

Death and What Comes Next

(Discworld)

Terry Pratchett

Death and What Comes Next

A Discworld short story

By Terry Pratchett

When Death met the philosopher, the philosopher said, rather excitedly: "At this point, you realise, I'm both dead and not dead."

There was a sigh from Death. Oh dear, one of those, he thought. This is going to be about quantum again. He hated dealing with philosophers. They always tried to wriggle out of it.

"You see," said the philosopher, while Death, motionless, watched the sands of his life drain through the hourglass, "everything is made of tiny particles, which have the strange property of being in many places at one time. But things *made* of tiny particles tend to stay in one place at one time, which does not seem right according to quantum theory. May I continue?"

YES, BUT NOT INDEFINITELY, said Death, EVERYTHING IS TRANSIENT. He did not take his gaze away from the tumbling sand.

"Well, then, if we agreed that there are an infinite number of universes, then the problem is solved! If there are an unlimited number of universes, this bed can be in millions of them, all at the same time!"

DOES IT MOVE?

"What?"

Death nodded at the bed. CAN YOU FEEL IT MOVING? he said.

"No, because there are a million versions of me, too, And... here is the good bit ...in some of them I am not about to pass away! Anything is possible!" Death tapped the handle of his scythe as he considered this.

AND YOUR POINT IS...?

"Well, I'm not exactly dying, correct? You are no longer such a certainty."

There was a sigh from Death. Space he thought. That was the trouble. It was never like this on worlds with everlastingly cloudy skies. But once humans saw all that space, their brains expanded to try and fill it up.

"No answer, eh?" said the dying philosopher. "Feel a bit old-fashioned, do we?"

THIS IS A CONUNDRUM CERTAINLY, said Death. Once they prayed, he thought. Mind you, he'd never been sure that prayer worked, either. He thought for a while. AND I SHALL ANSWER IT IN THIS MANNER, he added. YOU LOVE YOUR WIFE?

"What?"

THE LADY WHO HAS BEEN LOOKING AFTER YOU. YOU LOVE HER?

"Yes. Of course."

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE, WITHOUT YOUR PERSONAL HISTORY CHANGING IN ANY WAY YOU WOULD AT THIS MOMENT PICK UP A KNIFE AND STAB HER? said Death. FOR EXAMPLE?

"Certainly not!"

BUT YOUR THEORY SAYS THAT YOU MUST. IT IS EASILY POSSIBLE WITHIN THE PHYSICAL LAWS OF THE UNIVERSE, AND THEREFORE MUST HAPPEN, AND HAPPEN MANY TIMES. EVERY MOMENT IS A BILLION, BILLION MOMENTS, AND IN THOSE MOMENTS ALL

THINGS THAT ARE POSSIBLE ARE INEVITABLE. ALL TIME SOONER OR LATER, BOILS DOWN TO A MOMENT.

"But of course we can make choices between-

ARE THERE CHOICES? EVERYTHING THAT CAN HAPPEN, MUST HAPPEN. YOUR THEORY SAYS THAT FOR EVERY UNIVERSE THAT'S FORMED TO ACCOMMODATE YOUR 'NO', THERE MUST BE ONE TO ACCOMMODATE YOUR 'YES'. BUT YOU SAID YOU WOULD NEVER COMMIT MURDER. THE FABRIC OF THE COSMOS TREMBLES BEFORE YOUR TERRIBLE CERTAINTY. YOUR MORALITY BECOMES A FORCE AS STRONG AS GRAVITY. And, thought Death, space certainly has a lot to answer for.

"Was that sarcasm?"

ACTUALLY, NO. I AM IMPRESSED AND INTRIGUED, said Death. THE CONCEPT YOU PUT BEFORE ME PROVES THE EXISTENCE OF TWO HITHERTO MYTHICAL PLACES. SOMEWHERE, THERE IS A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE, THE MORAL CHOICE, THE CHOICE THAT MAXIMISED THE HAPPINESS OF THEIR FELLOW CREATURES, OF COURSE, THAT ALSO MEANS THAT SOMEWHERE ELSE IS THE SMOKING REMNANT OF THE WORLD WHERE THEY DID NOT ...

"Oh, come on! I know what you're implying, and I've never believed in any of that Heaven and Hell nonsense!"

The room was growing darker. The blue gleam along the edge of the reaper's scythe was becoming more obvious.

ASTONISHING, said Death. REALLY ASTONISHING. LET ME PUT FORWARD ANOTHER SUGGESTION: THAT YOU ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A LUCKY SPECIES OF APE THAT IS TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF CREATION VIA A LANGUAGE THAT EVOLVED IN ORDER TO TELL ONE ANOTHER WHERE THE RIPE FRUIT WAS?

Fighting for breath, the philosopher managed to say: "Don't be silly."

THE REMARK WAS NOT INTENDED AS DEROGATORY, said Death. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, YOU HAVE ACHIEVED A GREAT DEAL.

"We've certainly escaped from outmoded superstitions!"

WELL DONE, said Death. THAT'S THE SPIRIT. I JUST WANTED TO CHECK.

He leaned forward.

AND ARE YOU AWARE OF THE THEORY THAT THE STATE OF SOME TINY PARTICLES IS INDETERMINATE UNTIL THE MOMENT THEY ARE OBSERVED? A CAT IN A BOX IS OFTEN MENTIONED.

"Oh, yes," said the philosopher.

GOOD, said Death. He got to his feet as the last of the light died, and smiled.

I SEE YOU...

FB2 document info

Document ID: ec9795fa-bef9-413c-a804-6416bfccb692

Document version: 1

Document creation date: 18 March 2012

Created using: FictionBook Editor Release 2.6 software

Document authors :

-

About

This file was generated by Lord KiRon's FB2EPUB converter version 1.1.5.0.

(This book might contain copyrighted material, author of the converter bears no responsibility for it's usage)

Этот файл создан при помощи конвертера FB2EPUB версии 1.1.5.0 написанного Lord KiRon.

(Эта книга может содержать материал который защищен авторским правом, автор конвертера не несет ответственности за его использование)

<http://www.fb2epub.net>

<https://code.google.com/p/fb2epub/>