

A Revelatory Experience

As I drove into the university one day I experienced an uprush of euphoria induced by my listening to the synthesizer version of Bach Brandenburg No. 5 which I had inserted into the car stereo. The exquisite detail of the music, the stream of runs and trills overlaying the counterpoint, the whole simultaneous glittering stratified presence, – all realized with radiant clarity in the performance – excited me beyond measure. At the same time I was reminded of the operation of an elegant, intricate mechanism – a *constructed* mechanism perhaps, but, if so, a construct manifesting artifice beyond purpose, simply *running* – to do nothing more, like a musical box, than embroider time. Suddenly that notion blossomed in my mind into a joyous conviction that the whole of reality is truly the same, a neutral, complex, purposeless – indeed beyond purpose altogether – yet fundamentally benign mechanism whose sole *raison-d’etre* is activity on a vast, incomprehensible scale. Nothing more, it seemed to me, was needed. I felt, however briefly, as if I had achieved, in Camus’ elegant phrase, a lucidity transcending any scale of values. All this was accompanied by that rapturous feeling of uplift I have had the privilege of experiencing on rare occasions – I was lucky not to lose control of the car! I felt then that I had been granted not a mere glimpse, but the opportunity of full, if brief, participation in, Leibniz’s “pre-established harmony”. It was a revelation.

After these peaks of feeling, I returned to earth, and life, as life is wont to do, ground on in its pedestrian way. But a few days later my daily round was punctured by a remarkable dream. In the dream I was to be executed for an unspecified crime. The execution was to take place within a few hours, and I fully believed that there was to be no reprieve. I was confronted with the termination of my existence, not in the indefinite future, but imminently. I grasped with horror that these were to be my last moments, leading straight to oblivion. This prospect was so terrifying that I woke up with a start. O God, the relief on awakening! It was, I felt, a blessing to return to the ordinary world of conscious experience, however humdrum. The following day I went for a walk in a

nearby nature reserve, still ruminating on my dream of the previous night. As I walked along the path through the reserve I was delighted to encounter Coleridge's "numerous goings-on of life" in the form of birds chirping, frogs croaking, even a couple of snakes slithering. I was particularly moved to see a tangle of tent-moth caterpillars going about their harmless, convoluted business. All this provided such a contrast with the lugubrious recollection of my dream, with its adumbration of death and extinction. In addition to the pleasure I felt simply through the fact of my continued existence, I was flooded with the conviction, in joyous affirmation of my feelings a few days before, that when I cease to exist, the natural world – the living embodiment of Bach Brandenburg no 5, now for me emblazoned with birds, frogs, snakes and caterpillars – will persist! On a later walk through the reserve a retinue of curious dragonflies preceded me on the path, which now shone for me – new, uninventable, revelatory!