

A CONVERSATION ABOUT SOUP

Soup of the evening, beautiful soup! Lewis Carroll

*This Bouillabaisse a noble dish is – A sort of soup, or broth, or brew,
William Makepeace Thackeray*

The following is a conversation between two alien entities with characteristics that are somewhat bizarre, especially since they are non-corporeal. The time is indeterminate and so is the locale. For the sake of clarity let us name them Jove and Hova. Any similarity between their combined names and another well known but indeterminate entity is obviously deliberate. Also, their means of communicating are a complete mystery so that the following is, at best, highly conjectural and, at worst, a figment of this writer's imagination.

Jove: Hova, you appear to be depressed. What's the matter?

Hova: Actually, I am not depressed, but downright bored. I have gone through this stage before. I cannot refrain from asking why we're here or is there any purpose to our existence. These questions that have kept me interested and curious. I have come to realize that they have no answers. I find this somewhat depressing but that does not mean that I am in a depressed state. Simply put, I am just searching for something to keep me busy and involved.

Jove: Have you tried anything to alleviate your malaise? After all, we have available to us an infinite variety of possibilities.

Hova: I did try an experiment that seems to have gone sour.

Jove: What was it?

Hova: As you know, we are free to wander instantaneously anywhere we wish. We have been witness to all sorts of cataclysmic events involving massive transfers of energy. Despite the large variety of such occurrences the end results are nearly always the same and have become sort of predictable. We exist as forms of pure energy so that we are very familiar with its characteristics, perhaps too much so. We have a nodding acquaintance with another entity that is corporeal in nature. I decided to see what would happen if I converted relatively large amounts of energy to this strange form which we can call matter. In other words I created a new universe in which there was far more interaction between matter and energy. Then I waited to see what would transpire.

Jove: Where did this new universe exist and what happened within it?

Hova: Your first question is a foolish one in that it existed in the only place it could have, namely my mind.

Jove: Wait a minute! If it existed only in your mind then everything that transpired within it was also a product of your imagination, or was it?

Hova: That is an interesting point. I maintain that it all existed within my mind but independent from it. It seemed to go its own way. However, I must have had some influence over it but I cannot determine what sort and how much.

Jove: Please continue by relating what transpired within this new universe of yours.

Hova: Well, it all started with a big bang. It was the only way I could think of to create sufficient amounts of matter to make things interesting.

Jove: What do you mean by a “Big Bang”?

Hova: I managed to compact all the available energy into a small point in space and then I just let go. A huge explosion then occurred releasing great gobs of energy, matter and plasma in an indiscriminate manner.

Jove: What is plasma?

Hova: It actually took me awhile to figure that out. It seems that there is an intermediate state that sometimes occurs when there is a transition between matter and energy or vice versa. This state is a highly volatile substance that has the characteristics of both matter and energy and can go either way.

Jove: Did you actually dream that up?

Hova: I did not, at least I think that I didn't.

Jove: Okay! What happened next.

Hova: After the initial conflagration, things seemed to calm down. Both energy and matter flew out into the void, reshaping space and creating distinct entities called galaxies, which consisted of myriads of bodies of plasma called stars each emitting great amounts of energy and gravitational fields that allowed interstellar dust to create bodies of corporeal matter called planets.

Jove: This is quite a picture you have manufactured. Again, where did you get all this from or is it a figment of your delusional imagination?

Hova: As I stated earlier, I have no idea where any of this came from, whether it is a figment of my imagination, or whether there is any truth to it corresponding to a very bizarre reality. In any case, as you will soon see, it gets weirder.

Jove: I can't imagine how.

Hova: You have seen nothing yet. One of those planets, the third from its star also known as its sun, started its life in a rather unstable chaotic manner. However, out of this turmoil, very novel corporeal entities or organisms sprung into existence.

Jove: What sort of entities?

Hova: That is also an interesting question in that there was a tremendous variety of them. For lack of a better term, they were alive.

Jove: What does 'alive' mean?

Hova: That is another one of your questions that is not easy to answer. Let us just say that they responded to external stimuli in ways widely ranging from the very predictably simple to the exact opposite. The extremes of the former were simple and uniform in terms of their anatomy, physiology and biochemistry.

Jove: Wait just a second! Where did those last three terms come from and what do they mean?

Hova: I am not sure where they came from but I think they were developed by the sentient beings I just mentioned and between them they describe the structure and means by which they function. The overall study of these life forms was called 'biology'.

Jove: Well since all of this emanates from your imagination this must also be a reflection of your idiosyncratic personality.

Hova: For once you have stumbled upon one of my greatest fears, which is, if I am responsible for creating this world then I am guilty of a horrendous and fiendish development.

Jove: What do you mean?

Hova: The living beings I somehow created could be divided into two categories. The first were those that subsisted off naturally occurring matter and energy. Amongst the second were those that consumed the first and others that consumed other living beings like themselves. The first were labeled herbivores and the second carnivores. There was a third, labeled omnivores that were naturally both herbivores and carnivores. Unfortunately the highest form of these were sentient and quite sophisticated. Summarily, it seems that I unwittingly created a world full of killers, something that is totally alien to us. It isn't as if these humans (their appellation) did not know what they were doing. They just couldn't help themselves.

Jove: Did you try to rectify this horrible situation?

Hova: Certainly! I planted all sorts of benevolent ideas which they ritualized into something they called religions and which they used as an excuse to continue killing but this time others like themselves, however with differing religious ideas. This was the oft-used excuse to grab more of the resources and power they craved.

Jove: What was the outcome of this chaotic situation? It couldn't continue indefinitely.

Hova: You are right. It didn't. It seems that one of the major driving biological forces was survival at just about any cost. Survival depended upon the availability and desirability of females. In anticipation of your next question, procreation amongst the highly developed beings required the coupling of two beings of opposite sexes, one male and the other female. In a crude sense males were the dominant ones and it is they who often fought over the females and considered them vassals and as such property.

Jove: Don't tell me that you also dreamt up this ridiculous and inefficient form of procreation. I am beginning to wonder about your rather odd mind and how you derive pleasure.

Hova: Whether it is my imagination going berserk or whether there is a side of me that even I am not aware of is beside the point. In any case what came next is even more perplexing.

Jove: Frankly I cannot imagine anything weirder than what you have been recounting.

Hova: Be patient. Despite the barbaric nature of these sentient entities which we have labeled 'humans' they also evinced certain admirable traits such as curiosity about themselves and their universe, guilt over much of their behavior which they talked and wrote about in a very sensitive way, attempts to reduce the prevalence of violence by introducing strictures within their social systems, and technologies designed to lessen their dependence on accumulating resources and control over others. While these attempts made some inroads, unfortunately their basic beastly nature prevailed. Yet much to my surprise I learned something about the laws of nature that may have a profound effect on us. I am getting ahead of myself.

Jove: You mean to tell me that we, who are as pure as the driven snow, might learn something of value from these atrocious and appalling creatures. Impossible!

Hova: Not so, as you will soon surmise. One of them, a biologist by profession, got a way-out, revolutionary idea that was taken up. He wished to introduce a much greater degree of equity hoping that this could lead to an abatement of the number and ferocity of the conflicts taking place. To this end, he proposed that female ova be collected from a wide variety of personages with certain minimal beneficial characteristics. It would then be stored in a large vat under very controlled conditions into which male sperm would be injected, again from a wide variety of males, also with certain desirable traits. By controlling the temperature and the levels of a host of other bio-chemicals the rate at which the ova would become impregnated could be controlled and yet remain as random events. The virtue, as he saw it, was that no one would be able to claim parenthood. It didn't take long for this practice to spread all over the world. However there were those opposed to this novel approach to procreation and they were able to despoil the vats by introducing ova and sperm from other creatures. The conflicts that ensued literally destroyed all life on the planet, except for the vats full of potential reproductive agents that were and are located in deep underground sites protected from the radioactive fallout of the conflagrations that had occurred. These primeval soups are currently laying dormant waiting for something to trigger them off. This is the current situation.

Jove: Indeed this is scary but since it all exists in your mind, you can easily put an end to it. In any case you suggested that we could learn something from these creatures but have not revealed what.

Hova: As you know we exist as pure forms of energy with the ability to think and communicate between ourselves. These humans in their investigation of the laws of nature came up with a law of entropy something they also called the Second Law of Thermodynamics. One of the consequences of this law is that useful exchanges of energy occur when two or more energy forms of differing potential are joined allowing energy to flow from the higher potential to the lower until they are alike. When this

occurs there is no more useful energy flow. It occurred to me that our conversation really consists of a flow of energy which will soon cease making means of communicating null. Eventually our world, such as it is, will become a uniform glob of energy totally devoid of meaning. This is nothing more than another primeval soup which may or may not be revived. I simply do not know. If we are not able to communicate we will not be able to think. If we are not able to think then the fate of the soups I created in my imaginary world becomes a non-issue. What is even more disturbing is whether we are figments of someone or something else's imagination. What do you think?

Jack Basuk

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<http://www.jackbasuk.com>