

Wonder

This passage explains the inadequacy of human reason to comprehend the wondrous manifestations of the power of the gods, and mocks at the Confucian pretention to have found a rational answer to every problem. It is taken from the *Arrowroot* (*Kuzubana*), so entitled because this plant creeps humbly along the ground but yields a pretty blossom and a nutritious starch, which, when fermented, produces a stimulating liquor. Motoori suggests that his ideas, simple and unpretentious though they may be, are nevertheless food and stimulus for thought. This dialogue was written in answer to an attack on the Shinto revival by the Confucianist, Ichikawa Tatsumaro (d. 1795).

[From *Motoori Norinaga Zenshū*, V, 459-62]

Objection: You are obstinate in insisting that the Sun Goddess is the sun in heaven. If this is so, perpetual darkness must have reigned everywhere before her birth. The sun must have been in heaven since the beginning of the universe [before the birth of the Goddess].

Motoori: First of all, I cannot understand why you say that I am obstinate. That the Sun Goddess is the sun in heaven is clear from the records of the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi*. If it is so beyond any doubt, is not the person who raises an objection the one who is obstinate? This Sun Goddess casts her light to the very extremities of the universe, but in the beginning it was in our Imperial Land that she made her appearance, and as the sovereign of the Imperial Line, that is, of the Imperial Land, she has reigned supreme over the Four Seas until now. When this Goddess hid herself in a cave in heaven, closing its doors, darkness fell over the countries of the world. You ask why darkness did not reign everywhere before her birth, a question a child might well ask. It seems childish indeed when a question which might spring from the doubts of a child is asked with such insistence by you. But this very point proves that the ancient happenings of the Divine Age are facts and not fabrications. Some say that the records are the fabrication of later sovereigns, but who would fabricate such shallow sounding, incredible things? This is a point you should reflect upon seriously.

The acts of the gods cannot be measured by ordinary human reasoning. Man's intellect, however wise, has its limits. It is small, and what is beyond its confines it cannot know. The acts of the gods are straightforward. That they appear to be shallow and untrue is due to the limitation

of what man can know. To the human mind these acts appear to be remote, inaccessible, and difficult of comprehension and belief. Chinese teachings, on the other hand, were established within the reach of human intelligence; thus, to the mind of the listener, they are familiar and intimate and easy of comprehension and belief. The Chinese, because they believe that the wisdom of the Sage [Confucius] was capable of comprehending all the truths of the universe and of its phenomena, pretend to the wisdom of the Sage and insist, despite their small and limited minds, that they know what their minds are really incapable of knowing. But at the same time they refuse to believe in the inscrutability of the truth, for this, they conclude, is irrational. This sounds clever, but on the contrary, it betrays the pettiness of their intelligence. If my objector would rid himself of such a habit and reflect seriously, such a doubt as he has just expressed would disappear of itself.

It will be recalled that when Izanagi made his way to the nether region, he carried a light because of the darkness there, but while he lived in the actual world, he did not. The nether world is dark because it has to be dark; the actual world is clear because it has to be clear. Thus, there was light in the actual world before the birth of the Sun Goddess, although the reason why it is so cannot be fathomed. In the commentaries on the *Nihongi* there are references to luminous human beings of the days of creation who cast light about them, but these references were derived from the Buddhist scriptures. There is also mention of a deity of firefly light, but this was an evil deity, and his case cannot be taken as a typical one. There are otherwise no traditions about deities of light, and thus we have no way of knowing what light there was for illumination. But presumably there was light for reasons beyond the reach of human intelligence. Why then did darkness prevail when the Sun Goddess hid herself behind the door of the rocky cave? It was because it had been determined that with the birth of the Sun Goddess the whole space of the universe should come within her illumination, and that henceforth there would be no light without her illumination. This is the same sort of inscrutable truth as the case of the descent of the Imperial Grandchild from Heaven after which communication between Heaven and earth was completely severed. There are many other strange and inscrutable happenings in the Divine Age, which should be accepted in the same way. The people of antiquity never attempted to reason out the acts of the

gods with their own intelligence, but the people of a later age, influenced by the Chinese, have become addicts of rationalism. Such people appear wise, but in reality are quite foolish in their suspicion and skepticism about the strange happenings of the Divine Age which are quite different from the happenings of the human age. The fact is that even the things of the human age are, in reality, strange and wondrous, but because we are accustomed to their present form and have always lived in their midst, we cease to be aware of their wondrous quality. Consider, for example, how this universe goes on. Is the earth suspended in the sky or attached to something else? In either instance it is a wondrous thing. Suppose it is attached to something else, what is there under it to support it? This is something which cannot be understood. Thus in China, although there are many theories, they all end in wonder. Among them is a theory called the global theory which says that the earth is round and that it is enveloped in space and hangs in the sky. It sounds most plausible but ordinary reasoning tells us that despite the fullness of the ether in the sky this land and the great oceans cannot remain suspended and motionless in the sky. Thus, this theory too is nothing more than an expression of wonderment. Another theory says that space consists of ether only and that it has no form of its own. This too sounds plausible, but if ether fills the outer space, is there a limit to its extension or not? If it has no limit there is no way of determining its circumference or its center or where in it the earth is situated. The earth cannot stop except at the dead center of space. If, on the other hand, the extension of ether is limited, then it must assume the shape of a ball, raising the question about the definite point around which it condenses itself. Then again, what is there to cause it to condense? Thus we see that this theory too is an expression of the strange and the wondrous.

Man, living in such a strange and wondrous universe, wonders not about its mysteries but only about the wonders of the Divine Age, saying there is no reason for them. If this is not senseless, what is?

Consider also the human body: it has eyes to see, ears to hear, a mouth to speak, feet to walk, and hands to do a thousand things. Are they not truly wonderful? Birds and insects fly in the sky, plants and trees bloom and bear fruit—they are all wonderful. When insentient beings change into sentient beings such as birds and insects, or when foxes and badgers

take on human form—are these not the strangest of all strange things? Thus, the universe and all things therein are without a single exception strange and wondrous when examined carefully. Even the Sage would be incapable of explaining these phenomena. Thus, one must acknowledge that human intelligence is limited and puny while the acts of the gods are illimitable and wondrous. But it is indeed amusing that there are people who respect and believe in this Sage as one who had illuminated every truth of the universe and its phenomena, when in fact he explained only those things within the boundaries of his own intelligence.

The beginnings of such a vastly wondrous universe and all its phenomena must be even more wonderful. The Chinese explain it in terms of yin and yang, but they have failed to explain why yin and yang operate in such a manner—which only adds to the wonder of the beginnings of the universe. Or one might say that the universe had no beginning, just as it will have no end; but if things existed which had no beginning, it would be even more strange and wondrous. If my objector would reflect upon the above things, his doubts would disappear of themselves. If his doubts are still insoluble, I shall cite examples nearer to him. Mice and martens can see in darkness as well as in broad daylight. By what manner of light do they see? There are also birds which see things well at night but cannot see them in daylight. Such things cannot be explained by the usual reasoning. The objector has said that there was no reason for light to exist in the Divine Age, but can he say that there was a reason for such light not to exist? What is your answer? Even in the case of lowly birds and animals there is a reason beyond reason. Is there any need to say more about our imperial forebears at the beginning of the universe?

The Error of Rationalism

[From *Kuzubana* in *Motoori Norinaga Zenshū*, V, 463–66]

Objection: The scholar [Motoori] treats this country as if it were different from other countries.

Motoori: The objector also says at the end of the book that I want “to put our country outside the universe.” I cannot understand what he means, but I surmise from what he says before and after that he is