

Meditation in Arundel Street, Aldous Leonard Huxley

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A walk down Arundel Street in London remains, after all, the best introduction to philosophy. Keep your eyes to the left as you descend towards the river from the Strand. You will observe that the Christian World is published at number seven, and a few yards further down, at number nine, the Feathered World. By the time you have reached the Embankment you will find yourself involved in the most abstruse metaphysical speculations.

The Christian World, the Feathered World—between them a great gulf is fixed, a gulf which only St Francis has ever tried to bridge, and with singularly little success. His sermon to the birds was ineffective. In spite of it, the gulf still yawns. No Christians have grown feathers and no feathered people are Christians. The values and even the truths current in the world of number seven Arundel Street cease to hold good in that of number nine.

The world of the Christians and the world of the feathered are but two out of a swarm of humanly conceivable and humanly explorable worlds. They constellate the thinking mind like stars, and between them stretches the mental equivalent of interstellar space—unspanned. Between, for example, a human body and the whizzing electrons of which it is composed, and the thoughts, the feelings which direct its movements, there are, as yet at any rate, no visible connections. The gulf that separates the lover's, say, or the musician's world from the world of the chemist is deeper, more uncompromisingly unbridgeable than that which divides Anglo-Catholics from macaws or geese from Primitive Methodists.

We cannot walk from one of these worlds into another; we can only jump. The last act of Don Giovanni is not deducible from electrons, or molecules, or even from cells and entire organs. In relation to these physical, chemical, and biological worlds it is simply a non sequitur. The whole of our universe is composed of a series of such non sequiturs. The only reason for supposing that there is in fact any connection between the logically and scientifically unrelated fragments of our experience is simply the fact that the experience is ours, that we have the fragments in our consciousness. These constellated worlds are all situated in the heaven of the human mind. Some day, conceivably, the scientific and logical engineers may build us convenient bridges from one world to another. Meanwhile we must be content to hop. Solvitur saltando. The only walking you can do in Arundel Street is along the pavements.

The end