are limits to science—what science can tell us about the nature of being. The universe, including us, is ordered so that we can understand it. This is significant. All scientific observations indicate that it is reasonable to assume the universe could not have created itself. As we delve into the complexities of organized life, like the symbiotic relationships that belie linear evolution,” he shot Peder a knowing look. “And the intricate dance between quantum particles and field-mechanics, the more reasonable creation theory becomes. Contrary to the theory of spontaneous quantum phenomena where chance is the author of these elegant, complex structures, is to be . . .” Alex stopped as a stunning young woman passed. “Well, beautifully naive. . .” he shrugged. “But I need to stop there. Thinking about God as some material part of the creation, or energy released by decaying material, misses the mark completely. God is spirit, and spirit action is not dependent on any material energy source, no more than the power of reason is. Spirit is not made from material law, nor is it compelled by. In fact, spirit action has been shown to modify or break material law.”

“The preternatural. . .” Peder concurred. “Like, Placebo Effect.”

“Yes, preternatural as in beyond human comprehension of the natural world, is contrasted with the supernatural, which is above human reasoning.”

“Well, that’s all fine and dandy.” Mary stood. “It’s not enough to say that we can reason, but what does reason spring from? Is it inherent?” She spread her arms, “And if so, then what issued it forth? Is it from our adaptive will? Then what preceded it? I think we have been circling around the issue. When we use our capacity to reason—no matter its origin—I guess the issue is how much faith we can put into what has been revealed to us. We know the fallible nature of humankind because we know the fallible nature of ourselves. I think that’s why people gravitate

to the Divine. It's self-evident to say that the universe is stable. As to why—I guess it's a matter of faith." She looked over at the wall clock. "I gotta go."

Alex and Peder stood to hug Mary goodbye. She looked up at her little brother. "Like Kant once said: "I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith."

As Mary left, Alex turned to Stephan, and with the stroke of his finger, he made another mark on the imaginary scoreboard. "Looks like we just evened the score, ol' boy." He smiled before gliding off to get more drinks.