

Friends and fellow travelers, Happy New Year! Hope you all had a great holiday break and wish you the very best in the coming year. In the month since the last random thoughts email I visited San Diego for the joint mathematics meetings and presented a paper (such as it was) for the first time in a while. We also enjoyed taking part in the inauguration, albeit from afar, and then watched the rest of it at home.

It is a pleasure to be able to write to you and I hope to hear from you about goings on in your life. In this, another brief RT, I write about physics and spirituality, science and religion, the movie "Barbara" (about life under communism) and also about my struggle to stay mindful amid everyday life.

Yours, Sankar

Random Thoughts (92)

1/28/2013

1. (12/25) I was reading David Tong's prize winning essay in Scientific American on the question of "Is the universe analog or digital?" (or discrete/continuous?). This is a question scientists have been arguing about for centuries, starting with the question of whether light consists of waves or particles. He argues that the universe is continuous as opposed to discrete. Whatever discreteness exists, such as the quantum nature of light, the particles, etc., are outputs from equations over continuous variables. For instance lot of things in physics consists of fields --electromagnetic fields, nuclear fields, etc., -- and particles can be thought of as ripples in the fabric of these fields. It is an amazing thought. We all are, when you get down to the atomic level, nothing but ripples in a field. At any given moment, our whole existence, this entire universe, is but a temporary wave-like manifestation on the ocean of space-time. That is very close to what a lot of spiritual teachers have been saying.

2. (12/28, Poem)

Winter Rose

A solitary rose along the sidewalk
On a nondescript street
A single, glorious pink beauty
on a bare bush devoid of leaves
Only blackened remains of past buds
on the ragged, thorny branches.

Like an artist or a good man
having produced many a flower
Now summoning all his energy
for one final, sublime offering
To the world.

3. (1/3) I have been trying to decipher Chris Christie's actions over the past few months. His glowing praise for Obama after hurricane Sandy and now his vociferous attack on House Republicans, especially Boehner, for failing to provide timely relief. Perhaps it is all spur of the moment, simply circumstantial. But it is also possible there is a grand strategy. I am still not sure he will run for President in 2016 and even if he does I am not sure how viable he would be. But if that is what he is shooting for, then here is a possible line of thought: Having forsaken a run in 2012, his best chance of success in 2016 comes if Obama won in 2012 and there is no Republican incumbent in 2016. Hence his propping up of Obama after Sandy. This was the opinion of many analysts at that time. Okay, but what about now? What does he gain by piling on the House Republicans? Well, my reasoning is that his best path for victory would be a combination of moderate Republicans, independents and centrist

democrats. Basically everyone in the middle after you leave out the tea-party nuts and the staunch liberals. To get centrist democrats, most of whom support Obama, he is supporting Obama when he can. To get the other two he is going after the House Republicans. Actually this gets two birds in one shot. If the House Republicans and especially the tea-party caucus are weakened then Obama can get more done and then the economy would do better. Not only would this bolster his standing among the Obama people but it would also weaken the hand of tea party darlings like Rubio, Santorum and Jindal. If Christie succeeds in this strategy I can see him winning the nomination and also the general election by carrying states like New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Florida although he might have more trouble carrying places like New York and California. In fact it would be harder for him to win the nomination than the election. He will have trouble in the deep south primaries, starting from South Carolina, but he might easily win New Hampshire and Florida.

4. (1/4) Running well is all about getting the body and mind into a rhythm. Getting the breathing settled into an aerobic rhythm goes hand in hand with getting the mind to calm down with the force of your will. Once both are established, running for long distances is as pleasurable as biking or walking long distances and the mind becomes very still. In fact it is as blissful as sitting on a boat in calm waters under clear skies with nothing but blue waves all around.

5. (1/4) Saw "Barbara" tonight. Excellent movie. German with subtitles. Very thought provoking. About a Doctor in communist East Germany torn between her sense of duty and service and her yearning for freedom and satisfying her desires. Made me realize how lucky we are to live in a peaceful, free society and reminded me that many people do not have such lives, and if we are not part of the solution then we are part of the problem. It also helped me understand the paranoia that a section of the American society feels about losing their freedom, causing them to fall prey to fear-mongers, conspiracy theorists and gun merchants. Deeply misguided but understandable nevertheless. We have to be extremely careful about imposing our views on others. Not everyone wants to serve others or put community above self or nature above development, and change must happen through persuasion. Laws and regulations must be a last resort.

6. (1/9) Feeling kind of prayerful this morning. But I tell myself, one should only pray for others. Praying for oneself is like a kid asking his parent to play with him in his school soccer game. God has given me this wonderful body and mind so I can take care of myself and others. E is coaching me through every person, rock and flower in this beautiful universe.

7. (1/16) Last week I was in San Diego for the joint meetings of the mathematical societies. Before and after talks I found time to go for walks on the beach. It was great to have some time for peaceful walks in solitude. I used to do that every weekend but these days I don't get much time to visit beaches or even the riverside. It is humbling to be near the ocean, to realize we are part of the cosmos, to get out of the little pond of our daily existence.

8. (1/16) There has always been tension between reason and faith, between science and religion. I believe we need both. To those who ignore science I ask, what would Jesus, Mohammad or the Buddha have done had they been present today? Having dedicated their lives to the truth, don't you think they would have included the facts established by logic and rigorous experimentation? Just because you don't like what some scientists say does not mean you can ignore science. Do you ignore Jesus or any other Prophet because some religious leaders are corrupt? To those who say faith is unnecessary, I ask, how many decisions did you make today that are based on logic and reason alone? We all have some basic principles and beliefs guiding us that come from a place beyond logic and reason. Maybe that is the golden rule and humanism for some. In that case, that is their God and their faith.

9. (1/28) Stress and difficulties in life can be a wonderful opportunity for deeper reflection and mindfulness. In fact I think much of my spiritual growth has come from this. I have written about this in the past -- see rt75, #15. [You can search all of the "random thoughts" by typing site:nature-lover.net/writings/random_thoughts along with search words in Google].

10. (1/28) As I get older and observe my mind more closely the more I am able to see turbulence. This could have two interpretations: Either my mind is getting generally calmer so that I notice even a little turbulence like a pebble hitting still water, or my mind has been very turbulent all along and only now like a frog peeping out of the muddy waters I notice that it need not be that way. I am leaning towards the latter.