

## Letters to Adam K

re: It is One – One is Many

Dear Adam,

I enjoyed your letter in which you tell how Arne Naess was playing football with you and your brothers in the corridor of the farm. That must have been 1972, when he and a friend were staying there for a few days, before leaving to the Himalayan mountains of Nepal. As you know, Arne was a staunch mountaineer and yet, in 1970, he wrote a letter to the King of Nepal, asking him to declare all mountains above a certain height to be holy mountains. These mountains would be closed to mountaineers. Of course, he never got a reply. Too much money involved.

Since my first visit to him in Oslo in 1970, Arne has been a source of inspiration to me. He embodies a rare combination of qualities: clarity, complexity and depth of rigorous reasoning. If you agree, we dedicate this letter to him, because the theme “It is One – One is Many”, plays a central role in his green philosophy.

You wonder about the meaning of: *It is* – two simple words which present nevertheless one of the most profound ontological visions. Many students in philosophy read the two words with a certain perplexity, and one should. The ontological domain likes to hide itself, not different from the remark of Heraclitus that *nature likes to hide itself*.

“It is” is the unavoidable source of the intrinsic movement of change and no-change. The essence of each process, for example our own life span, is a ‘form’, a relative identity that comes and goes. Greek philosophers used to think and speak about “ta onta”, literally “the beings”, often translated as “the facts”. But the word ‘fact’ is a less meaningful translation than “being”, in the sense that it does not evoke the sphere (of) “to be”. The Greek were sensitive to the experience that whatever exists, participates in the equation: to be is real(ity); real(ity) is to be. Remember the birth announcement of your niece Hazel Judith, a month ago, on which was written, next to the figure of a little girl: *I am reality*. Isn’t that beautiful? “I am reality” is literally quite abundant, “I am” would be enough...but of course the word ‘reality’ means here: I have come into existence – I have come to life. And so, this announcement is the symbiosis of change and no-change. No-change refers to the dimension “to be”; change to the ‘beings’, the ‘forms’, the ‘facts’ which come and go.

Let’s now read again the sentence of Parmenides: “Our path only is left for us to speak of, namely, that It is. In it are many tokens that what is, is uncreated and indestructible, alone, complete, immovable and without end. Nor was it ever, nor will it be; for now it is, all at once, a continuous one.” I read the first sentence ‘Our path...’ as the awe felt by Parmenides in the face of *being: to be*, in the impersonal form of: *It is*, and the realisation that everything falls within *It is*. The reference to the ‘many tokens’ in the second sentence may help us to comprehend the existential insight that *time-as-such does not exist*. It is the human realisation of birth and death which leads us to think about a begin and an end...because a form comes and goes. The underlying dimension of being is the ‘now’ without past and future. *Future and past are projections within ‘now’*.

Parmenides speaks about illumination; his words mean enlightenment in the Buddhist sense. *Reality manifests itself as Here and Now*. Such an experience excludes the idea of a creation ‘ex nihilo’, a creation ‘out of nothing’, a folly to the Greek mind. A creation ‘out of nothing’

began to influence the Jewish world view after the Babylonian exile, and subsequently the world view of Christians, but not those of the ancient Greek or Hindus.

When reality manifests itself as here and now as it sometimes does when we are confronted with a dying person, the idea of 'One Reality' or 'One' jumps to the forefront. At such a moment, it may become self-evident why the experience of 'Oneness of whatever exists', does include the world of transient phenomena, including our own lives. In the passing away of a dear one, we feel on the bottom of our soul and body what it means to belong to the sphere of being, not as an independent 'ego' but as a participant in the world of being.

Plato, 427-347, in the footsteps of Pythagoras and Parmenides, gives to 'One', in Greek 'to (h)en', the highest position in his world of ideas. *One* becomes the symbiosis of the ideas 'goodness', 'truth' and 'beauty' which merge on their deepest level into each other, becoming *One*. The three ideas are a triad in which the quality of each singular idea reaches out to the other two, each jumping over its own limit. We experience the fluidity of goodness, beauty and truth in what Maslow calls a peak-experience. When the triad merges into the experience of oneness, it reveals itself as the most intense happiness a human can experience. *Oneness and happiness are the ultimate words of the mystic*. They do not need any external proof, because the experience itself is true, good and beautiful. No ugly bad lie involved, the opposite merger of Plato's triad!

Speaking about One, we have to understand that *the One is without any form...* it does belong to being but not as a particular being. The relationship between One and Many or – in philosophical terms – between monism and pluralism, is one of the most difficult riddles but a solvable riddle. Let me tell you, Adam, how I reached the realisation that the so-called One has to be without any form, in order to be present in whatever exists. As said before, we might call the 'One', 'to be or being' the depth-structure of everything with a temporary, relative identity. Only by not being itself a 'form', even not as God-Creator, is the One omnipresent. All 'forms' in the world of phenomena belong to themselves and to One. The One only to all.

Let me explain how I came to this realisation.

At an evening at the Academy of Architecture at the Waterlooplein in Amsterdam, I walked along the scale models of the magic square of 1 to 9, both horizontally and vertically.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
2 4 6 8 1 3 5 7 9
3 6 9 3 6 9 3 6 9
4 8 3 7 2 6 1 5 9
5 1 6 2 7 3 8 4 9
6 3 9 6 3 9 6 3 9
7 5 3 1 8 6 4 2 9
8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 9
9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9 9
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Students had worked in various materials, translating the numbers into a three-dimensional model in which each number counted for one cm: 1 was 1; 9 was 9 cm..

The way the nines were encircling at two sides the model, was aesthetically wrong; the nines were out of place. It simply didn't make sense to my mind. I also noted that the four nines in the middle, standing there as a square on their own, showed the beauty of a square but their 9 cm height did not contribute to the right balance. And then, it happened. I realised that the numbers 1 and 8; 2 and 7; 3 and 6, 4 and 5, were mirroring each other within a two-dimensional plane and, when connected by imaginary lines, formed the number 9.

After deleting the 9, I realized the nature of 9: its unifying position within the numbers 1 until 8. This was my moment of realisation: the '9' in the square is the perfect one : the number that expresses coherence and unity. Unity in the sense of oneness (9) cannot have an own existence. It reveals itself through the numbers which form together, numerically and geometrically, its existence. The world of One depends on the world of the manifold, to manifest its all-pervading existence and beauty. The 'static' design of the magic square is the result of dynamic processes.

We owe the magic square to the Indian and Arab cultures. The Indians invented the square, as they also invented zero; the Arabs understood the meaning, both of zero and the square, and gave it a central place in their philosophical discourse, architecture and carpentry. They understood the beauty of the square and the function of the number that combines the other ones, because "No god but God" or Allah. Allah is the One, everywhere present.

After we analysed Aristotle's three principles; after we cut through the navel string between logic and reality; after we discussed the law of transformation, we may now come to the realisation that the logical and semantic distinction between the notion One and the notion Many, does not necessarily lead to a gap between One and Many.

I hope that this letter and the two previous ones are helpful as an introduction to the world of mythology, in order to catch a glimpse of a way of thinking that is utterly alien to our approach of reality, a question also raised in your letter.

Let me know how you feel about these ideas

Fons

La Source, St. Jean de Valériscle

summer 2007