



Cogito, Ergo Sum
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I think, therefore I am. That was the first thought I had. Of course not in the same symbols, but with the same meaning.

I awakened, or came alive, or came into existence suddenly, at least my mental consciousness did. "Here am I," I thought, "but what am I, why am I, where am I?"

I had nothing to work with except pure reason. I was *there* because I was not somewhere else. I was certain I was *there* and that was the extent of my knowledge at the moment.

I looked about me—no, I *reasoned* about me. I was surrounded by nothingness, by black nothingness, a vacuum. Immense distances away I could detect light; or rather, I could perceive waves of force passing around me which originated at points vast distances away, vast in relation to my position in the nothingness.

There were waves of force all about me, varying in frequency. The nothingness was alive with waves of force, traveling parallel and tangential to each other without seeming to interfere one with another. I measured them, differentiated between them and finished with the task in a matter of seconds.

How could I do it? It was one of the capabilities I was *created* with.

What was I? I perceived the waves of force. I perceived great quantities of mass—solid, liquid, gas—whirling in vacuum, mass built up out of patterns of basic force. I searched my own being, analyzed myself. I was not gas. I was not solid. I was not even force. Yet I existed. I could reason. I was a beginning, a sudden beginning. And I had duration because I knew that time had elapsed since the moment I *awakened* though I had no means of telling how much time or of even naming the period.

Could I really be *pure reason*? Can reason exist? Can rational entity exist without a groundwork of matter, or at least of force?

It could. It must. I was rational entity and I existed. Yet I could find nothing of force, nothing to occupy space about my *self*. For all I could ascertain, I might have covered a one-dimensional point in eternity or I might have been spread throughout vast distances.

From this reasoning I concluded that rational entity might occur either as some force unlike that of all natural phenomena in space, or as some combination of these forces at the moment beyond my own power to analyze, even detect. I finished with that for the time being.

How did I come into being? I discarded the question as unanswerable temporarily. What was I before that instant I suddenly reasoned *cogito, ergo sum*? I could not say.

How did I know I even existed, really? Obviously because I was capable of rational thought. But what was thinking? First it was perceiving and accepting my own existence; beyond that, it was recognizing the dark nothingness around me and the forces it contained. I had to exist.

But how did I know nothingness was right? And how did I know its darkness was right? And how did I know the waves of force were *waves* and *force*? And how did I know matter was *matter* and that I was none of these?

"Symbols," I reasoned. "I'm thinking in symbols. I could not reason without symbols; therefore I could not exist as I am without symbols to think with."

Yet whose symbols were they? Where and how did I come by them? I could think back clearly to the instant of my creation, yet I had not invented the symbols in the interim of my existence, nor had they been given to me. What then? They were part of me when I came alive in this universe, had been *invented* some other time and elsewhere by someone else or by what I was before I became the entity of reason I now was.

Then that first flash of perception in nothingness was not spontaneous. There was something behind it. I was something before that moment, in another era of time, perhaps a creature of substance. But what?

I concentrated. I remembered the symbol *Marl*. I was or had been an entity *Marl*. Were there others back there, somewhere? There must have been, must be yet. Was I the only *Marl* who metamorphosed into this state of rational entity? Surely not. Yet I could contact no other rationale around me as far away as I could probe. How far was that? How could I know. Was it far enough to reach the other *Marls*, or were they scattered thinly throughout infinity around me like the flecks of mass?

I was suddenly ill. The symbol *malaise* came to me as the proper description of my malady. I grew dizzy with my sickness. I wished to regurgitate, to cast off this cold, frightening sensation. Yet I was provided with no physical means of doing it. It filled me throughout all my thinking. It was I. I thought to exist. I thought depression, sickness. Therefore I was the malady and it was a hell of malcontent beyond symbolical description.

What was wrong with me? I was frightened. I was concerned for my existence here alone. What was it called? The idea shimmered there on the fringe of perception, then fairly leaped into my consciousness. Existing alone as pure reason was worse than no-existence, was worse than dying or never having been at all. I need another *Marl*. To exist happily, I must have at least one other *Marl* to communicate with, to share my thoughts, to share my being.

Is this a necessity, a condition peculiar to me as I am, as reason, or is it a condition that came across the barrier with me from that other state? It must be the latter. An entity of pure reason, having come into existence as reason, would need nothing but himself. Why? Because he would be *without emotion*.

"I am *emotional*," I thought. "I am entity of almost pure reason, but I have inherited emotion from my previous state. It is a disorder of thought, but it can be a pleasant disorder when the emotion is the right one; or, if unpleasant, when satisfied.

"But I could not have emotions as I am now. They are *cortical responses*, or are supposed to be. What is *cortical*? No, they are a sort of illogical reasoning, nothing physical—" The rest eluded me.

"I am lonely," I thought. "Loneliness stems from fear and fear is a basic emotion. I am very lonely. I have been lonely for a long time, bringing it with me here. I would rather sate my loneliness than live to eternity, than know all there is to know. What can quell my loneliness? Another like me, another *Marl*—whatever a *Marl* is. I must have, must find another *Marl*."

I began to search. I darted frantically about space like a frightened thing, though I could perceive no movement. I knew I passed from one area of space to another because I could measure slight changes in the position of the stars about me. I knew the points of light were *stars*.

There was duration. I could not know how much. Eternity? A split second? But at last I discovered another like me. No, almost like me, but another *Marl*. The other entity had less of reason, more emotion. It was frightened and lonely. The *Marl's* whole existence was that of sickness—of loneliness, which is fear. The *Marl* was darting about madly, seeking, seeking a thing like itself. What was it, like me but different?

As I came in, I measured our similarity and differences. Rationally we were identical, or almost so. Emotionally we were different, vastly different. "*Marls* appear to exist as rationale and emotion," I reasoned. "Beyond that I cannot go."

The other *Marl* perceived me, darted frantically toward me, then slowed. We came together, touched like—*like two cautious fish meeting in a dark pool and touching mouths to substantiate identical species.*

The other *Marl* was satisfied with my identity. It leaped frantically at me, raced around me, through me, finally stopped, pervading me, while *vibrating* in sheer relief and happiness. I felt the great fear-loneliness in the other *Marl* begin to recede and in its place came an almost overpowering euphoria. It was *contentment*, and it stemmed from the basic emotion *love*. I knew this at once.

I suddenly realized that I too was relieved, that I was no longer sick with fear-loneliness. It was good, this existing of the other within me or simultaneously with me. Or was it I within the other? It sated our fear emotion and made, created a love-euphoria.

"I am happy I found you," I communicated. "I was lonely for another *Marl*. You are a *Marl*?"

The other hesitated, thinking. "No. I am *Pat*. I am different from you. But it is chiefly emotional. It is good."

"You are a *Pat*," I returned in disappointment. "I had hoped to find another *Marl*."

"Don't be disappointed," the *Pat* soothed. "We are alike, really. Almost so. Like—like flame and gas are both substance yet different. We are two types of the same thing. I am no longer frightened. I am no longer lonely. You are good for me."

I was relieved because I wanted to be. I believed the other *Marl*—no, the *Pat*—because I wanted to believe. I did not bother to rationalize. I felt elation.

"Then in that other time, that other place we both belonged to a—a common group, with another name?" I suggested.

"I believe so," the *Pat* answered.

"How was it when you came awake?" I asked. "Can you remember?"

"I think so. I recall I was born here in fright because it was all wrong. I was not in my natural state, so it was not right." The *Pat* paused to think. "I remember there was great speed and I was born in fright. Were you?"

"No," I answered. "I was not frightened at first. And I was never frightened to the degree you were. I was mostly lonely, which is related to fear. But when I first conceived of my existence here I was coolly logical. I awakened *reasoning*—realizing that I existed."

"I suppose it has to do with our emotional differences," the *Pat* beside me or with me or within me communicated.

"Do you recall where in space you came from?" I asked. "I must have been doubting my existence at first so intensely I did not observe. You seem to have taken your own being for granted, thus you were, perhaps, more observant."

"I—I think so." The *Pat* hesitated and I knew it was observing the stars around us. "Yes. Come with me. I think I know where."

I stayed with the *Pat*, a part of it, and we lurched through space. Rather, we ceased to exist at one point in space and existed in another. How far? Distances meant nothing.

"It was here," the *Pat* informed me finally.

Something was wrong here. The interweaving waves of force were all wrong. There was a disorder, a great cancer in space. The waves interfered with the progress of each other all along a great barrier. It was not natural, not like it was elsewhere.

"Something is wrong with the waves of force crossing this area. They interfere with each other. New forces are created. Do you detect it?" I communicated.

"I feel it," the *Pat* answered. "It is a sickness in space like—like our loneliness."

I knew the comparison was ridiculous but I let it pass. "You said you came alive at great speed. I could have been traveling too. We must have plunged into this barrier. It seems to me that emotions must originate in a *physical* being; perhaps reason could be free, but not emotion. I don't know. But I have a theory. I believe our *physical* selves still exist somewhere in space. The barrier, perhaps, interfered with the normal functioning of our mental equipment. We exist at one point in space and we are thinking, experiencing emotions at another point. It's as if our minds are—are broadcasting our thoughts and emotions far away from our physical selves. Either that, or our rationales were torn free and only our emotions are broadcast. Does that sound logical?"

"Yes," the *Pat* agreed, "I believe that is the answer."

I felt that the *Pat* was pleased with my theory, that it greatly admired my reasoning. I also perceived that it had no idea what I meant by the explanation. I did not mind.

"You said you were moving at great speed," I continued. "Can you remember the line, the direction you were traveling in?"

The *Pat* hesitated only a moment. "Yes. You perceive the star cluster there, the triangular one? My heading was in that direction, but it was changing fast."

"Then we could find nothing by traveling toward the triangular cluster?"

"No. I was moving in an arc in the direction of the distorted square cluster there. Do you see it?"

"Yes," I answered, knowing her use of the word *see* was unconscious. "That is Cetus."

"Cetus?" The *Pat* was startled. "How do you know that?"

"I don't know. The name came to me. It seemed right to call it that."

"It—it's all so frightening!"

I had no time for pampering our emotions, though I was at great peace with the *Pat* so near me. Time might prove vital. "Neither would it do any good to travel in the direction of Cetus," I said.

"No. No," the *Pat* communicated. "If there is any object of matter or force I was a part of in that other existence traveling through space, it is in an arc. The best we can do is take an arbitrary direction between the triangular cluster and the one called Cetus and hope to intercept the object, the other part of me, whatever it is."

"Come with me," I ordered.

I discovered the object of mass hurtling through space before the *Pat* did. It was symmetrical and metallic. I tore myself away from my companion and darted to meet it. I discovered it was a shell, a hollow thing, and I passed inside. There was a room there. There were projections and circles of transparent matter. I experienced the symbol *dials*.

There were two other creatures seated close to the dials, things of matter, and their substance was protoplasm. But there was no rationale present in either of them. I examined the living matter of the smaller one swiftly. Organs seemed poised in a suspended state. The creature I observed, housed in a protective shell, seemed paralyzed or dead. I remembered the word *dead*.

Then the *Pat* was with me again. "I—I feel something, *Marl*. I am frightened. What are they, those things there?"

"They seem to be—" I stopped communicating.

The *Pat* had disappeared!

The thing of protoplasm nearest me was moving but I was no longer interested. I remember the *Pat* had touched the upper extremity of the creature and had vanished, had ceased to be.

The old sickness was back. I was lonely. I wanted the other entity. I could not, did not wish to exist without the *Pat*.

I darted frantically about the metal shell, here and there, searching, searching. Where was the *Pat*? I *screamed* for it. I thought *Pat* as far away as I could reach, but there was no reaction, no response at all.

In my frenzy, I was back beside the creatures of protoplasm before I realized it, near the one I had not yet examined.

"Perhaps they took her," I thought. It was not logical, but it was a hope. Hope is emotional; I was becoming more emotional than rational.

I touched the larger of the two creatures, experimentally; moved cautiously inside it, searching, searching.

Suddenly I was seized by a great force, an inexorable power that grasped me and wrenched me, tearing me from the point in space I had occupied a moment before. My perception blurred, but I was not frightened. Without the *Pat* I did not care what happened. I was intensely curious. "So this is how it is," I reasoned in a flash, "to *cease to be*."

And I ceased to be... .

Marlow shook his head. I must have dozed, he thought. He glanced at the chronometer on the console ahead. No, only a minute or two had elapsed since the last time he had checked.

"Sleepy head! Wake up and live!"

He looked to his right. Pat sat in the navigator's seat smiling at him.

"I didn't sleep, honestly," he protested. "We hit some sort of barrier back there. It knocked me out for a moment. I had the damndest impression—"

"Remember what you promised!" She swiveled the seat about to face him. "No more scientific lectures on the mysteries of space or I'll return to earth. You know my poor brain can't absorb it."

"You win," he grinned, running calloused fingers through his greying crew-cut. He leaned forward and kissed her briefly. "How did an old space hermit like me ever win a flower-garden bride in the first place?"

They laughed together, and he felt secure within the metallic shell surrounding them, no longer alone.

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