

SEEING OUR WORLD THROUGH DIFFERENT EYES

**THOUGHTS ON SPACE AND TIME,
ABRAHAM LINCOLN, AND GOD**

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How to Get Clues

WHEN YOU WISH TO FIND A CLUE,
TRY TO CHANGE YOUR POINT OF VIEW!

Which came first—**the chicken or the egg**? I am pretty sure that you have already tried to unlock this challenging riddle. I was still a teenager when I came across it for the very first time. Back then I felt—as most people do—that there can't be a logical answer to this puzzle. If the chicken came first, where did this very first chicken originally come from? And if the egg came first, who had originally laid this very first egg? From a purely logical point of view, there doesn't seem to be any way out of this vicious circle.

But there is a unique solution, and in this book we will learn what it is. Once you understand how the riddle works, the solution is straightforward; and it can help us discover who we really are in the universe. Our solution even has the power to unlock the riddle to find (no kidding) God! This is because we can transform our original riddle to something far greater: Which came first—**creator or creation**? For pious readers, the answer is clear: "The creator, of course!" Others will oppose: "There is no creator. How could there be a creation?" Soon we will realize that there is a much deeper and all-embracing solution than these two. But what could it be? Did I get your attention? You must now be very hungry to get straight into this book, and that's what an introduction is all about. Pretty good for just one page, right?

As we get started, I would like to share something very important with you: the true secret of *how to get clues*. Let's assume you spend your holidays in Yosemite National Park taking photographs of its breathtaking landscape. Suddenly you notice a bird's tail peeking out behind some big rocks as shown in figure 1 left. But what bird is it? You can't tell from this one picture! But if you now change your point of view *in space* by taking a second picture from a few steps to your left, you can easily tell that this bird must be a Steller's Jay (figure 1 right).



Fig. 1: Which bird is peeking out behind these rocks?

Ready for another lucid example? So let's now assume you spend your next holidays in Italy taking photographs of the sea. You're so impressed that you forget what time it is. All you can see is the scenery shown in figure 2 left. So you might ask yourself: Is this a sunrise or a sunset? Is it morning or evening? You can't tell from this one glimpse! But if you now change your point of view *in time* by taking a second picture a few moments later, you can easily tell from the rising sun that it must be morning (figure 2 right).

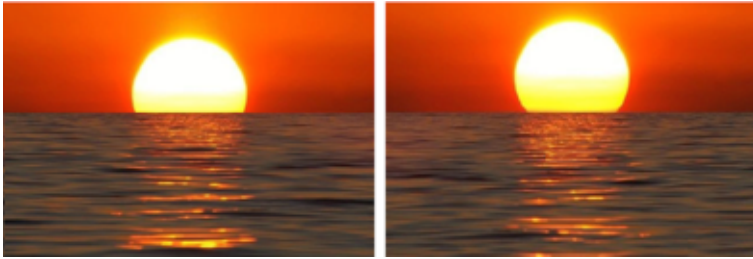


Fig. 2: Is this a sunrise or a sunset?

You might argue that there can't be any secret to these examples because we all know how to look behind a rock and how to make out a sunrise from a sunset. Sure, I agree. Yet there is a common strategy pursued in these two examples that discloses the secret about how to get clues: When you wish to find a clue, try to change your point of view! That is, we need to view things from several perspectives to better understand. In the six challenges ahead, we will apply this strategy not only to space and time, but also to our fellow man and to nature herself. We will learn that no human being is born to be a culprit and that there is a divine justice out there surpassing all human imagination.

With this being said, I am now going to outline some upcoming highlights for you. Our journey kicks off with a puzzle that is related to the fundamental structures of our world: Which comes first—**space or time**? Join us when we listen to Sir Isaac Newton and Immanuel Kant doing philosophy on space and time. They both strongly influenced our way of thinking, but it wasn't until 1905 that a twenty-six-year-old physicist solved the puzzle: Albert Einstein.

In the second challenge, we will apply the same type of question to two other features of our world: Which comes first—**being or becoming**? Is the universe about *being* something or about *becoming* something? This problem stumped Greek philosophers already 2,500 years ago. We'll learn that there are countless realities and also something very special that truly deserves the name "eternity."

Now that you've got the knack of this book, we'll keep it going: Which comes first—**good or evil**? It was Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who once declared that we live in the best of all possible worlds. But Pierre-Simon Laplace argued that a predestined world isn't given any chance to become better. Does nature provide any freedom? And if she does, how do "good" and "evil" come about?

Have you ever heard of Cuvier's fossils or of Lamarck's giraffes? Make sure that you don't miss out our challenge 4! Both Cuvier and Lamarck paved the way for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that helps us solve the mother of all mysteries: Which comes first—**the chicken or the egg**? Upon discussing the solution, we will reveal a great inconsistency: Most of us agree with Darwin that no species was created individually—so why do we still believe in every human being's individuality?

And then it'll be your turn: Which comes first—**creator or creation**? This puzzle is probably one of the deepest ever. Just give it a try and apply all that you have learned so far! I can tell you that this puzzle has very much in common with "chicken or egg." We'll plunge directly into Moses' Genesis and into Stephen Hawking's universe. I will also introduce you to one of the *finest* philosophers I've come across: Alfred

North Whitehead. Most of us haven't even heard his name, yet he's the one who holds the most vital solution of all for us. Whitehead teaches us how to love a God that truly is a God of every living thing.

The final chapter reflects the relationship between our main sources of truth—religion and science. It's remarkable to see how much humanity has been able to profit from both of them equally for so many centuries. The symmetry of a honeycomb or a snowflake inspires just as many religious feelings as a prayer. Here, we'll get right down to it: Which comes first—**love or understanding?**

In the bonus chapter, I'm going to disclose four clues to you that truly changed my life. All these clues link spiritual experiences to Einstein's famous theory of relativity. I admit that I still have goosebumps when I think about what these clues really mean altogether: *There's "something" around us and everywhere in outer space that guarantees the laws of nature and keeps track of every single move that we make.*

I am happy that you have taken notice of my book. It is up to you to decide how you will use the messages that you are going to read. I do not intend to bring you around to my line of thinking or to change your views in any way. I want precisely the opposite thing from you: I expect you to question and scrutinize every thought that you will read. Only in this way will it be possible for a world view to develop that is whole and in unity with everything that we know about life and the cosmos.

—Markolf H. Niemz

Second Challenge: Being and Becoming

Which Comes First—Being or Becoming?

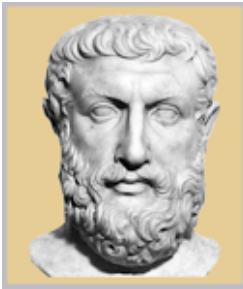
WHAT WE DO RIGHT NOW AND HERE,
EVER SHINES IN HEAVEN'S SPHERE.

What would you say if someone told you that he's watching Abraham Lincoln *live* serving as 16th president of the United States? No way! Right? But you're in for quite a surprise as you'll see in our second challenge. We will discuss powerful examples that will help us understand how incomplete our view of reality is. **"Reality" is how I perceive the world in space and time.** There isn't just one reality in the universe; instead, every observer in the universe has his/her/its reality depending on how the absolute distances in spacetime split into spatial and temporal. Please recall that space and time are relative, so how could there be one reality for all?

Philosophers frequently consider space the playground of being, and time the playground of becoming. Just think about it: How could I ever *be* if there were no such thing as space? How could I ever *become* if there were no such thing as time? It makes sense, right? Yet I'm afraid it isn't as easy as it sounds. Do you consider yourself a "human being"? Of course, you do! I did so myself until I started composing this challenge. But has it ever occurred to you that you might be a "human becoming" instead? It's not only your body aging; it's also your feelings, your knowledge, and your thoughts that *become* richer with every experience that you have. So what's our world all about—being or becoming?

Parmenides' Sphere

Parmenides of Elea was a Greek philosopher who was one of the first to scrutinize the nature of being and becoming. Let's turn back time 2,500 years and listen to his words: "It is impossible for anything not to be. If it came from nothing, what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished."²⁵



Parmenides,
Greek philosopher
(sixth/fifth century BC)

From a logical point of view, Parmenides is a bit hasty in extinguishing any becoming. To truly understand his way of thinking, let me add that he believed we can only think of things that are real: "It is the same thing that can be thought and that can be."²⁶ So he concludes: Not-being can't be since it can't be thought; and becoming cannot be either since it always starts with not-being. Well, I admit that Parmenides' approach to being and becoming is somewhat tricky. If you haven't got his point yet, just take your time and read this page again. I would like you to actually adopt Parmenides' view of reality for a while in order to comprehend how his ideas were able to influence philosophers in the centuries to come—up to the present day.

Regarding space, Parmenides taught that cosmic space isn't unlimited, but an enormous **sphere** entirely filled with being. This being is the only homogeneous "substance" that permeates all things (including all living things and the air), that our senses perceive in the cosmos, and that constitutes the cosmos itself. In his vision, the cosmos is not composed of temporary objects such as stars, planets, clouds, mountains, or living things that are capable of birth, movement, and death. The entire cosmos would only consist of being, which is one huge, spherical, eternal, motionless substance that is never becoming, but always equal to itself. Whatever we conceive as "becoming" is just an illusion.

I've started this chapter with Parmenides because being seems to be the easiest thing I can understand about myself. I just need to touch my own body—and instantly it feels like "I am." But if I start thinking about the beginning of myself, I soon realize that my life started with becoming, not with being. My mother *became* pregnant with me, I *became* alive, I *became* bigger and bigger. Neither pregnancy, nor birth, nor growing is an eternal, motionless being. And there is more: My senses *became* sharp, my body *became* mature, my brain *became* capable of memory. The becoming of myself continues all of my life until I will *be* (!) dead some day. But if we become day by day, why do we consider ourselves "human beings"—and not "human becomings"? Oops, the spelling program of my laptop is warning me now that the phrase "human becomings" isn't correct.

So, since we are used to consider ourselves human beings, Parmenides' ideas can't be that far off the mainstream. It is reasonable to ask that if something came from nothing,

what need could have made it arise later rather than sooner? But in his basic premise, Parmenides definitely misses the truth—we can surely think of something even though it isn't real. Here's one example: I can think of light moving at only one mile per second, but physics tells me that the speed of light is always 186,282 miles per second. Even if light were to *become* slower some day and were to start moving at only one mile per second, Parmenides would have to admit that becoming is part of reality too.

Heraclitus' Fire

We can easily imagine that Parmenides' philosophy was not accepted by everyone, but also provoked a lot of objection. Parmenides' strongest opponent was Heraclitus of Ephesus. Heraclitus believed in a world that's based on becoming, not on being. He thought of the cosmos as a continuously self-igniting **fire**: "The universe, an entity out of everything, has not been made by any god or men; it was, it is, and it will be eternally living fire that is regularly igniting itself and likewise regularly extinguishing itself."²⁷

Heraclitus was obsessed with the idea that the world is developing only through contrasts. Any becoming is caused by opposites like day and night, winter and summer, war and peace, satiety and hunger. Yet he also sees harmony in our world—not in an eternal sphere as Parmenides did, but in contrasts: "Men do not know how that which is drawn in different directions harmonizes with itself. The harmony in our world depends upon the tension of opposites like that of

the bow and the lyre.”²⁸ So we would do Heraclitus a great wrong if we reduced his teachings to becoming. While Parmenides objected to any form of becoming, Heraclitus didn’t oppose all forms of being. Instead, he claimed that opposites unite to give birth to harmony. I wished that today’s nationalists would take this statement to their hearts.



Heraclitus,
Greek philosopher
(sixth/fifth century BC)

One of the most famous sayings by Heraclitus is about life being like a river: “You cannot step twice into the same river.”²⁹ This prominent statement comes with two different interpretations. Most people are aware of only one: If I stroll down the banks of the Mississippi River, the waters before my eyes are permanently changing. So, when stepping into the Mississippi River twice, it can’t be the same water—nor the same river—both times. But there is another interpretation to this saying that goes even deeper: I cannot step twice into the Mississippi River since my first bath has somehow changed *myself*. That is to say: I cannot step twice into the same river *as the same person*. Can you hear the bells ringing? Heraclitus is actually telling us that we are becoming anew every single moment that we do something. So, I’m not and never was a human being, but I am and have always been a “human becoming.”

Bingo! We are still 500 years before Christ, but we have encountered it again: I am not, yet I become. From now on, this deep *mystic experience* will guide us like a golden thread. I somehow like the image of life being like a river. The peaks and troughs, pits and swirls—they're all part of the ride. So, do as Heraclitus would: Go with the flow and enjoy the ride, as wild as it may be!

Both Parmenides and Heraclitus tried to get to the bottom of our world. Yet, while thinking in terms of being and becoming, they didn't pay much attention to the fact that the world looks different when we change our point of view. Einstein was taking the observer's perspective into account—and his theory holds even more clues for us.

Light's Memory

Let's return to Abraham Lincoln. How could someone claim that he's now seeing him *live* serving as president of the US? Here is the solution: Imagine that our observer is sitting in a spaceship one light-year away from earth. One light-year is the spatial distance that light travels in one year. Let's also assume that our observer has a huge telescope on board and that he is looking through it back to earth. What would he see? He would watch events *live* that had happened on earth precisely one year ago because the light emitted from these events needed one year to reach him. Now, if his spaceship were 60 light-years away from earth, he would see my dear parents *live* marrying although they both already died a few

years ago from earth's perspective. So what would he get to see if his spaceship were 158 light-years away from earth? You got it! From there, he would now be watching Abraham Lincoln *live* ruling in White House.

You might argue: What he would get to see is history only. But the clue is: It is history from earth's perspective, but it is *live* from the spaceship's perspective! Here is why: **From my perspective, "history" is anything that happened before "my now"; from my perspective, "live" is anything that's happening at "my now."** So what would our observer see from his spaceship? He wouldn't see a black and white photograph of Abraham Lincoln in an album (figure 14 left); he also wouldn't see any video on DVD. He would indeed watch Abraham Lincoln *live and in full color* (figure 14 right), but from 158 light-years away! He would see him *as live* as you would see me if I were standing ten feet in front of you. If you like football: He would see him *as live* as we would have seen the New England Patriots playing the Philadelphia Eagles on February 4th, 2018, if we had been attending the Super Bowl with binoculars.



Fig. 14: Abraham Lincoln in an album and live in full color

What's going on here? It doesn't really matter whether you watch me *live* from a distance of ten feet, or a football match *live* from a distance of 100 yards, or Abraham Lincoln *live* from a distance of 158 light-years. Spatial distance is the only difference in these three scenarios. And what does this mean in regards to reality? Well, it means that Lincoln isn't president anymore from our perspective, but that he is still president from the perspective of a spaceship 158 light-years away from earth! Both of these perspectives are real. That is: They both describe an event that is happening right *now*, but it depends on an observer's time of what is "now." So, there isn't just one reality in the universe; there are as many realities as there are observers! My reality depends on my space and my time. We can also say: My reality depends on what I read off my ruler and my watch. I know of colleagues who studied Einstein's theory of relativity, but they still can't let go the idea of just one reality. By doing so, they're blocking themselves from the truth.

Now you might ask: If the number of realities is countless, isn't there anything in our world that we may consider as "standing out" from everything else? So let me disclose a great truth to you: Yes, there is! And the big surprise is that it isn't any science fiction. Instead, it is all around us: It's the *light* that we all bathe in. I even go one step further and add: It can't be coincidence that all of our world religions regard light as divine. Here are two examples: Jesus Christ speaks of himself as "the light of the world."³⁰ Buddhists say about Amida Buddha: "As he is light, so also life, he is eternal."³¹ You'll find more examples in my book *How Science Can Help Us Live in Peace*.³²