

# ***The Missing Ingredient***

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***With Apologies to Whom it May Concern***

## **Episode I**

### ***A Puzzle in the Paper***

It is a late autumn Sunday morning. At 221B Baker Street Mrs. Hudson has lit the fire and cleared away the breakfast things. Holmes and Watson are comfortably settled in their armchairs reading the papers.

“I say Holmes, have you seen this piece in the Times about consciousness?”

Holmes folds his paper and lays it on the table at his side, exchanging it for his pipe. Leaning forward he knocks the pipe out on the grate. With yesterday's ashes dislodged he sits back and reaches for his tobacco.

“About whose consciousness?”

“Well, I don't know. Yours and mine I suppose.”

“There's an article about our consciousness in the Times, Watson? This is a breach of privacy.

“No, no, Holmes. Not *our* consciousness. The consciousness we all have. Everybody's consciousness.”

Holmes holds a match to the first pipe of day. He draws on it a few times, pulling the flame down into the strong black tobacco. The pipe securely lit and the match thrown into the fire, he settles back in his chair.

“Then there is only one thing for it, old chap, we must bring a class action.”

“No, no, Holmes, why must you play these games. It's not about our own consciousness, our own private thoughts and dreams and so forth. You

know very well what I mean. It's about human consciousness, the consciousness we all have."

"Well now," Holmes pauses to pull on his pipe, considering his next move, "if everybody has this same consciousness, then it's not yours and mine after all. First you say one thing and then another."

"Holmes, you are impossible sometimes. I'll say no more about it." Watson sits back huffily and makes a drama of re-opening his paper. Holmes relents.

"I'm sorry Watson. Our enforced idleness makes me irritable. Not a decent case for months. The criminal fraternity seems to have lost the ability to outwit the police. A sorry state of affairs. Please do carry on. What is so interesting about this article of yours?"

"What is interesting about it, Holmes, is that the author says that consciousness is the most baffling problem in the science of the mind."

Holmes is quiet for minute or two. It is as if he has lost interest in the conversation. Watson knows better than to interrupt his friend's calculations.

"I should have thought," Holmes replies eventually, without shifting his gaze from the flames dancing around the coals in the fire, "that it is the only problem in the science of the mind."

"Well, that may be so Holmes. I wouldn't know. Anyway, he says it cannot be solved."

"A preposterous idea, Watson. No problem cannot be solved. If it does not have a solution then it is not a problem but a misunderstanding. But this article begins to interest me. Who is the writer?"

"Some philosopher chap. Mostly quotes other people. Says that however we try to explain consciousness we keep finding that there's a missing ingredient in our explanation. Well, no, the ingredient isn't in the explanation, that's the problem. Every explanation of consciousness they can think of has a gap in it. Without an extra ingredient they're stumped."

"Ah, my friend, how often have we faced this problem?"

"We have?"

"Most certainly. Are we not often consulted when our conscientious officers of the law have identified all of the suspects for a crime, but cannot prove that any of them could have committed it?"

"I suppose we are, yes. I remember a number of such cases. There was the time we first tangled with that chap Athelney Jones."

"That would be an example, yes. In such cases the police find they cannot completely explain the crime by assuming that any of their suspects committed it. Yet a certain doggedness makes them keener to prove one of them guilty than make the more obvious but inconvenient inference. In such cases there is usually a suspect missing from the list in whose absence the crime is inexplicable."

"By Jove, Holmes, I see what you're getting at. There was an ingredient missing from their list of suspects."

"Exactly so. There would have to be an ingredient missing from all incorrect explanations of the crime, gaps in story from which we can deduce that it is an incorrect explanation. If this were not so then we would never find the crime difficult to explain but would simply arrest the wrong man. Consider the Sholto case. From the evidence I was able to infer that none of the police suspects could have committed the crime. By eliminating them one by one from our enquiry we proved that either there was a suspect missing from the list or the crime could not have been committed. But the poor chap had clearly been murdered and someone must have done it. Our detective friend Jones made an assumption and didn't want to change it. How often over the years have I said to you, old friend, that when you have eliminated the impossible what remains, however improbable, must be the truth?"

'True enough, Holmes. You've said it many times. Said it at the time if I remember right. Police were dumbfounded. All quite obvious to us of course.'

Holmes takes a few moments to tamp down his tobacco and puff it back into life.

'Quite so, Watson. Quite so. They had all the suspects under lock and key. All that remained was to prove which one was the culprit. Elementary mistake. I expect this is what your philosopher chap is talking about when he says there is an ingredient missing from all his explanations.'

'Well, yes, no doubt you're right, Holmes. Usually are. Don't know how you do it. Damn tricky business. Couldn't follow the whole thing myself. Why don't you read it?'

He starts to fold the paper. Holmes makes no move to take it.

"Does your philosopher say how many ingredients there ought to be in his explanation?"

"No. Just says there's one missing. "

"Well, he just hasn't looked everywhere. No doubt it will turn up. Our scientists have only recently turned their attention to human consciousness. No doubt a century from now his missing ingredient problem will seem trivial."

'But that's the thing, Holmes. He says the ingredient will never turn up. Something to do with metaphysics.'

"Ah, that accursed game of chess with the devil. But never turn up? This seems unlikely. Which are the ingredients that are not missing?"

"I can't answer all these questions, Holmes, you must read it yourself. He talks a lot about mind and matter, so perhaps it's them." Watson opens his paper and scans the page. "Quotes a fellow called Chalmers somewhere. Yes, here it is."

We have seen that there are systematic reasons why the usual methods of cognitive science and neuroscience fail to account for consciousness experience. These are simply the wrong sort of methods: nothing that they give to us can yield an explanation. To account for conscious experience, we need an *extra ingredient* in the explanation. This makes for a challenge to those who are serious about the hard problem of consciousness: What is your extra ingredient, and why should that account for conscious experience?

Holmes rises from his chair and walks to the window. Clapping his hands behind him he stands observing the people passing in the street below. The middle aged man, not wealthy but secure enough on a major's pension. The girl, a maid on an errand. A young couple holding hands, out for some air, married a few months. The older couple with their smart children walking over to spend the afternoon with relatives. The occasional cab clatters past. With the weather turning colder the street, the city, is a quiet as it has been for many months. He returns to the fire, gives it a few pokes with the poker to cheer it up and settles back into his armchair.

"You know, old friend, your article interests me. Philosophy is an impractical activity. Still, if our criminals have lost their imagination and we have no private clients in immediate need of our services then we must somehow pass the time. Why don't you read me some more of it."

"Can you not read it yourself, Holmes? I can't read you the whole thing from beginning to end. It's too long, and I shan't know which bits you want to hear and which bits you don't. Haven't finished it myself yet."

"No, Watson, if you don't mind I'd prefer to sit and listen. Start where you like. Choose whichever passage you care to. We will see what this fellow's problem is about, and whether it is worthy of our attention."

"I hardly think that even you, Holmes, given your neglect of philosophy, would be able to solve a philosophical problem that according to the experts nobody can solve. Damn it man, this is the Times. They wouldn't have published the article if the chap didn't know what he was talking about."

"I am disinclined to think that the problem cannot be solved, Watson. And philosophy is not about expertise. It is about thinking clearly and methodically. This I feel capable of doing, as you know. As for your expert, he has a problem that he cannot solve. In this case we can be no worse at solving it than he is. If he is an expert, and if he knows what he is talking about, then this problem is not a trivial one, and it may even present a challenge. Perhaps it is a problem that can only be solved by Holmes and Watson. It wouldn't be the first."

"I say, old chap, I see what you mean. Like beating the police at their own game, eh."

"In a way, yes. But the situation is not quite equivalent. The game of philosophy is not owned by anyone. On the contrary, it is a game we can all hardly avoid playing. We can only play it more or less enthusiastically. Why don't you read the passage that first made you think I'd be interested in this

problem. Where precisely did it first occur to you that I might want to read the article."

"Well, yes, that's it. There was a place. About half-way through. Struck me straight away."

Watson straightens the paper and searches for the passage. "Lost it now. Quotes another philosopher talking about the same thing."

"Take your time, old chap. Shall I ask Mrs. Hudson to bring up a fresh pot of tea?"

"Jolly good idea. I shall have a cigar. Ah, here it is. Now where's the name. Oh yes, Colin McGinn."

Maybe the reason we are having so much trouble solving the mind-body problem is that reality contains an ingredient that we cannot know. We have only a very partial grip on both mind and brain, but if we could remedy this ignorance the solution to the problem would be immediate and uncontroversial. It's like one of those detective stories in which the detective has only limited information and cannot for the life of him see how to solve the mystery - the crime looks quite impossible to explain in his current state of information - but then he lights upon the crucial missing clue and everything falls into place. But with the case of the mind-body problem, I surmised, the clue is not *going* to come to light, which explains why we have been mystified by it for centuries. It *might* come to light, I thought, but it would have to be very different from anything considered so far; it would certainly not be some minor tinkering with one of the theories currently around. And in my bones I felt that there was some deep-seated obstacle in our intellectual makeup that prevents us from understanding the missing clue.

Watson lowers the paper and looks up. Holmes has been listening with eyes closed but now opens them. Elbows resting on the arms of the chair, he brings his fingertips together.

"There are points about this case that promise to make it a fascinating one, Watson. Well done for spotting it." He is silent for a moment, tapping his fingers, reviewing the facts. He continues more slowly.

"As you would expect, I would be very unwilling to accept that there is a deep-seated obstacle in my intellectual makeup. Nevertheless, I cannot counter this charge unless and until I have found McGinn's crucial missing clue. This is indeed a challenge." Holmes continues to tap his fingers together but says no more.

"What about that tea, Holmes?"

"Ah, yes. Quite so. Must get our priorities right." He pulls himself out of his armchair. "But once we have the tea poured and your cigar lit we must continue. Our intellect has been disparaged in print and we must set about defending it. We must see whether this McGinn chap's 'feeling in his bones' is anything more than that."

"What about some biscuits?"

Holmes bows ceremoniously, elegant in old blue dressing-gown over pyjamas and slippers.

"I shall see to it immediately." He starts for the door. Watson stands and stretches.

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## Episode II

### *Some Facts Examined*

Half an hour later Mrs Hudson has delivered tea and biscuits and seen to the fire. Holmes and Watson are resettled in their armchairs, one clipping a cigar and the other sipping tea. Holmes lowers his cup to its saucer.

"Now, Watson, where were we? It is a strange affair. We have a missing ingredient in our theories of mind and matter, a missing clue that is not going to come to light, a crime that looks quite impossible to explain, a problem that has mystified us for centuries, and a deep-seated obstacle in our intellectual makeup. We must consider where it would be best to start."

"You should read the article."

"And why should I do this?"

"Because it explains what the problem is and why it cannot be solved."

"But my dear chap, the problem could not be more clear. For a complete mind-matter theory a third ingredient is required, or, at least, a new idea which would have to be very different from anything considered so far, certainly not some minor tinkering with one of the theories currently around. We cannot argue with the professors."

"But you can't be sure of that, Holmes. Perhaps these fellows have made a mistake. You might be able to prove that another ingredient is not required, or that some minor tinkering would do the trick after all. It's not like you to put so much trust in someone else's reasoning."

"An excellent point, Watson, and I have considered it. But in this instance I think it highly unlikely that a mistake has been made. No, we must take the experts at their word. If there were even a slight chance that some other solution to this problem might be found, a solution requiring neither an extra ingredient nor a radical new idea, then these philosophers would not be suggesting otherwise in print. It would be to offer too great a hostage to fortune. If tomorrow one of their students stumbled across a different solution they would be made to look foolish, and competent

philosophers do not take such risks. No, these chaps are confident that nobody can refute their suggestions. If they say there is no solution for this mind-matter problem other than to suppose there is an ingredient missing from our theories or the need for a radical new idea, and presumably both, then we must assume that this is one of the facts of the case."

Anticipating the next question Watson looks back to the paper.

"I'm not sure what the author means by mind. I suppose he means whatever we think with."

"Possibly. We shall see. I'm more concerned at the moment with what he means by consciousness."

"Ah, that's an easy one. He says it is what it is like."

"Like what?"

"No, it's not like anything. He says that what it is like *is* what it is."

"Surely he means that what it is like is *like* what it is."

"Er, well no, I'm quite sure he says what it is like is the same as what it is, and that what it is simply is what it is like."

"My dear fellow, a sausage is what it is like. Everything is what it is like as far as you and I will ever know. How could it be otherwise? We might as well say that what it is like is what it is like, or that what it is is whatever it is. A useful definition needs to do more than restate Aristotle's law of identity."

"Don't blame me, Holmes. It's not my definition."

"Quite so. My apologies. So, consciousness is what consciousness is like?"

"Yes. No. Well, it was something like that."

"But you've only just read it, Watson, you can hardly have forgotten already."

"Well, no. Now you're confusing me. He says that consciousness is what it is like to have an experience. In fact I think he says that consciousness *is* experience."

"Ah, that is slightly more clear." Holmes considers for a moment. "Or perhaps not. It is a most ingenious definition, I must say. But it hardly seems sufficient for a scientific theory. And he says that it is the existence of this 'what it is like' that we cannot explain?"

"That seems to be it, yes."

"Well now, I can see that consciousness is something of a very different kind to matter, and cannot be explained as a physical thing. I wonder why he avoids concluding that there is a third category of phenomenon that is not mind or matter, and that this is what is missing."

"Can't be that simple old chap."

"Presumably not. But then, we cannot start by presuming anything. The difficulty of a problem is a poor guide to the complexity of its solution, and often it is quite the reverse, so we cannot rule out a solution because it is simple. At any rate, we must remember to return to this idea later and

examine why these philosophers dismiss it. Well, we have the essential facts. Now we must take a little time to put them in order."

"My dear Holmes!" Watson starts to object but Holmes raises his hand.

"Yes, Watson, there are, no doubt, many more facts to be considered. Nevertheless, we have as many as we can manage for now."

"Hardly seems a fact in sight to me, old chap. All hypothesis and conjecture. Nothing like evidence to go on."

"A lack of evidence is not our problem, Watson, far from it. The principle difficulty for philosophical problems is usually that there is far too much evidence. What is vital is often overlaid and hidden by what is irrelevant, and it is no simple matter to decide which is which. No, in philosophy we must, as far as possible, build theories from as little evidence as possible, albeit that it should be of the highest quality."

"Surely not, Holmes. How many times have you told me that we should do no such thing? Time and again you've said we must fully acquaint ourselves with all of the available evidence before we start to construct theories."

"Quite right, Watson, quite right, and I have not changed my mind. Nevertheless, to construct a cosmological theory all we would need to acquaint ourselves with is one piece of evidence, for we can infer all the principle facts about the universe from this, or all that it would be possible to infer."

"Holmes, that is a ridiculous statement."

"How so?"

"You mean to say that you could deduce the explanation of the universe from any single fact, whatever it is?"

"This I do not know. The evidence indicates that it would not be possible to infer the entire explanation of the universe from one or even a great many facts. It certainly cannot be an easy thing to do or else your two philosophers would not be speaking of missing ingredients and ancient mysteries, and there would be such a thing as progress in our theology and metaphysics. But as far as it is possible to do so, then any single fact would do for a starting place, and ideally we would use no more than this."

"But this can't be right, Holmes. Surely with more facts to go on we would, well, we'd have more facts to go on."

"One would think so, Watson, and in a way it is true. As we build our theory we must continually test it against the evidence to ensure that it remains on the right track, and for this the more evidence the better. But the ideal philosophical theory would be derived from a single fact. It is much the safest way to proceed. Have you not read Descartes? I have him here somewhere." Holmes pulls himself out of his chair and walks to a cabinet in the corner. "I think it may be rule number nine of his *Rules for the Direction of Mind* that I'm after, if I remember correctly. Here he is." Taking a book



from the shelf Holmes returns to his chair and searches for the relevant page. "Yes, here we are. He says this about facts. I have no doubt it is good advice."

We ought to give the whole of our attention to the most insignificant and most easily mastered facts, and remain a long time in contemplation of them until we are accustomed to behold the truth clearly and distinctly.

"Sounds like something you might have said yourself, Holmes."

"I would certainly concur."

"But he doesn't say that we should start with just one fact."

"No, but the implication is clear. If we are to give the whole of our attention to the most easily mastered facts and remain a long time in contemplation of them, then the fewer the better."

"Is this the chap who said he thinks therefore he is?"

"That's him, yes.. Taking *cogito* to be a fact he attempts to construct a grand philosophical theory, just as one might grow an oak from an acorn. His project fails in the execution but the plan is sound. When we are called in to assist in a criminal investigation we can usually take it for granted that the crime has been committed. This is the singular fact that must be explained. Given this singular fact, we proceed to gather whatever evidence may be available to us and derive from this an explanation of how it came to be a fact. In philosophy, however, life is not so simple. Here we must first establish that a crime has been committed, and then exactly what kind of crime it is. Descartes chose *cogito* as his crime, we might say, the fact that he had to explain, because it seemed clear to him that this crime had definitely been committed. It seemed to him to be an undeniable fact from which it would be safe to extrapolate to an explanation of an extended universe containing beings capable of thinking they exist. Or, as your fellow in the paper might say, of 'knowing what it is like to think they exist.' "

Holmes returns his gaze to the fire and puffs lazily on his old briar pipe.

"I'm not following you, Holmes. You seem to be saying that one fact is as good as another as a starting point for a cosmological theory, which doesn't seem very likely to me, and I thought you didn't take much interest in philosophy, yet here you are giving me a lecture."

"Forgive me, Watson, I was thinking out loud. And yes, it is true that I have not devoted much time to philosophical matters. Indeed, I recall that soon after we met you assessed my knowledge of philosophy at nil. Yet I am not ignorant of the main issues."

"I must apologise again, Holmes. Hoped you'd forgotten."

"Quite alright, old fellow. But you might have surmised at the time that my methods of deduction could hardly have been developed without

reference to Aristotle, and I discuss the matter presently at hand in the first of my published articles, which you did me the honour of reading."

"You did? I did? Surely not."

"Do you not recall 'The Book of Life?'"

"The title is familiar."

"In it I said that from a drop of water a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other, and that all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it."

"Ah. I do remember you saying something like that."

"You were sceptical at the time but perhaps you have changed your mind since. I am now only reiterating the same point. The ideal reasoner, once he or she has been shown a single fact in all its bearings, would deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it, but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after."

"Well, I have certainly learnt, thanks to you Holmes, that with imagination a great deal may sometimes be deduced from a single piece of evidence. But this is not the same as saying that everything we might learn about the universe we could learn from *any* single piece of evidence."

"This is not what I'm suggesting. We cannot learn how the stock market is faring from the examination of a drop of water. But if we are after metaphysical truths, as are your chaps in the paper, then a drop of water is as good a place to start as any."

"I don't get this, Holmes. Descartes' approach I can understand. But a drop of water?"

"Choose any fact you like then, and we shall see what can be done with it."

Watson rests his cigar in the ashtray and picks up his tea. He sips while he thinks.

"Alright then. I will choose the fact that my shoes are a little tight."

"Oh, very good Watson, very good. Well now. Do you think of this as a fact?"

"Without a doubt."

"Then you think. If you were Descartes you would immediately conclude you exist and proceed accordingly. Do you see? From the fact that you think that your shoes are too tight the rest of his philosophical scheme follows. Or, at least, it would if his reasoning is correct."

"Ah, Holmes, yes, but you said his attempt to deduce everything from *cogito* fails. Why would your attempt to do so from the tightness of my shoes not also fail?"

"I dare say it would, Watson. My point is only that it would be just as likely to succeed as Descartes' attempt. We see from this silliness about shoes the general principle. Even the most trivial fact allows one to infer *cogito*. No doubt this is why Descartes chose it as an axiom."

Watson takes some time to respond.

"Alright. I suppose I must grant you that anything I consider a fact is a thought, and so would imply *cogito*. But now you say that your attempt to deduce everything from this fact I gave you may fail. If so, then you have not made much of it. Yet you said it ought to be possible to deduce all the significant facts about the universe from the tightness of my shoes."

"Not quite, Watson, not quite. I said that one fact would be as good as another, which is not to say that any of them would be good enough. Besides, I do not accept the tightness of your shoes as a fact."

"But I'm not making it up, Holmes. They are too tight. Damned uncomfortable."

"So you say, Watson, so you say. However, I do not know what it is like to be you, so this is not a fact for me. It is just your report of what it is like to be in your shoes."

"I say, Holmes, that's just what this fellow says. Says we can never know about other people's experiences, or even know that they have any. Calls it the 'other minds' problem. Talks about how hard it would be to imagine what it's like to be a bat."

"Indeed. Yes. Or a ball."

"What? Oh very good. No, the flying kind."

"Or a human being."

"What?"

"No doubt it would be impossible to imagine what it is like to be a bat, although we might deduce a little from a study of its behaviour and sensory apparatus. But it strikes me that it may be no easier to imagine what it is like to be a human being."

"Doesn't seem very difficult to me, old chap."

"Are you quite sure, Watson? I wonder. Let us try an experiment. Close your eyes for a moment." Watson complies. "Now, do your best to imagine what it would be like to be a human being."

Watson re-opens his eyes.

"Humour me, Watson. Just try."

Watson closes his eyes. Thirty seconds pass.

'Do you see what I mean?' asks Holmes.

"I certainly do." Watson replies in a puzzled tone, eyes still closed. "I don't seem to be able to imagine how to even go about it."

"Now, try to imagine what it would be like to be bat."

Watson closes his eyes again. "Ah, that's a lot easier. No, wait a minute, this can't be right."

Watson opens his eyes. "How odd. It's impossible to imagine what it's like to be either me or a bat. But wait a minute. I can imagine what it would be like to be some other human being than me. If this were not so then I'd be unable to empathise with human beings any better than bats."

"It does seem that way, yes. Perhaps you are right. Why not give it a try. Think of someone you know and imagine what it would be like to be them."

Watson closes his eyes.

"Alright," he replies a minute later, eyes still closed. "I have some idea of what it would be like."

"No doubt you have a good idea of what it is like to be imagining what it is like to be them, Watson, but how can you ever know that your idea of what it is like to be them is even roughly correct?"

"Because I can roughly imagine what ... ah. You have me again Holmes. I have no means of confirming that my rough idea is even slightly correct. It could be wildly incorrect for all I'll ever know." He opens his eyes. "Good gracious, Holmes, perhaps what it is like to be a human being is wildly different for each of us, more different than we can even imagine."

"That may be so, Watson. It seems likely, although we can only speculate. Perhaps you are the only human being who has experiences. It does seem most likely that what it is like to be a human being is at least roughly similar for all of us, but even so, it may be roughly similar in some ways and unimaginably different in others. God alone could know what it is like to be a plurality of beings, and thus what our experiences as individuals do and do not have in common."

"Let's not bring God into it, Holmes."

"You consider Him irrelevant to a Sunday morning discussion of human consciousness?"

"Well, no, I suppose not. Of course not. But religion is not a matter of deduction."

"On the contrary, Watson, there is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion. It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner."

"Well, honestly Holmes! I don't know what's come over you this morning, I've never heard you say such a thing before."

"I think you'll find that you have, my friend, for I happen to remember when I said it."

"When was that?"

"I was leaning against the shutters of a bedroom window, examining it for scratches."

"I have no memory of it."

"Do you not remember the case? The stolen naval treaty?"

"I certainly remember the case. Oh yes, and now I do remember you saying something like it. You were admiring a rose by the window in the

bedroom. I thought you were talking any old nonsense in order to disguise your actions."

"I am not so dim-witted that I must talk any old nonsense in order to disguise my actions, Watson, as you well know. It is true that I allowed a part of my mind to wander from the issue at hand. It was necessary to engage the audience in order to distract it. My mind wandered to the beauty of the rose by the window, and to the promise that such beauty holds for our hopes of God were we to extrapolate from it to a theory of the universe. A drop of water, uncomfortable shoes, the beauty of a rose, a cosmology can be inferred from any observation, fact, perception, axiom or item of evidence. As for religion, would you not agree that we would be foolhardy to adopt a religious belief, even if it is atheism, without first examining the issues with the full force of our intellect?"

"I would certainly agree, yes."

"I had no doubt you would, Watson. To say that religion is not a matter of deduction is to say we are prepared to believe whatever happens to be agreeable to us, regardless of its truth or even whether it makes sense to us. Of course, this is not to say that our deductions can ever prove that there is such a thing as God, a soul, an afterlife and suchlike, but we must at least attempt to distinguish between what seems quite likely to be true and what seems utterly improbable. The beauty of a rose seems to me to affect the probabilities for the existence of some sort of God, though I doubt it could settle the matter."

Watson finishes his tea and crosses the room to pour himself another. Returning to his chair he lights a second cigar. Once lit, he reviews the discussion.

"I must say, Holmes, I feel quite unsettled by our experiments. I've begun to wonder whether my shoes really are too tight or whether I'm only imagining it. Still, at least we have proved that I'm not imagining being me, for I cannot do it even if I try. I see why Descartes chose *cogito* as his single fact. He could not be imagining he was thinking, and therefore he must exist."

"Ah, if only philosophy were that simple, Watson. We have certainly not proved that you are not imagining being you."

"But I can't imagine being me. I've tried to do it and I cannot."

"I wonder if that is really true. These are matters of considerable subtlety and we can take nothing for granted. Close your eyes again for a moment, and for this experiment try to imagine that you are only imagining being a human being."

Watson is silent for a minute or two.

"This is most confusing, Holmes," he eventually reports, eyes still closed, "I'm not sure whether I'm imagining it or not."

"Now, Watson, you see the gravity of Descartes' problem. His deductive method is sound in principle, but ineffective if the chosen starting

point is a doubtful fact, and worse than useless if it is not a fact at all. Yet it is surprisingly difficult to find a fact that cannot be doubted. For philosophers it is one of the most difficult of all tasks. For myself, I do not believe Descartes succeeded in finding one, and as a consequence his project was foredoomed."

"But this is ridiculous, Holmes. Is it not a fact that I think?"

"This you must determine for yourself, old friend, I cannot do it for you."

Watson settles back into his chair and closes his eyes. Holmes ponders the issues while nibbling one of Mrs. Hudson's home-made biscuits. After a few minutes he continues.

"It seems to me our discussion has at least thrown some light on the curious definition of consciousness favoured by your two writers."

Watson opens his eyes.

"It has?"

"It leads me to the idea that the thing that thinks cannot be a thought. Or, to put it another way, and less than grammatically, if there is something 'that it is like' to have a mind, then 'what it is like' is not the same thing as mind. These must be two phenomena, in appearance at least, our mind and whatever is that is aware of what our mind is like. To make them one phenomena we would have to say that 'what it is like' *is* the mind, that minds do not have owners."

"And why not say just that."

"At this point, Watson, I do not know. It seems a vital issue. Yet it is clear that your two philosophers do not want to do this, for if they did then only two basic ingredients would be required for a fundamental mind-matter theory. There would be no mysterious missing ingredient. At the same time, they do not conclude that 'what it is like' is wholly distinct from mind, for this would give them their missing third ingredient. No, we must assume that there is a good reason for their reluctance to commit themselves to one view or the other. It seems that 'what it is like' must either be identical with mind or different, and yet your philosophers find neither idea satisfactory. At the same time, if we eliminate these two possibilities we seem to face a paradox. Perhaps this should be our first task, Watson, to determine whether 'what it is like' is or is not the same phenomenon as mind."

"How on earth are we going to do that?"

"I fear it will take a little more time than remains before lunch, Watson, but I shall see what I can do. Why don't you finish reading the article while I consider the problem."

"Perhaps we could take a walk later and continue our discussion."

"Ah, Watson, you and your dratted fresh air. But perhaps we should. Some exercise would not go amiss."

"Despite what you have said, Holmes, I still don't see how we can hope to solve the mystery with so few facts before us."

"I have enough for now."

"You see some clues then?"

"You have furnished me with seven, but I must test them before I can pronounce on their value."

"You suspect there is a solution?"

"I suspect myself - "

"What?"

"Of coming to conclusions too rapidly."

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### Episode III

#### *A Walk in the Park*

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said Holmes, "which makes you an invaluable companion."

They had walked briskly through the cold, quiet streets to St. James's Park, and having warmed up now strolled at a more leisurely pace through the fallen leaves of the great elms that lined the southern promenade.

"Well, I suppose that is something."

"It is a great deal, Watson. Perhaps more than you know. Have you given further thought to our problem?"

"I can't make head or tail of it. There seems to be no piece of evidence that might not be doubted, in which case there is nowhere to begin."

"And yet we must begin, Watson, and we must do much more than that. If we cannot solve this problem then we cannot rebut the charge laid at my door by your fellow in the Times, who predicts that an obstacle in my intellectual make-up will prevent me from ever doing so."

Watson shakes his head in wonderment.

"It is surely only you, Holmes, alone among all men, who would see in this speculation a personal affront."

"That may be so, Watson, but I rather doubt it. By implication the charge is levelled against all men equally.

"No doubt. But I don't suppose many of them would feel so offended as to attempt to refute it personally. To me it seems more reasonable to assume that if it is beyond the abilities of professors of philosophy to overcome this mysterious obstacle then there wouldn't be much point in me trying. Whole thing is far too confusing."

"Such an assumption may well appear reasonable, Watson, or not, as the case may be, but it remains an assumption either way. If we took this attitude whenever we were consulted by a client with a problematic case then where would we be? We would be of little use to them if we began by assuming that because they cannot solve the problem, nor can we."

Watson claps his gloved hands together to warm his fingers.

"Well, if you put it like that, Holmes, I suppose you're right. But is it not true that more often than not in our investigations we depend as much on your ability to uncover fresh evidence as on your painstaking methods of deduction? What if there is no more evidence to be found than has already been found and is already available to everyone. This lessens the likelihood of your succeeding where so many have failed."

"A good point, Watson. I think it more than likely that this is the case regarding the evidence. At any rate, I must admit to being temporarily at a loss as to where any fresh evidence might be sought. Here we seem to have one of those cases where the art of the reasoner must be used rather for the sifting of the essential data than for the acquiring of fresh evidence. The problem is so uncommon, so complete, and of such personal importance to so many, that the outcome can only be a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis. This muddies the waters. The difficulty in such cases is to detach the framework of facts - of absolute, undeniable facts - from the embellishments of theorists and reporters. Having established ourselves on this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn, and which are the special points upon which the whole mystery turns."

"All the same, Holmes, I still cannot see where your deductions will begin. After playing the guinea pig in your experiments this morning I'm having some difficulty deciding what I do think is a fact and what I don't. How on earth do we know anything at all?"

"We must begin where we always begin, Watson, with the facts as they appear to be. Later, perhaps, we will discover that they are facts only in appearance, or that they are irrelevant facts, or even that there are no certain facts to be found, but we must start from what appear to be the facts. We have no other option. When asked to solve a difficult case we do not usually ask our clients to go away and come back when they are more certain of the facts. It is our first task to discover the facts, and we can only start with the facts as they appear to be.

"Alright, yes, I see all that. But what I mean is that there don't even *appear* to be any facts."

Holmes stops and consults his pocket watch.

"Let us turn for home here, Watson. If we do so now we can stroll along and still be in time for Mrs Hudson's glorious tea and crumpets."

"I certainly shan't object to that. Indeed, I daresay I'd rather walk more briskly and persuade her to make tea a little earlier than usual."

"A capital idea. Let us make haste."



Half an hour later Watson and Holmes are once again settled in their armchairs by the fire. They do not speak for a while. Watson breaks the silence.

"So, Holmes, what are your thoughts? Can the obstacle be overcome?"

Holmes carefully places his cup and saucer on a table at his side and takes up his pipe and tobacco.

"Of that, Watson, I am not yet certain. But I have begun to discern the shape of it, and I see now that almost as soon as we have begun to examine the problem of consciousness we are confronted by this obstacle."

"We are?"

"Consider, Watson, the simplicity of this problem. In virtue of tight shoes, drops of water and suchlike, there is no doubt that material objects appear to exist, and in virtue of the thoughts that we have about these objects there is no doubt that mental objects appear to exist. To whatever extent either of these phenomena are real or illusory, it remains the case that either one gives rise to the other or both arise from something else. Your two philosophers have concluded that they could not have arisen one from the other. Were they not very sure of this they would not be speculating in the Times that we cannot solve this problem without an extra ingredient and talking of metaphysical problems. They conclude that in order to explain mind and matter we would need an extra ingredient. The case is quite clear."

"Why not God, then?"

"Why not indeed. This was my first thought. But during our walk I realised that He is not the only suspect. There is at least one other."

"And this would be ...?"

"Awareness, Watson, or what your philosopher chap calls 'what it is like', the very thing we are trying to explain. You were aware of what it was like to feel discomfort at the tightness of your shoes, but for which you would not have needed to borrow a pair of mine for our walk. This awareness cannot be the same thing as the experience, otherwise you would have become unaware when you took them off. "

Holmes gazes into the fire and follows his thoughts. . .

"Had there not been something that this discomfort was like for you, Watson, then you would not have noticed they were too tight. Yet what is it that noticed? Awareness must precede experience, for experience, or 'what it is like', if it is not identical with awareness, must be contingent. As for the rose we discussed earlier this morning and my remarks about religion, it was not the rose that turned my thoughts to God while I examined the window frame for clues on that summer's day, but my experience of its beauty, for while it seems undeniable that this beauty was in my experience, nonetheless it seems inevitable that its beauty lay only in my eye as the beholder, and not in the rose itself. That we may experience the beauty of the rose despite this therefore seemed suggestive. But I am wandering. It is an odd idea, I must

admit, that it may be the thing we are trying to explain that is what is missing from our explanation, and I cannot say it will not turn out to be a red herring of an idea, but as we noted this morning, if there is a mysterious ingredient missing from our mind-matter theories, in the absence of which we cannot explain experience, then the fundamental condition for experience will be what is missing. Yet immediately, before we have hardly even begun to explore this innocent idea, we meet what is surely at least a temporary obstacle in our make-up, for it is not easy to imagine a phenomenon that is neither mental nor physical, yet which would serve as the condition for experiences, including our experience of our thoughts and even of the tightness of our shoes."

"Some believers say that we cannot imagine God. Perhaps this is not a coincidence."

"The point had not escaped me, Watson, but I would rather refrain from making such bold conjectures quite so early in the investigation. Let us rather follow the facts."

A light knock at the door is followed by the entrance of Mrs. Hudson, but it is not, as expected, for the sake of the tea tray.

"Mr. Holmes, I'm very sorry, but there's a gentleman downstairs says he won't go away without seeing you. I told him this is Sunday and not a day for calling without a by your leave, and at tea time as well, but he takes no notice, and so I must leave it to you to send him on his way. This is his card.

Holmes takes the card and examines it with his customary care.

"It is alright, Mrs. Hudson, perhaps our visitor might provide us with a break from our arduous philosophising. You may scold him and tell him that I will make an unusual exception, and that I require five minutes to become presentable. Please show him up at the end of that time."

Holmes turns back to his friend.

"Quickly, Watson, we must make ourselves ready for visitors."

## Episode IV

### *A Chat on the Terrace*

Much time has elapsed since the Baker Street days. Holmes has retired to his villa in Sussex, set in a lonely spot on the southern slopes of the downs near Fulworth Cove, where for much of the time his company is no more than his housekeeper and his bees. Occasionally, however, his old friend Watson

comes down for the weekend. We catch up with them again on one such visit.

It is a warm Sunday afternoon in late August and they sit together out on the small terrace at the top of Holmes' garden, comfortable from a good lunch and enjoying the commanding view out over the Channel. During lunch they have been discussing old cases, not all of them successful.

Letting his memory wander, Watson remembers an earlier Sunday afternoon discussion. This had been brought to a premature close by the interruption of a new client in need of an immediate consultation, a senior official not unconnected with the French Government, and the unfolding of the extraordinary series of events that led eventually to the final defeat of the master criminal Professor Moriarty, an outcome that although successful had forced Holmes to feign his own death and take refuge abroad for some years. After his return they had both been busy, occasionally in partnership together on a case, but with Watson now a married man with a medical practice to maintain they had spent a lot less time together.

That earlier discussion had faded from Watson's mind well before Holmes had even returned from the dead, but now, looking back with nostalgia to the old days, the memory of that afternoon comes back to him.

"I say, Holmes. Do you remember that conversation we had long ago one Sunday afternoon at Baker Street, about consciousness? There was an article in the Times. Did you ever meet that fellow's challenge to your intellect that so upset you at the time?"

Holmes reaches for his pipe and matches.

"I do, Watson. I do. Quite well as it happens. I rather thought you'd forgotten it."

"Well, I had until now. I wonder if this would count as one of your unsolved cases."

Holmes does not reply immediately. Then he smiles slightly.

"I wonder the same thing, Watson. It is difficult to be sure."

"To be sure it was a case, you mean?"

"Oh yes. It was undoubtedly a case."

"Well, surely either it would count as unsolved or it wouldn't."

"One would think so, yes. The problem here is that while a philosophical investigation may be similar to a criminal investigation in many respects, remarkably so at times, in philosophy one does not have the benefit of a judge and jury to make the final impartial judgement as to its success or failure. We must be our own judge and jury. This leaves us open to errors, especially those that may have been caused by our biases and temperament. It would be possible to imagine that we have succeeded where we have not. In cases where our results seem too implausible to be true it may even be possible to imagine that we have failed where we have not. Perhaps, despite my admiration for his methods, and with the hope that I do not do him an injustice, our old friend Descartes might be counted

an example of the first mistake. Given the clamour of opinion in the philosophical community we must assume it is an easy one to make. The second may not be much more avoidable. These are errors to which I am not usually prone, Watson, as you know, but I cannot quite be sure that I am incapable of making them. Greater certainty is required for a philosophical conclusion than for a criminal conviction."

"Have you thought about the problem further, then, in the meantime?"

Holmes does not answer for a moment. Then he stands.

"I will replenish my tobacco supply, Watson, and bring you something to drink, as any good host would have long ago done, and then recount to you the details of the case as far as I can understand them."

Holmes turns and heads for the French windows, in his later years still lean and upright and not without all his old agility. Watson settles back and looks out to sea, drowsy in the gentle sunshine, a picture of contentment.

He wakes with a start.

"As you may remember, Watson, the course of events in London did not run as well as I had hoped, for the trial of the Moriarty gang left two of its most dangerous, my own most vindictive enemies, at liberty. I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Lama. I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Kartoum."

Watson pours himself a glass of lime cordial from the pitcher Holmes has placed on the low wrought iron table between them.

"I remember you telling me, Holmes. I can hardly imagine what adventures you must have had travelling the world alone in this fashion, and in such exotic places."

"Some adventures I am even now not yet free to divulge, Watson, no more than before. My coming and goings during the siege at Khartoum, perhaps the most daunting of my modest brushes with danger, cannot be recounted even now for fear of damaged reputations and revelations of incompetence. But on the topic of which we speak I can be quite open. What I cannot do, I regret, is tell you is that I understand all that transpired. All I can do is say that I understand it well enough to have some confidence that the case can be solved and have some idea of where its solution would lie, even if I would not want to call this more than a strong suspicion. I will try to be brief, although the story is a long one.

When I arrived in Lhasa I found myself quite unknown, for your dramatized accounts of our adventures generate nothing to support your pension in that land. Nevertheless, I was treated with great courtesy. I could not, as a visiting Westerner, fail to become the subject of much curiosity. I had acquired an informal knowledge of the culture and lifestyle on my

previous travels, but on arriving in Lhasa I settled down to undertake a more serious investigation. My previous studies of Chaldean had helped me to understand the rules of the local language, but I had at all times to rely an interpreter, usually my trusty guide Tenzig.

I found Tibet a most fascinating study from the start. Once my interest became known locally, and was seen to be that of a curious academic and not a military investigator, I found no difficulty in meeting local scholars happy to share a knowledge of our respective societies, our habits of life and ways of thought. It quickly became apparent that to understand Tibetan culture it would be necessary to acquire a quite thorough understanding of its religious tradition, for it is a country in which religion invests itself in the everyday affairs of its peoples to an extent our European societies have not experienced for many centuries if ever. It may amaze you to learn, Watson, that in that land of snow, ice and towering mountains, somewhere around forty percent of young men become monks."

"Good Heavens, Holmes. I hardly know what to say. Surely this cannot be the case. It is a remarkable statistic."

"The figure is an estimate, given to me by my guide and translator, but even with a large margin of error it is astonishing. More astonishing is the regular propensity of the monks to wander off to live alone in the thin air and bitter cold of the high mountain passes, sometimes for years, sometimes for the rest of their lives, in pursuit of their goals. Few of us could lead such a life for a weekend. I mention all of this, Watson, because it has a bearing on the case at hand."

"No need to apologise, old chap, I find it all fascinating."

"I had only been in Lhasa a short time before I received an invitation from the head Lama to visit him at his Palace. I did not accept it."

Holmes reaches for the pitcher.

"You did not accept it? Why would you turn it down?"

"Because, Watson, I am a detective. I had seen that if I was ever to understand the life and society of this strange and little studied land I would need to thoroughly investigate its religion. In such an investigation the leader of this religion would normally be my first choice of interviewee. I saw, however, that in this case, due to his status, I may be awarded only one chance to speak with this man. I did not want to waste this chance by asking questions any tourist might ask. I wanted to ask questions that a detective might ask. For this I needed more time to prepare. I explained this briefly to the head Lama's messenger, hoping that my translator would ensure that my words would seem polite and respectful, and asked if our meeting could be delayed. Two hours later the same messenger returned to say that the Lama respected my decision and that I should call on him at my convenience, but at least once before I left the city."

"Good Heavens, Holmes, this is a land of surprises."

"You do not know the half of it, Watson, although your knowledge of India will give you at least a flavour of the place."

Watson looks pensive.

"I regret that I did not make more effort to learn about Indian culture and history, now that I look back on those army years. I suppose it is important that visiting soldiers, even military doctors, do not become fascinated by the better features of the society of their unwilling hosts, and such a fascination was not encouraged, even frowned upon by many."

"Just so, Watson, just so. We cannot admire too greatly what we are supposed to destroy on the basis of its inferiority. Fortunately, my hosts were not unwilling. Just as soon as I told my guide and interpreter that I wished to understand his religion more thoroughly he arranged that I meet with his teacher. This I duly did. His teacher was a middle-aged monk widely known, my guide enthusiastically reported, for his insight and clarity of speech.

At another time I will recount the details of this meeting, as I remember them, but suffice it to say for now that I came away from it in more confusion than I am used to experiencing. I was clear on only two things. First, that I was investigating a religion quite unlike anything found in our culture, and second, that I should not underestimate its teachers."

"I am not sure I have heard you admit to confusion before, Holmes, only to find it in others."

"I accept your rebuke, Watson, no doubt it is deserved."

"No, no. Not a rebuke. It was an observation clumsily put."

"But a fair rebuke, my friend, nonetheless."

"I feel it is accurate, and unfair only if taken as criticism. You are not often confused."

"Thank you for your dissembling, Watson,. Let us continue with the account of the case, for you must be wondering why I am telling you all this.

I spoke with my translator's teacher for three hours. Apparently the head Lama, who is known as the 'Dalai' Lama for his reputedly vast knowledge as a religious teacher, had already informed him of my interest and requested that he give me whatever time he may have available should I call on him. This message had been sent to a number of scholarly monks in the city. It was to make my research very much easier than it might otherwise have been."

"Remarkable hospitality, Holmes. I suppose they hoped to convert you."

"So I speculated, Watson, at the start. Later events were to prove this an unsatisfactory explanation. At any rate, it allowed me some productive days of discussion, at the end of which time I decided that the moment had arrived to accept the invitation of the head Lama.

His palace is a most unusual building by our standards, with, so it is said, over a thousand rooms. Nobody seems to know the exact figure. I was

to visit it four time, and each time came away impressed by my host's capacity as a thinker and scholar, greatly affected by his demeanour and charisma, and yet, in respect of the topic under investigation, the religion of which he is the senior representative, quite bewildered by his words."

Watson stirs as if to speak, but Holmes raises his hand.

"Yes, Watson, bewildered. I make no apology for it. It was after our second discussion, as I walked home with my guide, that it occurred to me that this bewilderment may be connected with the remarks made by that chap in the Times we had discussed almost two years earlier at Baker Street, for they suddenly came back to me. It crossed my mind that my bewilderment might not be unconnected with the obstacle in my intellectual make-up of which he had accused me."

"Honestly, Holmes, you are worse than a dog with a bone."

"Thank you, Watson. A detective can do no better than be worse than a dog with a bone."

"Well, no. I suppose not. But an attempt to connect this purported intellectual obstacle with your bewilderment in Tibet seems a bit desperate."

"Not at all, Watson. It is only by making connections that we can make sense of the world. In this case it seemed quite likely that there was a connection between the philosophical problem of consciousness, as it appears in our academic philosophy, and the difficulty of understanding a religion that is all about consciousness."

"Is it all about consciousness?"

"Such was my conclusion, Watson, at the end of the various discussions that prepared me for my visits to the palace, and it was reinforced during those visits."

"Remarkable."

"Yes."

Homes steepled his fingers under his chin and for a moment is far away in his own thoughts. Watson does not interrupt.

"I cannot recount those conversations in any detail, Watson, for really we would have to be here for a week. Let me say this. I left Tibet soon after my fourth meeting with the Dalai Lama, and although I was to learn more as I travelled across this extraordinary and beautiful land, I knew already that my views on a number of profound questions had been irrevocably changed. Most of the story must wait for another day, Watson, for we must stick to the case in hand."

"As you wish, Holmes. The question is, did you solve it?"

"This I cannot claim. Certainly not. Yet I do see now that it could have a solution, and that there does appear to be an intellectual obstacle preventing us from easily understanding that this solution is possible. At any rate, this was the substance of what I took away from my discussions with the Dalai Lama and the other monks. I must congratulate you for bringing the entire topic to my attention, Watson, for consciousness presents a

unique and fascinating challenge. It is a case for which we must, all at the same time, be the client and the consulting detective, the victim and the perpetrator of the crime, the only evidence that there was a crime and the only person who can see it."

They sit silently for a time. Eventually Watson stirs.

"I cannot follow you on all this, Holmes, and I daresay you won't be surprised to hear it. I wish I could. It is a case that seems a little more urgent than it did back in the Baker Street days."

Holmes laughs and settles back more comfortably in his chair.

"Indeed, my old friend, so it does."

For a while they sit silently looking out across the bay, enjoying the play of sunlight on the water, lost in their thoughts. The conversation then turns to other things. We do not know whether they were ever to speak again about this case, and no record of a further discussion survives.

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