

# Faterh Inire Theory

The Urth list — 15 messages, 4 voices, 11 Dec 2010

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/5815>

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Lee Berman — 11 Dec 2010, 21:28

A personal question for Gerry, if I may:

Do you believe in God?

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Gerry Quinn — 11 Dec 2010, 21:50 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

A personal question for Gerry, if I may:

Do you believe in God?

A difficult question, because I'm not sure. I have sometimes wondered whether the concept of God - that is to say the concept of God as active agency, not the concept of God as concept - is compatible with what we know of the physical nature of the universe. My current thinking is that it may be, but I am far from certain of the truth.

- Gerry Quinn

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Lee Berman — 11 Dec 2010, 22:48 · follows Gerry Quinn

Do you believe in God?

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Thank you for that honest and incisive answer :- ). I think tying God to being compatible with the physical nature of the universe does suggest you are an unredeemable materialist. Which is cool! Heck it seems to be working very well for Stephen Hawking who, I think, recently denied the existence of God or found Him unnecessary or something. Science is an incredible tool for understanding almost all of what we see in the universe around us. I guess I am pretty much a materialist myself.

But, if I may be honest, materialism seems to be a worldview to which you are deeply wedded. You aren't showing signs of being able to step outside it when trying to understand the things that materialism can't explain, like God and religious thinking and religious thinkers as Gene Wolfe, at some levels, is. Can you recognize materialism as a handicap in this small, restricted venue? How does one talk to a blind man who finds the existence of colors to be "highly unlikely".

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Gerry Quinn — 12 Dec 2010, 17:04 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Do you believe in God?

Gerry Quinn- A difficult question, because I'm not sure. I have sometimes wondered whether the concept of God - that is to say the concept of God as active agency, not the concept of God as concept - is compatible with what we know of the physical nature of the universe. My current thinking is that it may be, but I am far from certain of the truth.

Thank you for that honest and incisive answer :- ). I think tying God to being compatible with the physical nature of the universe does suggest you are an unredeemable materialist. Which is cool! Heck it seems to be working very well for Stephen Hawking who, I think, recently denied the existence of God or found Him unnecessary or something. Science is an incredible tool for understanding almost all of what we see in the universe around us. I guess I am pretty much a materialist myself.

Two logically incompatible things cannot both be true. That is a rational position, rather than a materialist one.

If God exists, and the physical universe exists, it must be that they are logically compatible. If they are not logically compatible, at least one of them does not exist - or, at minimum, we are operating off an incorrect model/description of one or both, and we might find that better models are compatible after all.

But, if I may be honest, materialism seems to be a worldview to which you are deeply wedded. You aren't showing signs of being able to step outside it when trying to understand the things that materialism can't explain, like God and religious thinking and religious thinkers as Gene Wolfe, at some levels, is. Can you recognize materialism as a handicap in this small, restricted venue? How does one talk to a blind man who finds the existence of colors to be "highly unlikely".

I don't think materialism is the issue here, but rationality! I have never rejected any of your concepts as intrinsically unacceptable by its very nature - I have merely noted some occasions when they seem contradictory of other elements in the text, or when the support for them seems thin. I am somewhat inclined to dismiss interpretations of the text to which both conditions simultaneously apply.

Now it is of course perfectly possible for a \*text\* to be contradictory and/or irrational. Fundamentally, this occurs because we can only understand texts by way of interpretations - a text considered purely as a physical object cannot be self-contradictory. If I write "The sentence on the other side of this paper is false" on one side of a piece of paper, and "The sentence on the other side of this paper is true" on the other, no unusual physical consequences occur - the molecules of ink bind to the paper in the normal way; the paper does not wriggle and twist in my grasp as I attempt to write. So where does the apparent contradiction arise? It arises from our supposition that the sentences can both be taken as carrying some useful information; this hope is dashed when we consider both together.

Now it may be that this piece of paper with its contradictory text may be very marvellous and enlightening to somebody who has led a sheltered life when it comes to logical paradoxes. But do you not agree that in some respects, it is rather deficient? If the paradox is not the point of it, then we must admit that the two sentences tell us less than we hoped they might, rather than more.

By the same token, a novel may contain contradictions; it may be that if we looked closely enough, all novels do. But such contradictions must surely be considered defects, in general. It is my opinion - you may disagree - that Gene Wolfe would also consider them defects, and would not purposely embody major themes in such a fashion. I therefore conclude that interpretations that contradict things we are told clearly are likely to be spurious.

You seem to be developing a thesis to the effect that Wolfe deliberately makes his novels self-contradictory, as some sort of metaphysical gesture. I cannot disprove it, but I very much doubt it. I would find it easier to believe if the speculations you use to justify it, and use it to justify, appeared to have better grounding in the text.

I hold that interpretations based on different 'levels' as you put it, should be compatible to a considerable degree, and if they are incompatible, I believe they require a high evidentiary standard.

The blind man can be convinced of your ability to detect colours if you can detect things he can not, and demonstrate their existence. You may not be able to convey to him the beauty of a subset, but if you can detect colours it is certainly the case that experiments can be done that will prove it to all and sundry - for example distinguishing ripe from unripe fruit in a glass box. Of course if the universe were completely random, it might not be possible to make such demonstrations - but the universe is not, and I have faith that Gene Wolfe's books are not either.

- Gerry Quinn

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Lee Berman — 12 Dec 2010, 21:49 · follows Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn- If God exists, and the physical universe exists, it must be that they are logically compatible. If they are not logically compatible, at least one of them does not exist

Gerry you have painted yourself into an atheist corner here. God is defined, in deepest essence, as supernatural. Not of this physical universe. You might as well admit the point blank obvious by your rationale:

God doesn't exist. The alternative is that you don't exist and [cogito ergo sum] you know you do.

So many SF stories have painted the pagan gods as real physical entities. This is a way of acknowledging their false god status. I think it was Star Trek movie VI in which the Judeo-Christian God, Jahweh, was discovered to be a planet-sized psychic entity which fed on human faith and belief. Again, proving the falsity of this god.

I don't think materialism is the issue here, but rationality!

It doesn't matter. You could call it science or math or logic. They are all basically same thing: tools  
the human brain uses to understand the world it perceives. Are these the only tools available?

Gerry I asked before if you believe in God. Now I will ask if you believe in evolution (as the process  
which created human beings, I mean).

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David Stockhoff — 12 Dec 2010, 22:02 · in reply to Lee Berman

You lost me. Gerry didn't say he and God were logically incompatible.

To me, one is provable/disprovable and the other is neither. That makes them "logically compatible," because one does not determine the existence/nonexistence of the other. That is,

no Gerry does not mean no God

real Gerry does not mean real God

no Gerry does not mean God

real Gerry does not mean no God

And the reverse as well. Where is the "corner"?

I will grant that we can say, "each one does not exist in the same sense as the other exists" and if they do, incompatibility may arise. Your examples are excellent.

God appearing to Gerry would, as you suggest, prove that He exists as Gerry does and cast some doubt on His existence otherwise---but not really, because maybe God was just popping in for Gerry's benefit and left most of Himself at home in Nondisprovableverse. Similarly, if God uses a Mac, then Disprovability has contaminated Nondisprovableverse and we have a problem. A hierarchy of 'Verses would help.

But I don't anticipate either type of event, myself.

On 12/12/2010 4:49 PM, Lee Berman wrote:

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Dec 2010, 01:32 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Gerry Quinn- If God exists, and the physical universe exists, it must be that they are logically compatible. If they are not logically compatible, at least one of them does not exist

Gerry you have painted yourself into an atheist corner here. God is defined, in deepest essence, as supernatural. Not of this physical universe. You might as well admit the point blank obvious by your rationale:

You dare to define God? I am not so brash!

But seriously, it doesn't matter whether he is of the physical universe or not, so long as he is logically compatible with it.

God doesn't exist. The alternative is that you don't exist and [cogito ergo sum] you know you do.

You are asserting that God is incompatible with the physical universe. As I said. that question concerns me, but I have not come to a conclusion with regard to it. For that matter, I do not think that 'Cogito ergo sum' represents all that there is to be said about its purported subject.

This all seems beside the point anyway.

So many SF stories have painted the pagan gods as real physical entities. This is a way of acknowledging their false god status. I think it was Star Trek movie VI in which the Judeo-Christian God, Jahweh, was discovered to be a planet-sized psychic entity which fed on human faith and belief. Again, proving the falsity of this god.

There are mailing lists devoted to Star Trek. This one, however, is concerned with the works of Gene Wolfe I find the latter considerably more interesting.

- Gerry Quinn

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Dec 2010, 01:35 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Gerry I asked before if you believe in God. Now I will ask if you believe in evolution (as the process which created human beings, I mean).

That question is easier. Of course I do.

- Gerry Quinn

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Lee Berman — 13 Dec 2010, 04:01 · follows Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn- There are mailing lists devoted to Star Trek. This one, however, is concerned with the works of Gene Wolfe I find the latter considerably more interesting.

Now that's a snotty comment, heh! But an honest opinion I'm sure. Please consider that I am not writing with you only as an audience. I don't know if you have any background in public speaking or performance as I do but if ever called to the task I recommend occasional humorous departures from your main subject as a way to avoid being a total bore to your audience.

Actually, this whole thread about Gerry's worldview is probably off-topic enough to warrant a reprimand from Ranjit. (sorry R. I'll try to wrap it up quickly!).

Do you believe in evolution?

That question is easier. Of course I do.

I ask because you seem to have a somewhat (or perhaps totally) religious attachment to rationality and logic as tools for understanding the universe. I see no signs that you question their supremacy or brook any competition from other forms of interpretation and understanding. So, within an evolutionary framework, I am wondering how you think such ultimate universal tools came to reside in the brains of creatures closer to our ape cousins than mice are to rats.

Do you have a sense of 2001: A.S.O. stuff going on where something like black rectangles from space uplifted us from animals looking for bananas to divine masters of perception?

Or is it based on the evolutionary principle of diversity and range. Some (surely most) human beings use their limited rational and logical abilities simply to chase resources and sex and comfort. While some human beings are endowed with an extra-large dose of these abilities (like having a longer tail) and only these few superior humans can use their gifts to plumb the deepest mysteries of the universe (which includes Gene Wolfe books.

Or is there another explanation you have? I am really interested Gerry. You are a case in study as your flow of thinking is so different than my current flow. Actually I would be interested in your age also. (I am 49).

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Lee Berman — 13 Dec 2010, 05:19 · follows Lee Berman

Adam Thornton- One suspects that this has been the fate of many monarchical buildings converted to bureaucratic workplaces as the Type Of Government clanked along its chain, in our time. I think it is likely that Jonas, as the representative of Near Future [Ea|U]rth is more familiar with Cubeville than is Severian. The room's just a waiting room in bland government offices, complete with cookies and coffee urn. It's just that the wait times have become generational; indeed, eternal.

Heh. This resonates with me also. In writing BotNS I think Gene Wolfe was still working either as an engineer or as an engineering journal editor. This scene could partially be his version of "Dilbert" or "Office Space". I'm pretty sure Wolfe includes in-jokes in his work that only his close family and friends could really understand. Perhaps co-workers also.

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hammstu at sbcglobal.net — 13 Dec 2010, 05:24 · in reply to Lee Berman

Currently re-reading "Forlesen" and I agree that this may be a commentary on corporate/day job monotony.

Sent from my BlackBerry? smartphone with SprintSpeed

-----Original Message-----

From: Lee Berman <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Sender: urth-bounces at lists.urth.net Date: Mon, 13 Dec 2010 00:19:42

To: <urth at lists.urth.net>

Reply-To: The Urth Mailing List <urth at lists.urth.net>

Subject: (urth) Faterh Inire Theory

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bureaucratic workplaces as the Type Of Government clanked along its chain, in our time. I think it is likely that Jonas, as the representative of Near Future [Ea|U]rth is more familiar with Cubeville than is Severian. The room's just a waiting room in bland government offices, complete with cookies and

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Dec 2010, 16:50 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Gerry Quinn- There are mailing lists devoted to Star Trek. This one, however, is concerned with the works of Gene Wolfe I find the latter considerably more interesting.

Now that's a snotty comment, heh! But an honest opinion I'm sure. Please consider that I am not writing with you only as an audience. I don't know if you have any background in public speaking or performance as I do but if ever called to the task I recommend occasional humorous departures from your main subject as a way to avoid being a total bore to your audience.

For a fact I do try to include an occasional touch of humour. Perhaps my witticisms are missing the target.

Do you also find your audiences respond well to patronisation?

As for Star Trek, it certainly has its merits, but its medium, format and audience militate against the subtle themes and expressions we look for in Wolfe's books. That is all I am saying. That it can do some things better than Wolfe's books is also certainly true; I just do not think they are mostly the same things we discuss here.

Actually, this whole thread about Gerry's worldview is probably off-topic enough to warrant a reprimand from Ranjit. (sorry R. I'll try to wrap it up quickly!).

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Are we closer to apes than mice are to rats? Mice and rats would certainly think so. I guess it would depend on your criteria. (Genetic distance is one possible criterion, but there are others.)

As for tools other than rationality and logic, I do not in the least discount them. I assert that the best understanding comes when we use all our tools, not just some. From my perspective, you seem averse to using the tools of rationality and logic, lest they show you something you do not like.

Do you have a sense of 2001: A.S.O. stuff going on where something like black rectangles from space uplifted us from animals looking for bananas to divine masters of perception?

Or is it based on the evolutionary principle of diversity and range. Some (surely most) human beings use their limited rational and logical abilities simply to chase resources and sex and comfort. While some human beings are endowed with an extra-large dose of these abilities (like having a longer tail) and only these few superior humans can use their gifts to plumb the deepest mysteries of the universe (which includes Gene Wolfe books.

I do not think the distinction between the abilities of individuals is as strong as you indicate above (most people can learn to read and enjoy it, IMO) - nor do I think that the ability to appreciate Gene Wolfe is a special mark of superiority, although it is probably less common than the ability to appreciate Star Trek. And I think we all attempt to plumb the mysteries of the universe, in our different ways.

I don't see the "diversity and range" principle as especially relevant here. For whatever reasons, we appear to have evolved not just rationality and logic, but an ability to create and

appreciate art, be it Wolfe, Star Trek, or other forms, low or high. This is an ability shared by every human, and used by every human, although perhaps not to the same degree in all. What vestiges of such abilities are detectible in the behaviour of apes is something I am not qualified to judge. Certainly there is some common mental ground between ourselves and apes (or other creatures).

Or is there another explanation you have? I am really interested Gerry.  
You are a case in study as your flow  
of thinking is so different than my current flow. Actually I would be  
interested in your age also. (I am 49).

I am 51, so it would appear that a generational difference may be discounted as a possibility. However, I do not believe my thinking is quite so unusual or anomalous as you imagine. You are focused on me because I have challenged your theories, but I suspect many others would have questions along the some lines as those I have put forward.

- Gerry Quinn

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Dec 2010, 17:01 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Adam Thornton- One suspects that this has been the fate of many  
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be his version of "Dilbert"  
or "Office Space". I'm pretty sure Wolfe includes in-jokes in his work  
that only his close family and  
friends could really understand. Perhaps co-workers also.

I have always thought that the horridly artificial plastic oranges in  
\_Peace\_ were a reflection of the ghastly mass-produced 'Pringles'. Wolfe reportedly developed  
the machine that cooks them. Perhaps they are the true crime for which Weer must atone.

But then again, I hate Pringles, so this may be too personalised a reading.

- Gerry Quinn

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Lee Berman — 13 Dec 2010, 17:57 · follows Gerry Quinn

Gerry Quinn- Do you also find your audiences respond well to patronisation?

I always mirror my audiences in tone. Speaking in their language is the best, sometimes only  
way, to achieve communication.

As for Star Trek, it certainly has its merits, but its medium, format and  
audience militate against the subtle themes and expressions we look for in  
Wolfe's books. That is all I am saying

And all I am saying is that there is a good chance Gene Wolfe gathered with his family each week in the late 60's for episodes of Star Trek as so many American families did, including my own. You seem to suggest the show was beneath him and you. And the same for me and my family. We have the recent evidence of Ryan saying Gene Wolfe's only exposure to a classic legend was a Disney movie. As I was saying, in regard to patronisation, I mirror my audience.

Are we closer to apes than mice are to rats? Mice and rats would certainly think so. I guess it would depend on your criteria. (Genetic distance is one possible criterion, but there are others.)

Are there? Within the acknowledged evolutionary framework we were discussing, what other criterion is there? Are fish and whales close? they look alike, have some similar adaptations..but I don't see how that is relevant to our discussion.

As for tools other than rationality and logic, I do not in the least discount them. I assert that the best understanding comes when we use all our tools, not just some. From my perspective, you seem averse to using the tools of rationality and logic, lest they show you something you do not like.

You seem to discount intuition and gestalt understanding in here. I can't speak to your attitude else where. You are descending to rhetorical snottiness rather than your true observations. If I was really averse to using the tools of rationality and logic then my cheese would be riposted by the hyperbolic perigee of pinballs and gum.

I am 51, so it would appear that a generational difference may be discounted as a possibility.

Agreed. I asked because there was a time period in my life when I thought and spoke as you do now. I think we will have to just agree that we think differently and leave it at that. I will defer any last words to you.

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Gerry Quinn — 13 Dec 2010, 19:41 · in reply to Lee Berman

From: "Lee Berman" <severiansola at hotmail.com>

Gerry Quinn- Do you also find your audiences respond well to patronisation?

I always mirror my audiences in tone. Speaking in their language is the best, sometimes only way, to achieve communication.

I do not believe I have patronised you. If I had avoided criticising your interpretations of BotNS and just ignored them, that would have been patronisation.

As for Star Trek, it certainly has its merits, but its medium, format and audience militate against the subtle themes and expressions we look for in Wolfe's books. That is all I am saying

And all I am saying is that there is a good chance Gene Wolfe gathered with his family each week in the late 60's for episodes of Star Trek as so many American families did, including my own. You seem to suggest the show was beneath him and you. And the same for me and my family. We have the recent evidence of Ryan saying Gene Wolfe's only exposure to a classic legend was a Disney movie. As I

was saying,  
in regard to patronisation, I mirror my audience.

I haven't suggested that Star Trek or Pinnochio are beneath anyone. I've watched plenty of them. I do think it somewhat unlikely that the 1991 Star Trek movie you mentioned is an influence on BotNS. But yes, some Star Trek episodes from the '60s did indeed feature aliens who looked like, copied or emulated Greek gods, for reasons which may have owed as much to wardrobe costs as to philosophical inspiration. Maybe that's where Wolfe got some of his ideas, who knows?

Are we closer to apes than mice are to rats? Mice and rats would certainly think so. I guess it would depend on your criteria. (Genetic distance is one possible criterion, but there are others.)

Are there? Within the acknowledged evolutionary framework we were discussing, what other criterion is there? Are fish and whales close? they look alike, have some similar adaptations..but I don't see how that is relevant to our discussion.

We are discussing both evolution and culture. Obviously genetic distance is one obvious criterion from the evolutionary side of things, but its relationship to culture seems less obvious. Furthermore, it could be that a lot of the genetic distance between apes and humans relates to brain development, while that between mice and rats may have less difference here. So it is not obvious that simplistic measurements of genetic difference are appropriate here even in their own terms.

As for tools other than rationality and logic, I do not in the least discount them. I assert that the best understanding comes when we use all our tools, not just some. From my perspective, you seem averse to using the tools of rationality and logic, lest they show you something you do not like.

You seem to discount intuition and gestalt understanding in here. I can't speak to your attitude else where. You are descending to rhetorical snottiness rather than your true observations. If I was really averse to using the tools of rationality and logic then my cheese would be riposted by the hyperbolic perigee of pinballs and gum.

I have stated quite clearly above that I do not discount such tools, but *\*value\** them. I do not think you are valuing logic and rationality enough as criteria. I think that undervaluing logic and rationality leads to elephant theories. I don't see any "rhetorical snottiness" in what I said.

I am 51, so it would appear that a generational difference may be discounted as a possibility.

Agreed. I asked because there was a time period in my life when I thought and spoke as you do now.

Again with the patronisation. Grow up little Gerry and you will understand the true wisdom behind my theory that Typhon is Severian's sister.

I think we will have to just agree that we think differently and leave it at that.

I will defer any last words to you.

What would be the point? You have almost invariably placed words in my mouth rather than deal with those I have already spoken.

- Gerry Quinn