

I Am Not Supposed to Be Here: Birth and Mystical Detection

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“Take off your mask . . . Here! Here! We’re here! . . . It’s so good to see you all, I didn’t expect you . . . What are you doing here? Nothing . . . I am not supposed to be here . . . Don’t ever change . . . Let’s get out from under this roof. Good idea . . . I shouldn’t even fuckin’ be here . . .”

—*True Detective*, Season 1, Episode 8

True detection lies in being extra circumspect about birth, life’s originary and seemingly unerasable crime. “If attachment is an evil,” says Cioran, “We must look for its cause in the scandal of birth, for to be born is to be attached. Detachment then should apply itself to getting rid of the traces of this scandal, the most serious and intolerable of all.”¹ The mystery of birth is the ur-object of detection in that the impossible fact that I am me, even more than there being something rather than nothing, is an absolute disproportion or asymmetry which is per force unaccountable to empirical understanding and unassimilable to reason, as reflected in Albert Einstein’s statement, “There is something essential about the Now which is just outside the realm of science.”² Being living proof that the truth about reality cannot be positively known, birth is the negative ground upon which detection trues itself, restoring knowledge to the mystical process of nihilation and apharesis. As Pseudo-Dionysius says, “If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge . . . We would be like sculptors who set out to carve a statue. They remove every obstacle to the pure view of the hidden image, and simply by this act of clearing aside (*aphaeresis*) they show up the beauty which is hidden.”³ Detecting or uncovering truth is a negative matter of seeing through falsehoods, cancelling zeros, naughting lies. As Sherlock Holmes observes, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”⁴ Due to the knower’s monstrously unmasterable complicity with birth, according to which all murder mirrors my own coming-to-be, detection is authentically true only insofar as it sees into evil’s specular abyss, fearlessly following a path into the radically immanent correlative identities of innocence and victimhood, investigator and criminal.⁵ Birth’s wrongness limns the speculative threshold of science and the real. “The hellishly real impossibility that you are you is the true stupidity according to which the absolute is alone

¹ E. M. Cioran, *The Trouble with Being Born*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Seaver Books, 1976).

² See Paul Davies, *About Time: Einstein’s Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 77.

³ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1025B, in *Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 138.

⁴ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet and The Sign of Four* (New York: D. Appleton, 1902), 69.

⁵ “Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that he does not become one himself. And when you stare for a long time into an abyss, the abyss stares back into you.” Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, eds. Rolf-Peter Horstmann & Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

knowable.”⁶ Or as Meillassoux says, in terms that figurally evoke the circumspection of birth, “We now know the location of this narrow passage through which thought is able to exit from itself—it is through facticity, and through facticity alone, that we are able to make our way towards the absolute.”⁷ Likewise, to sense my essential wrongness is both to see the impossibility of absolute knowledge and an absolute knowing in its own right. If I knew everything about everything, possessed perfect science of the universe and all of its processes, what could possibly answer the question, why am I me? And were I to know the answer to this question, what else could I possibly not know? The negativity of birth is solid evidence, the first clue that truth lies in the fact that I am not me, that the real trouble with being born is that one was not, that *we are things that labor under the illusion of having a self*. Such is the pessimal frame within which the television show saves the significance of detection from forensic positivism and restores its essential negativity to the immanent cosmic and existential horizon, that is, to the diurnal hell that is ‘you’. Beyond its own necessarily imperfect narrative representation, the show presents—at least for anyone who is not so far gone into identification as to insist upon fictional solutions to the problem of themselves—the imperative to practice true detection in the sense of mystically solving the mystery of birth and working out one’s own salvation with fear and trembling (Phillippians 2:12) in the name of the personally terrifying principle that there is no one in need of saving. Silently implying that life ought to be lived like a crime drama in which the detective investigates birth instead of death, *True Detective* is hardly incompatible with mystical or superessential nihilism and the traditional meaning of mortal birth as the spiritual opportunity for the eternal birth which saves one from hell and/or further thrownness. As Meher Baba states in his 43rd birthday message, “The incident of birth is common to all life on earth. Unlike other living creatures which are born insignificantly, live an involuntary life and die an uncertain death, the physical birth of human beings connotes an important and, *if they are extra circumspect about it*, perhaps a final stage of their evolutionary progress. Here onward, they no longer are automatons but masters of their destiny which they can shape and mold according to will. And this means that human beings, having passed through all the travails of lower evolutionary processes, should insist upon the reward thereof, which is ‘Spiritual Birth’ in this very life, and not rest content with a promise in the hereafter.”⁸ *We all fit a certain category . . . and any of those types could be a good detective, and any of those types could be an incompetent shiteheel*. Seeing the worldly, human event of oneself as neither for this life nor for another, this doctrine gives birth back to the always-new domain of immanent will and saves it from the self-dramatizing and auto-celebratory passivity of the subject who decides to dwell in paradoxically egoistical epiphenomenality, predicating itself upon irresponsibility for the fact of its own being. As Julius Evola posits at the end of *Ride the Tiger*, “If one can allow one’s mind to dwell on a bold hypothesis . . . once the idea of *Geworfenheit* is rejected, once it is conceived that living here and now in this world has a sense, because it is always the effect of a choice and a will, one might even believe that one’s own realization of the possibilities I have

⁶ Nicola Masciandaro, “Absolute Secrecy: On the Infinity of Individuation,” in *Speculation, Heresy, and Gnosis in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion: The Enigmatic Absolute*, eds. Joshua Ramey & Matthew Harr Farris (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014), forthcoming.

⁷ Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 63.

⁸ LM, 1788 (www.lordmeher.org), italics mine.

indicated—far more concealed and less imaginable in other situations that might be more desirable from the merely human point of view, from the point of view of the ‘person’—is the ultimate rationale and significance of a choice made by a ‘being’ that wanted to measure itself against a difficult challenge: that of living in a world contrary to that consistent with its nature.”⁹ *It's all one ghetto, man, giant gutter in outer space . . . Well, then what do you got the cross for in your apartment? That's a form of meditation. How's that? I contemplate the moment in the garden, the idea of allowing your own crucifixion.* My aim in what follows, therefore, is to detect how this deathly natal sorrow, the perfect sorrow of being which precedes and exceeds my feeling of it, is neither melancholy nor pessimism, but a true sign of an absolutely optimal worst.

The intuition that one should not be here, that there is something inexplicably wrong or wrongly inexplicable about being, oneself, in this universe—whatever universe this is—is not to be taken lightly. The simple fact that I am capable of this intuition is astonishing and lends it a peculiar kind of unquestionable authority, as worthy of being believed as my being here. *Do you want to hear this or not?* That being is a sorrow, that this entity is strangely equipped and bound to grope around the most dark cell of itself is really something. A need for escape vaster and more confining than all prisons. A vector of adventure killing and outliving every quest. From the start, let us once and for all never confuse this intuition of essential wrongness with there being anything the matter, that is, with evil as we like to think about it. Let us sever and silence in advance all traces of its relation to *worry* and right now cease forever to fall into the trap of considering the problem of birth, of coming to be, to have anything whatsoever to do with the issue of death. *Not at first, but right there in the last instant. It's an unmistakable relief.* Worry is the way of the lifetime actor, the diurnal identitarian liar, who, in the self-interest and pseudo-life of being someone, dramatizes existence and in doing so blindly *goes along with it*, never failing to show up for the show, even after it is too late (to not show up). Not that anyone is entirely deprived of the illumination of this wrongness, it being also the proper light in which everyone assumes the mask and hallucinates escape. *It was all the same dream, a dream that you had inside a locked room, a dream about being a person and like a lot of dreams there's a monster at the end of it.* How do you like living with yourself? As Levinas states, “Escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [*moi*]

⁹ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: A Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin & Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 227. Cf. “The whole of evolution, in fact, is an evolution from unconscious divinity to conscious divinity, in which God Himself, essentially eternal and unchangeable, assumes an infinite variety of forms, enjoys an infinite variety of experiences and transcends an infinite variety of self-imposed limitations. Evolution from the standpoint of the Creator is a divine sport, in which the Unconditioned tests the infinitude of His absolute knowledge, power and bliss in the midst of all conditions. But evolution from the standpoint of the creature, with his limited knowledge, limited power, limited capacity for enjoying bliss, is an epic of alternating rest and struggle, joy and sorrow, love and hate, until, in the perfected man, God balances the pairs of opposites and transcends duality. Then creature and Creator recognise themselves as one; changelessness is established in the midst of change, eternity is experienced in the midst of time. God knows Himself as God, unchangeable in essence, infinite in manifestation, ever experiencing the supreme bliss of Self-realisation in continually fresh awareness of Himself by Himself. This realisation must and does take place *only in the midst of life*, for it is only in the midst of life that limitation can be experienced and transcended, and that subsequent freedom from limitation can be enjoyed” (Meher Baba, *Discourses*, III.12).

is oneself [*soi-même*] . . . In escape the I flees itself, not in opposition to the infinity of what it is not or of what it will not become, but rather due to the very fact that it is or that it becomes.”¹⁰ *He’s gonna come for you, he is worse than anybody.*

The horror of this binding—the horror of the *this*—is only superficially that it is a horror to me, a horror of me as victim of my own being. That is the level dramatized in Lovecraft’s *The Outsider* in which you both abhor and hold to yourself as most prized possession within a hideously unknowable and unownable cosmos: “Such a lot the gods gave to me—to me, the dazed, the disappointed, the barren, the broken. And yet I am strangely content, and cling desperately to those sere memories, when my mind momentarily threatens to reach beyond to the *other*. I know not where I was born, save that the castle was infinitely old and infinitely horrible . . .”¹¹ For under this too-familiar being-in-the-world level of horror lurks the greater horror still of a more universal binding, a more terrible cosmic complicity, one according to which hiding within the given, my cowardly acceptance of its fraud as my own, is simply no longer possible. Here is where the need to escape, to get out of myself, as no longer conceivably *my* need, is already so close to being something universally free from myself, that to entertain it is too dangerous, too threatening to escape per se and the singular sense it holds to me, to me. Here is the threshold of a greater—neither human nor inhuman—internal outdoors, the boundary of the limitless unlocked prison whereupon almost everyone really plans to stay inside, where you keep planning *your*—or worse *our*—escape via designs perforce designed to prevent you from actually escaping! Being oneself is easy. Anyone can do that. Now your lot, your precious little fate, so safely guarded by the personal spectre of your eventual non-being, is all yours. Go ahead, cling to it, all you want. Stay in hell. *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.* The stronger you do the clearer I see the deeper oceanic death which this clinging fears, that decollative drowning into being *neither oneself nor someone else*.¹² Not birth nor death do you really fear, but the birth and/or vanishing found in the death of death, a living death and undying life born from the *death of birth*. “It is no longer I who live . . .” (Galatians 2:20).

What if the I is not, never becomes, is not oneself? *Can you, uh, tell us anything about that?* How that silently wrecks your palatial prison. How that destroys, exposes as always already eroded, your standing in the world! As Cioran explains in *The Temptation to Exist*, “Even more than the style, the very rhythm of our life is based on the *good standing* of rebellion. Loath to admit a universal identity, we posit individuation, heterogeneity as a primordial phenomenon.”¹³ What kind of sick creature is this? Someone who celebrates his birthday all the while counting on death to save him from never having been and/or being forever, from the unborn abyss of eternity! Simply not to be such a creature is reason enough to affirm, over and against whatever this essential wrongness of being consists of, the purer fact *that* I feel it as an index of a self-destroying and self-fulfilling universal truth, to see it for what it is, namely, a real and direct sign of the fact that I am never who I think I am. *Put your hands on your head.* One way or another, I am universal. I was not born and will never die. This is the only sane conclusion, the only true solution not absolutely intolerable to itself, the only one that speaks with the self’s own absoluteness: “the essence of my self arises from this—

¹⁰ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 55.

¹¹ H. P. Lovecraft, “The Outsider,” (<http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/fiction/o.aspx>).

¹² Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, 1.3, 1001A.

¹³ E. M. Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*, trans. Richard Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 42.

that nothing will be able to replace it: the feeling of my fundamental improbability situates me in the world where I remain as though foreign to it, absolutely foreign.”¹⁴

Even if there is no escape, or no one here to escape, or if the only escape lies in realizing either, knowing this feeling is really something else. *Other times I thought I was mainlining the secret truth of the universe.* Now at least I start at last to actually grasp existence, to know more than intellectually what I’ve known all along, that “Existence is the unheard of, *what cannot happen.*”¹⁵ The inescapable freedom of being a thing that should not be is a supervenient truth according to which escape is eternally accomplished—divinely or nihilistically it does not matter—on the basis of its necessarily being an escape from itself, an escape from escape. Escape escapes escape. Salvation is the sheer non-existence of anyone in need of saving. So the need to break out of oneself is really real only for someone who somehow already has. Whether or not anyone ever breaks out, I am outta here! The rest is *escapism* or false appropriation of freedom in the interest of further binding. See how everyone, the whole world, destroys this freedom with plans for escape. Why not stop? Why not rest in the self-evident openness wherein the cosmic prison walls are the innermost boundary of paradise? *No numbers on this place—fire must’ve happened a long time ago.* Why not cease your infantile clamoring for justice and just—for once in your life—be just? “The just man,” says Eckhart, “Serves neither God nor creatures, for he is free, . . . and the closer he is to freedom . . . the more he is freedom itself. Whatever is created, is not free. . . . There is something that transcends the created being of the soul, not in contact with created things . . . not even an angel has it . . . It is akin to the nature of deity, it is one in itself, and has naught in common with anything.”¹⁶

That I see the wrongness of my being, that I know it, is enough wrong for me. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt. 6:34). *Tell me what you see. Ligature marks on her wrists, ankles, and knees. Multiple shallow stab wounds to the abdomen. Hemorrhaging around throat, lividity at the shoulders, thighs, and torso. She’d been on her back a while before he moved her.* That I sigh with secret indifferent sorrow is a cosmically sufficient secret. “My secret to myself, my secret to myself, woe is me” (Isaiah 24:16). Flying faster than Satan, this sigh passes the widest sphere, surpassing God. “For my essential being is above God, taking God as the origin of creatures. For in that essence of God in which God is above being and distinction, there I was myself and knew myself so as to make this man. Therefore I am my own cause according to my essence, which is eternal, and not according to my becoming, which is temporal.”¹⁷ *Her body is a paraphilic love map.* Birth, whose negativity is instant evidence that one is not one’s body, that “a body came into the world, but it wasn’t you” (VH), is my negative bond of love with the absolute. “O blissful Estrangement from God,” says Mechthild of Magdeburg, “how lovingly am I connected with you!”¹⁸ How else that I have these blind antennae, these weirdly haptic polymelic phantom limbs, which grasp the endless beginningless chain of my binding, touching its matter and feeling its form? How else do I sense the infinite

¹⁴ Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 69

¹⁵ E.M. Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*, 218.

¹⁶ Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, Sermon 17.

¹⁷ Eckhart, *Complete Mystical Works*, Sermon 87.

¹⁸ Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 4.12.

verticality of my self-foreignness, this otherness more myself than me, according to which birth, insofar as the event or its world can be blamed for establishing my miscarried belief in its happening as my own, is unmistakably death? Simply accept as proof of this the fact that it is actually happening. Close your eyes and see the invisible hands that tied you to the tree of life with a binding that reveals the difference between yourself and the tree by blinding you to it, blinds you to the difference by binding you to it. *The hubris it must take to yank a soul out of non-existence.* The hands are your own.

Coda: “My soul is chaos, how can it be at all? There is everything in me: search and you will find out . . . in me anything is possible, for I am he who at the supreme moment, in front of absolute nothingness, will laugh.” (E. M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*)

