

The Light That Obscures

My father told me a story about Prince Albert. One night he was travelling through London and came across a night watchman, one of those men who spend the night huddled around a fire keeping watch on property. So he asked him "what do you do, alone all night". The answer was

"Sometimes I sits and thinks,
and sometimes I just sits".

At first this story just made me laugh. But it is thinking about this story that I became more acutely aware of what I now call "Unintentionality", or the "U" experience of life.

I recently spent a year working in England, and it entailed driving on motorways for many hours each day. I became able to use driving as a form of meditation, just driving and doing nothing else.

Sometimes I drives and thinks,
and sometimes I just drives (*and lets Thought do the thinking*).

Have you ever had the experience of just letting your thoughts freewheel, without trying to direct them one way or the other, or even trying to subdue them ?. Most people have that kind of experience every now and again. Do you get the feeling that at those times there is another dimension to life, that goes beyond your individuality and intentionality? That although you are thinking it is not the "I" that is doing it, that there is more to "U" than the "I"?

One morning I was driving from London to Bristol. I was doing the driving and Thought was doing the thinking.

First I got a flashback to an experience that I had had many years before, when I was still living in Italy. I was (guess what?) driving at night in a country road when a beautiful hare that had been sitting in the middle of the road was caught in the glare of my headlights. It ran in front of the car, darting from one side of the road to the other, but did not leave the road. The driver of the car behind tried to pass me in order to run the hare over and take it home for his dinner.

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I realised that as long as the hare was in my headlights it was not going to be able to see its way out of there, so I switched off the headlights. As soon as I did that three things happened...

1. The hare got away
2. I nearly drove into a tree
3. The guy behind me had to go without potted hare for dinner

I next thought about something else that happened much more recently, by which time I was living in Australia. I had driven to the outback with my family, and we were what seemed to be hundreds of miles from the nearest light bulb. We had stopped the car, turned off the engine and the lights, and just sat and looked. In the moonlight we could see for many miles, and the stars were so bright and clear that it seemed that you could actually see the people on them. You felt like saying "G'Day" to them. Everything was so still that you could hear the shuffling of little animals a long way off.

When it was time to go, we got back into the car. I started the engine and turned on the lights. As if by magic, the world was transformed, I could only see what was revealed by the headlights, and I could only hear the noise of the engine.

On my way to Bristol, Thought made a point about the light that obscures. It occurred to me that certain types of light, such as car headlights or torchlight, have the ability to illuminate, or reveal, a relatively small area in front of the viewer, but also to obscure everything else. Whereas it is useful if you just want to see what is in front of you, it is not very good if you want to see any further.

The next realisation hit me like a ton of bricks.

I realised that a good part of my experience of life is of a similar nature.

It is as if I am in a dark universe holding a torch, or sitting in a car with the headlights on. At these times (which is most of the time, if not all), all I can experience in life is what I reveal for myself by shining a light on it. I get the feeling that we are all out there, with our torches in our hands, trying to see (or experience) something that is beyond what you can shine a light on.

I can also see the light being shone by others, sometimes we reveal the same things (while inevitably looking at them from our individual points of view), sometimes my light goes dim and I need the help of someone else's light, sometimes I also help others when

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my own light is particularly strong. So although I can see more than what I can reveal by myself, while I am in this experience I can still only see things as they are revealed by a light, I do not see things by their own light but by virtue of an external light that reveals them, and I cannot see what is not revealed.

I also have a sense of how people relate differently to their own "light". Some people depend on their light to the extent that they are not even aware of the lights of others, they outshine everyone else with their own light, as if they are afraid of the dark. Some have a strong and very narrow focus in their light, their experience of life is simple and clear and nothing else exists for them. Others have a very wide beam, they take in a lot of different things and have a very articulated and sophisticated view of life. Others yet do not have a light of their own (or it is very dim indeed), and depend on the lights of others, at least to see in this way.

I call this "the light that obscures", although you could also call it "the light that reveals". It seems to me as if revealing is correlated to obscuring, whenever you reveal something you necessarily obscure something else.

I also call this the "I" experience of life, where the "I" stands for "I", also for Identity and for Intentionality.

I get that there is more to life than what I can reveal, whether by my own light or the light of others. I can almost try to switch off my headlights to see what I can see.

Thought thinking is an example that we can all probably relate to. How often do we have the experience that we are allowing our thoughts to go wherever they go, without intentionally thinking about anything in particular?.

Another example is what sportsmen refer to as "The Zone", where you are just doing what you are doing without thinking, without allowing your thoughts, your concerns and ultimately yourself to get in the way. That is when we put in our best performances.

An important part of my work, and of my existence, is generating ideas. I am what is generally termed "a thought leader". I notice that my best ideas, the ones that really make a difference in my life, in my work and in the lives of others, are not the ones that I cause by "intentionally thinking", but the ones that "come out of the blue", *often while I am driving*. Perhaps the ideal job for me is to be a travelling salesman?

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During my stay in England I developed some very strong interpersonal relationships. These were helped by the fact that I attended a couple of challenging personal development courses during which I had to share my life with others. We had to pull together and coach each other in order to make it through. In this context I have been acknowledged, and I acknowledge myself, for having made a real difference in the lives of others. What I got, at the same time, is that I was only able to make a difference when I was able to leave the "I" part of the equation out of the conversation and out of the relationship. On the one hand this taught me that in order to make a difference to someone I have to be in his/her life, not in mine, but it also taught me that there is a lot more to me than the "I".

I can recall countless experiences throughout my life where I was able to profoundly touch, move and inspire someone, not by saying or doing something "in order" to convince someone of something, but by simply saying or doing what was there for me. At other times I had tried intentionally to "enlighten" someone, to convince them of something that I had thought of, and ultimately to be right, and failed abysmally.

The thoughts that come out of the blue, the things that I do and say without an "in order to", still have a purpose in life, but not in MY life. I do not always see that.

How does this insight impact my experience of life?

I used to see life as something "intentional", something that we (I) do, that we reveal for ourselves (even together), something that we know about, or that we know that we don't know and that we ought to know about (shine on the light!!).

This dependency on revelation, on having a light to shine, on needing to "*know*" what the past means and what the future has in store, while at the same time believing that the future is unpredictable, brings about (at least for me) a kind of anxiety about life.

Is there a "right" life that I should live? How do I know that I am getting it "right"? What is the role of problems? Do problems have the role of diverting me from getting it right? Should problems be avoided, and risks mitigated at all costs? Should I reduce my life to the routine of how to do the shopping every week?

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On the other hand, does life take on value based on the problems that are taken on?, was Ghandi an ordinary man with a big problem? Should I also be looking for a problem worth living for?

These are very interesting and engaging questions. I often dwell on questions such as these and I welcome any conversation about them. However all these questions remain within the domain of the "I" experience of life. They are questions about MY life, not about LIFE ITSELF.

What if, on the other hand, everything is there already, but obscured by my light until it is revealed by it. My light reveals it for a while, and then moves on, and everything seems to change or disappear. This gives me the impression of time, but perhaps the only thing that changes is where I direct my light.

So here I am, standing at the edge of light, staring into the darkness, rather like a child at his first recital, trying to peer through the limelight looking for mum. (did it ever occur to you that darkness could be worth looking at?, if it was nothing you would not see it).

Beyond the light of "I" there is "U", an experience of life that goes beyond Individuality, Identity and Intentionality. In the meantime, my "I" is still sitting in the car, staring into the headlights and muttering "this is all there is".

In an earlier paper I wrote

"Because there is more to me than me, there is more to you than you, there is more to them than them, there is more to us than us.

Beyond my physical presence, beyond my identity, beyond my games, there is life itself."

Now I get what I meant, paradoxically I can only get it when I do not try to reveal it, but when I simply experience it. So it is not easy for me to describe it on paper. I can only describe how I feel about it.

I have an immense feeling of Freedom, knowing that I can be free from the need to know. I don't know what I don't know except that I know that it is there. It seems to me that the ultimate form of freedom is freedom from myself, from my own concerns, from my fears and my own "in order to".

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I have a feeling of Trust, I trust that everything in LIFE (not just MY life) is as it should be, whether I know it or not. I have learned first to trust others, then to trust myself and ultimately to trust life itself.

I have a feeling of Intimacy, of being with others in their lives, and just being there and being myself, without an "in order to".

Sometimes I shout back at the car "I want to see better, please turn OFF the headlights". "I", still sitting in the car and staring at the headlights shouts back "You want to see better?, tell me where to shine the light"

And Thought giggles and thinks quietly "Why want to see better? Leave the lights as they are, close your eyes and listen!"