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Epilogue: THE MAN WHO MADE THE WORLD SAFE FOR EPISTEMOLOGY

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EPILOGUE

THE MAN WHO MADE THE WORLD SAFE FOR EPISTEMOLOGY

I

. . . which raised the question of whether rapid eye movements during the furious sleep of colorless green ideas might indicate that they were dreaming, and if so whether their dreams were as furious as their sleep, and if not whether they were at least dreams of glory, dreams of freedom, dreams of knowledge, dreams of the sort one would expect a colorless green idea to dream, assuming, that is, that a colorless green idea could, in some sense, be said to . . .

SCREAM!

My own, it drew me, through consciousness, to cognizance of the necessity to complete my mission while my mind was still intact, before it was too late . . .

NOT TOO LATE YET. I steadied myself against a wall, pushed off, and continued down the long hallway, toward the distant laboratory door. I remembered the mission, the sight of the mindless crowd, the voice behind me: "It's only a matter of time before it hits us too, and we'll find ourselves like that, every cognitive structure gone, every production system, every problem space, every representation, every algorithm, every strategy, every heuristic, every operation, every scheme, every rule, every means, every goal, every image, every plan, every concept, every percept, all gone. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to track down this mad psychologist and bring back our cognitive structures. Only you can get to him before it's too late . . ."

NOT TOO LATE YET. I tried to keep the words in my mind, as if that would keep my mind in my head, and plunged on down the final hallway of my international search, here at the Nebraska Institute for Higher Research, in the state of Nebraska, in the state of consciousness, in the state of mind of a short rich fat black smart gay male Nebraskan, sitting in his Big Red clothes in the Big Red stands on a Big Red You're-sitting-pretty-with-CITIBANK seat cushion, sucking deep fried pineapple in worcestershire sauce and marshmallow à la julienne through a bendable chocolate straw, and allbut oblivious to the ceaseless senseless screaming of the butterflies overhead, the chronosynclastic infundibulation of the chronosynclastic infundibulata, and the Big Red roar of the Big Red crowd at the Big Red surge of the Big Red team, as he dreams peacefully of warm tropical seas lapping on the snapping banks of the Himalayas, the soggy fog of Venice in the spring, the thrilling chill of Uranus in the autumn, the foggy sog of July in the winter,

and the chilling thrill of a Big Red day that was not too hot, not too cold, not too dry, not too wet, not too late YET. I plunged against one wall, against the other, but kept on ahead, down the hall, up the hall, through the hall, ever closer to the end, to the goal, to the waiting door, the door which, no doubt--

Slammed behind me, and suddenly my mind was clear. Before me stood the lab--dark, cluttered, fringed by all manner of giant, whirring contraptions, crisscrossed as far as the eye could see with endless rows of tiny fluid-filled tanks, each carefully labeled: Modus tollens, representational space, conservation of discontinuous quantity, INRC, hierarchical classification, object permanence, exclusive disjunction, multiplicative seriation. A silent figure emerged from the darkness, strangely familiar. My search was over.

"So, kiddo," he said finally, "we meet at last."

Coldly, I met his stare. "Dr. Moshperson, I presume?"

II

"None other," he said, gesturing at the myriad tiny tanks around him. "You like my collection?"

"So this is where all the cognitive structures are going. But how do you do it?"

"Quite a simple technique," he said proudly, taking a tiny vial from a rack beside him and holding it up. "I simply create microschemata such as these, with mirror-image reversibility, and then send these antistructures out into people's minds. When an antistructure meets a structure, of course, terminal disequilibrium is induced and the structure instantly collapses into a cognitive singularity from which no thought can escape. The resulting black holes of the mind then suck up all the cognitive structures around them, each of which, upon passing forever within the mental event horizon, travels through the cognitive wormholes of epistemic spacetime and emerges from the artificial white holes at the rear of my lab."

"But why? What earthly purpose could underlie such a fiendish scheme?"

"It's all for a higher purpose, I assure you." He gestured toward the giant machines ringing the lab. "As structures come in from around the world, I feed them into the reflective abstractors, which, by coordinating the epistemic activities of those schemata and projecting them onto a higher plane, dissociates their underlying form from their

idiosyncratic content, thus constructing higher-order structures of ever-increasing scope and power."

"But for what purpose?"

"Because by consolidating higher-order metaforms and then feeding them back through the reflecting cycle, I can go beyond any organismic intelligence yet produced by evolution, beyond sensorimotor intelligence, beyond representational intelligence, beyond operational intelligence, beyond hypothetico-deductive intelligence, and on, eventually, to a level never before conceived, a level that will bring my mind beyond the realm of all my fellow-creatures, the level of ultrametadialectics!"

"And what will become of all the poor people whose mental schemata you've appropriated to pursue this mad endeavor?"

"Ah, have no fear on that score. For having achieved the grace of ultrametadialectics, I will gladly sell back to the common folk, at reasonable prices, low-order concrete and formal operational schemes." He turned. "Igor!"

A hunchback appeared, waving a placard over his head.

PROPORTIONALITY SCHEMES!!

Mobile, reversible, equilibrated, fully consolidated!
Handcrafted from only the finest micro-operations!

Get yours now!

Only \$39.95 while the supply lasts!

He leaned over his hunch toward me in a conspiratorial manner and whispered, "Order now, and we will include without charge two temporal ordering operations and a . . ."

"How dastardly!" I cried. "Don't you see where such epistemological perversity will lead?"

"That distinct possibility," said Igor, "reverses the inverse perversity of the eminently versatile personal observation that the kinetic theory of verse, in a demonic demonstration of remonstrations, may initially express public doubts to numerically supplement the more credible misgivings of the right circular cylinders, nonetheless depriving them of their ectoplasmic ecstasies, to settle a scatophagous score that scrapes the one hundred and sixty-eighth, one hundred and sixty-ninth, one hundred and . . ."

"Ah," said Dr. Moshperson, "I'm afraid Igor is far beyond the stage of terminal disequilibrium. And I'm afraid, moreover, that it's your turn now."

He stepped closer. I drew my gun and pointed it at him. He laughed scornfully.

"It's useless, kiddo, you can't shoot me, for I am he, as you are he, as you are me, and we are all together." He laughed again. "But I require no weapons: I can disintegrate your cognitive structures without lifting a finger. Ever think about negative numbers, wimp, smaller than zero itself, or, even better, about their square roots?"

'Shoot,' I thought to myself, 'shoot before it's too late.'

"Ah, but it's already too late," said Dr. Moshperson, "for what if I were to tell you that this statement is a lie? Haw! Now if that's the truth, then it's a lie; but if that's a lie, then it's the truth; but let's not dwell on it, for wouldn't you rather discuss the fact that light is made of particles, but is a wave, but is made of particles, but is a wave, but . . ."

In the distance I could still hear Igor babbling on: ". . . might seem to think that retaliatory attacks could proceed to prolong the promiscuous promulgation of proprioceptive propinquity by protozoans of the southeastern northwest, which is not to say that malevolent malfeasance of a malefactor's malnutrition and malignant malediction of the international reality on the part of its constituent members would not . . ."

"Unfortunate fellow," said Dr. Moshperson. "Not a cog in his cognitorium. But suppose we took poor Igor's left cerebral hemisphere and transplanted it into another body. Would the resulting person, call him x, be Igor? But suppose we transplanted Igor's right hemisphere into another body. Would that person, call him y, be Igor? But then wouldn't x and y both be each other? Haw!! So does one brain make one person, or two, or three? Ah! Not to change the subject but did you know that in black holes spacetime is infinitely curved--not just curved, mind you, but infinitely curved? But let's keep a grip on ourselves, shall we?--let's be logical about all this. Here's logic for you: Consider the following sentence. This statement cannot be proved. Assume that's false. Thus it can be proved, thus it's true. Thus the assumption of falsity engenders a contradiction and must be rejected. The statement must thus be true. Thus--as it says--it can't be proved. BUT I JUST PROVED IT! HAAUUUGGGGHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

I heard my gun hit the ground as I slumped against the wall behind me and slid slowly to the floor.

"Oh mama," I cried, "can this really be the end?"

III

Suddenly, faintly at first, I heard footsteps outside, coming down the hall, slowly, deliberately, approaching the lab door. I wondered if I were hallucinating as the door was slowly opened by an elderly gentleman, tall, stout, with twinkling eyes and a fringe of white hair around his jaunty beret.

Dr. Moshperson stepped back. "Who are you?" he asked sharply.

The old man stopped, smiled, and calmly began to fill his scorched meerschaum pipe.

"WHO ARE YOU!?! " screamed Dr. Moshperson.

The old man put the pipe to his lips, toked, waited, and exhaled smoothly, evenly.

"Piaget's the name. Cognition's my game."

Dr. Moshperson stepped back, then thrust forward a giant phosphorescent phaser-pistol.

"Not even you can stop me," he said, quietly now, deliberately. "One more step and I'll blast you with my paradoxidigmatic disequilibrater."

Piaget stepped forward. A dazzling blast of whites and reds obliterated all trace of him, and then, rebounding, left him exhaling another toke.

"It's no use, Moshperson," he said. "My mental schemata are protected by a metacognitive force field against which your weapons are useless."

Another shot--again no result. Piaget aimed his pipe. "Drop it," he said, "or I'll blast you back to the sensori-motor level."

Dr. Moshperson shot again, followed by Piaget. For an instant they faced each other; then Dr. Moshperson collapsed, blinked vacantly, circled aimlessly on the floor, and finally crawled out the door.

"He won't get far," said Piaget. "The Genetic Militia is waiting outside. And no doubt all of you will, in the course of multiple organizations and adaptations, assimilations and accommodations, manage to re-equilibrate your epistemic selves at your customary structural levels of cognitive functioning."

"That's easier done than said," noted Bärbel, stepping into the lab. "But how did you know what we'd find here?"

"Operative knowledge, my dear Inhelder. But to begin at the beginning: For some years the Center for Genetic Epistemology in Geneva has engaged in recombinant cognition research, using our modern cyclocognitron to accelerate and bombard cognitive structures and thus produce new ones. Such work has, of course, been criticized with regard to the dangers of an undesirable cognitive structure being created and somehow escaping from the laboratory. We considered this a minimal danger since, first of all, recombinatorial creation of new cognitive structures is constantly proceeding in real life anyway via the natural equilibration mechanism, and second, laboratory-created structures are generally too unstable to exist in a natural mind for more than a few microseconds. Nevertheless, we willingly acceded to the stringent security precautions required by the Swiss government.

"Recently, Lawrence Kohlberg--with whose six cognitive-developmental stages of moral judgment you are all no doubt familiar--joined our team. Kohlberg had for several years been engaged in theoretical work on hypothetical subzero stages of moral judgment. His aim now was to use our cyclocognitron and recombinant methodologies to pursue this work empirically. Until early yesterday his research went smoothly. Then calamity struck. A gang of neobehavioral terrorists under the leadership of C. J. Brainhard stormed the Center and, during the ensuing chaos, unwittingly loosed upon an unsuspecting world the crown of Kohlberg's creation, moral stage negative seventeen--the most reprehensible cognitive structure that ever existed!

"The considerable danger of this soon became apparent: Moral stage negative seventeen, which had been thought too unstable to exist outside the artificial cognitoria of our laboratories, might manage to take hold in a mind whose natural equilibration processes had been profoundly disrupted, a mind that had been subjected to untold years of unremitting mental mortification, a mind driven to the ultimate extreme of epistemic existence--in short, a mind newly emerged from graduate school. Immediately, I recalled the rumors of Dr. Moshperson and his evil scheme. Putting one-and-a-half and two together, I grabbed my beret and pipe, sent word to the Holiday Inn in Philadelphia to rouse the Genetic Militia, and rushed right over."

"And once again," I said, "when advances in psychology threatened to deprive us of our cognitive structures forever, you arrived in the nick of time to make the world safe for epistemology."

"All in a day's work," said Piaget. We left the lab and headed out into the light of day, where a grateful crowd of newly cognizing people waited happily. They cheered.

I turned to Piaget. "Have you anything to say to the Nebraska populace?"

Piaget tipped his beret, toked briefly, and stepped to the waiting microphone. "My dear fellow-knowers: Let me just remind you once again that the pyramid of knowledge neither rests on its base of data nor hangs from its vertex of theory but rather floats in midair in an ever-expanding dynamic equilibrium."

The crowd roared, cheered, and burst into song:

My mind has seen the glorious expansion of the truth
From the vertex to the base lies rationality forsooth
Epistemic is our faith and dialectical our proof
The truth goes marching on.

EPISTEMOLOGY FOREVER
LUCIDITY IS OUR ENDEAVOR
AS REALITY INFLATES THE PYRAMID EQUILIBRATES
THE TRUTH GOES MARCHING ON!!!!

(Repeat last stanza, with gusto)