**Mastering the Cyber-Dragon**

**A mythological approach to the Digital Revolution**

We have woken a Dragon. This one is not a Chinese dragon, or Welsh dragon, but a Global dragon, a creature of cyber-space, and because it is in full rampage, it might be valuable to gain some insight into the life of the ancient, powerful and meaningful symbol of a ‘Dragon’. Why might it be useful to employ this imagery and symbol for our current struggles in the chaotic lee of the digital revolution?

By discarding true mythological narratives, global society has lost much of the guidance and wisdom of genuine myth and metaphysics, the metaphorical language of deeper experience. What is more, along with the loss of guidance, we are losing touch with such experience, and an increasing majority are unable to order everyday concerns from a more embracing perspective, which alone can offer coherent and meaningful ways forward. Regrettably, our cultural life has been trivialised in every aspect by the onslaughts of media communications, including the alarming manifestations they have called forth in ordinary people—envy, cruelty, self-interest, fantasy, meanness and above all, fear. Fear of just about everything, which seems to have found its ultimate expression through the pandemic by personification into a cute little virus-ball with spikes. This meme is shared everywhere, and is entirely infantile.

Traditional sacred mythological stories allow complex psychological states and actions to be explored and wisdom passed down the generations. Dragons are part of this lore, and it is my contention that global society is currently terrorised into paralysis by a huge evolving one, a Cyber-Dragon, which is feeding off our confusion, rootlessness and heedlessness. It is vital that we look for ways to take issue with it, to tame or ride or utilize its energy. However, simply taking a lance to it, as in the myth of St George, is not a sensible or achievable option. This dragon is too big, too useful, too integral to our lives.

Before dragons became cute through children’s literature and animation, a ‘dragon’ (sometimes serpent-like) was a depiction of awesome force. Awesome force is what we are facing right now. Dragons in all global cultures are an expression of power in some form, and utilize the universal symbolism of four Elements. Hence, beautiful sinuous Air dragons with fierce faces, flowing Watery dragons, and Fiery and fire-breathing dragons. Our western heritage also includes plump, forbidding Earth dragons living in caves and guarding gold and treasure, when they are not ravishing maidens and the land.

All dragons are energy incarnate and therefore dangerous, because any energy, force or power, whether psychological or physical, can be turned either to destructive or useful ends. The electricity which lights our homes can kill in an instant. The rain, by whose gentle beneficence roses bloom in our gardens, can accumulate to a raging flood. Revolutions turn bloody; governance can become tyranny.

And now, faced with the new terrain of an ocean of powerful information technology and connectivity, we need a warning: Here be Dragons! Big Tech is not the only contributing aspect, but its dragon-power is finally exposed. The most obviously sinister side is deliberate manipulation of data and opinion by the corporations which run the networks, but another more covert encroachment is simply our willingness to embrace and be embraced by digital facilities in our everyday lives. We must learn not to be helplessly digested in its maw, but to use skilfully, and retain our agency. That’s the individual challenge.

**Dragon Power**

All dragons grow through enchantment, and arise in society when events and ideologies become compulsive, addictive, emotively charged, and draw in the energy and ideas of more and more individuals. In this way the Cyber-Dragon, rooted in digital technology, is the mother of many smaller but related contemporary dragons like aggressive special-interest and campaigning groups, and socially divisive ideologies. The Cyber-dragon came into being with a nervous-system new to the earth: the world-wide web’s interconnecting dendrites, sensitive to every click of a mouse. This neural network is now essential to process the increasing complexity of our human lives and proliferating needs, and it sustains the Cyber-dragon’s existence.

Not only on earth, the reach of this great new network of conscious capacity extends into the Galaxy. On the positive side, the Cyber-dragon has made possible momentous new perspectives and a paradigm-shifting awareness of our global, earth-based identity. Night-time images from the orbiting International Space Station show networks of light inter-connecting into what looks like a vast brain; the brain of the earth—or the brain of the cyber-dragon?

The issue is power, new forms of power and the employment of power. Many are concerned about how technology relates to the organic basis of life and human potential, and whether the technological manifestations of dragon-power are abrogating authority to machines and compromising our humanity. With the mundane details of our lives now enmeshed with digital processes: shopping, banking, communication and so on, the fear is that this increasing mechanisation and computer-generated manipulation, algorithms, standardization and bio-technology will relentlessly shepherd us towards an *inhuman* future.

Here is where the living imagery of a dragon may help us to keep perspective. The myth is one of living organic being. A dragon is not a machine, but an aspect of consciousness, a product of human conscious creativity and reflective awareness. However smart and self-generating Artificial Intelligence becomes, we humans design the algorithms and engineer the capacities, and it is precisely this awareness that we have to keep in view. If we lose this perspective, we sacrifice the *best* of humanness, diminishing its real, creative, chthonic authority. Fantastic inter-connectivity and speed of associative thinking is not the same as *intelligence.*

But the Cyber-Dragon is intelligent, because we are. Intelligence, from the Latin, means ‘to choose between’. Therefore, its meaning is close to ‘discernment’ involving choice and judgement, as opposed to random selections, rules and algorithms. The Cyber-Dragon is our product, our creation, but its life is independently evolving, and therefore can influence or dictate the choices of individuals and groups in the everyday sphere.

**Metabolism and Evolution of Dragons**

Our best hope is to recognise the dragon power at work, and to get a grip on its habitat and diet. Smaller dragons arise with any consuming preoccupation which garners to a force and has power, such as ideological or practical obsessions which can achieve dominance in the lives of individuals. However, those of real concern to us all are mass-energy dragons. The twentieth century unleashed two major ones, Communism, an ideology of fine-sounding sentiments which translated into an immense toll in lives and misery, and Nazism, which rallied multitudes of ordinary, relatively innocent populace, who concurred emotionally with the energy and grandiose vision unfolded before them by a stirring little man with a moustache. Most knew not what they espoused because the details were backstage, but the power of mass identification roused every man, woman and child, as the inspiring ideology swept like a storm-wind through fields of wheat.

Because emotion and energy are two side of the force which moves us to do anything, the emotions generated through polarization, frenzy or any excitants, whether they be negative or positive, will feed and augment a growing dragon. Once a movement is underway, even a benign, well-meaning initiative can turn vicious and destructive to the original intent, because the effects of mass and momentum are almost impossible to control.

Dragons form like whirlwinds. In retrospect we can easily identify tyrannies and destructive frenzies like the French Revolution, Maoism and Stalinism, but as a culture we are still astonishingly slow to recognise as ‘dragons’ the malign forms dominating the media and social life of today. Incubating in our collective nest are Trolling, Wokeness, Celebrity, Me-too, Black Lives Matter, Extinction Rebellion and many more emotive non-rational intensities. They should be easy to distinguish by their passion and coercive tactics, the lashings of a dragon-tail, but too many people and institutions fail to call them out.

The scene continues to evolve. Enter Sars-coV-2, and the stage is set for a perfect unleashing of fear. The dragon here is not the biological virus, but rather the extreme human emotions around safety, risk and survival, and intolerance of open discussion or informed dissent. Digital connectivity has facilitated all these malign aspects. The Cyber-dragon feeds on hysteria which scrambles reasoned opposition, and polarisation which energizes conflict. Fear is without doubt a favourite food, and the coronavirus has served up a delicious food source, as well as consolidating its hegemony by rapidly accelerating our digital dependence.

**Cyber-Dragon**

Since cyber-space is a brand-new habitat with plenty of power potential, following natural law, it will be colonised with some kind of living beings. My contention is that it has become an abode of dragons, the living products of our collective and individual psychic energies. This life is not biological, but a spawning of the psycho-sphere, and only therein lies potential to recognise and take steps to co-habit or deal with it. Nothing is more dangerous than an invisible enemy.

Needless to say, the varieties of human foolishness are endless, but in our day, digital processes and the powers unleashed by them have been the chief drivers of wokeness, polarized politics and identity and gender issues, all of which dissolve social bonds and individual strength of purpose. Digitalization turned into a huge inimical dragon with the exercise of digital power, when scorching opposition by its breath, and when ‘Big Tech’ and other ‘Big’ commercial and political power nexuses achieved the status of coherent, purposeful ‘entities’, and became masters, rather than servants of our collective needs.

We need now to look to remedies, workable defences, reining and riding techniques.

 Some modern St Georges have shown willing to take up a lance and try to tackle the situation, and a growing number of Intelligent thinkers stand up for rational avenues of debate and discussion, particularly online, which is an example of using the Cyber-Dragon power constructively, and harnessing it. This is one route to salvation and rescue; riding the dragon, utilising its capacities and potentialities creatively without being enslaved by them to fight the narrative both at the level of ideas and emotional adherence. It’s not enough so far, but it’s a start.

Because in individuals the Cyber-Dragon operates by eating our attention, snacking daily on our distractedness, hassling away calm reflection, sobriety, silence or stillness with constant digital stimuli to keep the passions coming, it suggests another avenue of defence. Silence is its nemesis, a hopeful chink in its armour and scales.

In personal life, the cultivation of silence is a very potent weapon by creating a still centre in the wheel of living, an axle upon which an individual life can turn straight and true. Dukkha, or suffering, is a Buddhist term whose origin means a broken or defective axle hole, and the teaching of every spiritual tradition is about cultivating a true hub where not even a dragon can disturb the smooth and necessary turning of the wheel. This instruction vanquishes dragons by starving them of food and energy, rendering them quiescent, even obedient.

Silence is power. For each of us personally, the option exists to quell the Cyber Dragon’s rampage by digital hygiene, silencing the clamour for constant attention, click-bait, negativity, drama. Each of us has the power to decline the use of some social media; to cut down exposure generally, and avoid shallow news-feeds in favour of more considered reading and listening and a more balanced view of current affairs rather than partisan headlines picked up courtesy of some algorithm.

After defence, the attack. Once the brain-deluge is reduced, the time saved from surface interactions and useless information is time to engage more deeply and develop the large perspectives which are a true route to mental and emotional stability. Physical exercise, keep-fit, relaxation and other mindfulness practices have obvious benefits in this direction also, but more is possible. For reclaiming attention and directing it resolutely towards the good, true and beautiful, there is no training more potent than meditation when properly taught in a well-rounded traditional context. Meditation is more than a technique for personal benefit. In its essence, it offers a route to the core of the deep inner space of essential humanity into which no dragon ever has access. But we have to take up the offer.

A coherent world-view and strategy for living is both a personal and collective quest for meaning, morality and overview, but it has to begin for us as individuals.

**The Wheel of Four - Keeping the balance**

Like everyone else, when I switch on my devices each day, I find myself immediately in a maelstrom of controversies, divided opinions and dubious facts and information. If I let these forces take prominence or authority in my own psycho-spere, I feel caught up in an endless ideological spin-cycle which is both exhausting and confusing.

How to make sense of the process and momentum? Without addressing the specific meaning content, is there some way of analysing the process so that it becomes comprehensible and therefore potentially manageable?

My suggestion is that if we slow down the spin-cycle and look for where these spin vectors and velocity originate, and take a cue from traditional metaphysical teaching on four directions and the power of four-ness, the principles for all this ideological and emotional pressure fall into four categories. In addition, the four divide into two polarities, which adds a principle of momentum (as opposed to the stability of a fixed cross.)

It is quite easy to identify four prevailing social positions or ideological camps in current global society. *Co-operation* is seen by manyas a far worthier principle than *Competition,* and the same demographic often espouse the *Collective* as more important thanthe rights of the *Individual*. These assumptions have become a chief focus of morality, and the partisan nature and vehemence with which they are associated is responsible for much of the instability of values and meaning we face. In a smoothly functioning society, all four would have equal importance in the appropriate place, because any closer look at nature or life reveals that they operate together. These forces are not antagonists, but partners in service of the whole. Left and right, centripetal and centrifugal, heat and cold and so on, work together in a reconciliation which naturally produces a harmonious, productive result for the totality, and in fact, is what maintains a living cosmos. But instead of being like the spokes of a great mill-wheel turning into the future, this quaternity of forces roils within the entrails of our contemporary Cyber Dragon generating division and polarization, and keeping it alive and flourishing from the emotional energy invested in them.

Antagonism is a great generator of negativity—meat and drink for any dragon. So, we find self-assertion substituting for individuality, social well-being delivered with coercion, competition turning into greed, and cooperation becoming a lazy feel-good ethos. All have violent potential, which comes to the fore when the partnership is devalued and the balance deeply disturbed.

 **Nemesis – the** **Cyber-star**

Equal and balanced, the centre or hub of this wheel of four forces is still, like the fulcrum of a see-saw. With proper order established, it could be a sort of ninja-weapon heading for the cyber-dragon, but first comes an urgent need to ask the perennial existential questions with serious intent. Profound answers will only result from profound questioning, facilitated by maintaining a social and individual space where superficialities and self-preservation are forsaken in favour of asking hard questions.

A slow transformation driven by necessity may be the only way forward, not by undermining or tearing down currently unfashionable ‘out-dated’ institutions, but rather by rigorously critiquing the pop-up philosophies and shallow-rooted preoccupations of today. Those old institutions were guardians and preservers of many essential principles of life and living, and a positive approach would involve re-discovery and re-packaging.

I think taming the social Cyber-Dragon will be a product of many efforts, many brave St Georges trying their hand at finding the weak spot under the dragon’s jaw to curb its destructive power. In addition, and perhaps mercifully, the bigger and heavier a dragon grows, the less nimble and flexible it is when time and the cosmos turns, and new forces arise to challenge its hegemony. There is an ancient legend that the blood of a dragon has powerful healing properties, and a whole new army of warriors can spring from the drops.

The power of silence is not mere absence of noise, but can be the beginning of wisdom in so far as it makes possible a capacity for discernment, clear thinking, emotional range and stability. These are our harness to ride upon the Cyber-Dragon. Only then are we safe from its fiery breath, and allow its great wings to fan our faces with the winds of change, and its tail sweep away baggage from the past as we head into the Unknown of cyber-space. It is our future, our human future, if we make it so.

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