

Miguel de Unamuno

Tragic Sense of Life

Selected excerpts

“Consciousness is participated knowledge, is co-feeling, and co-feeling is com-passion. Love personalizes all that it loves. Only by personalizing it can we fall in love with an idea. And when love is so great and so vital, so strong and so overflowing, that it loves everything, then it personalizes everything and discovers that the total All, that the Universe, is also a person possessing a Consciousness, a Consciousness which in its turn suffers, pities, and loves, and therefore is consciousness. And this Consciousness of the Universe, which a love, personalizing all that it loves, discovers, is what we call God.”

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“Man is said to be a reasoning animal. I do not know why he has not been defined as an affective or feeling animal. Perhaps that which differentiates him from other animals is feeling rather than reason. More often I have seen a cat reason than laugh or weep. Perhaps it weeps or laughs inwardly — but then perhaps, also inwardly, the crab resolves equations of the second degree.”

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“Perhaps the immense Milky Way which on clear nights we behold stretching across the heavens, this vast encircling ring in which our planetary system is itself but a molecule, is in its turn but a cell in the Universe, in the Body of God. All the cells of our body combine and co-operate in maintaining and kindling by their activity our consciousness, our soul; and if the consciousness or the souls of all these cells entered completely into our consciousness, into the composite whole, if I possessed consciousness of all that happens in my bodily organism, I should feel the universe happening within myself, and perhaps the painful sense of my limitedness would disappear. And if all the consciousness of all beings unite in their entirety in the universal consciousness, this consciousness—that is to say, God—is all.

In every instant obscure consciousnesses, elementary souls, are born and die within us, and their birth and death constitute our life. And their sudden and violent death constitutes our pain. And in like manner, in the heart of God consciousnesses are born and die—but do they die?—and their births and deaths constitute His life.

If there is a Universal and Supreme Consciousness, I am an idea in it; and is it possible for any idea in this Supreme Consciousness to be completely blotted out? After I have died, God will go on remembering me, and to be remembered by God, to have my consciousness sustained by the Supreme Consciousness, is not that, perhaps, to be?

And if anyone should say that God has made the universe, it may be rejoined that so also our soul has made our body as much as, if not more than, it has been made by it—if, indeed, there be a soul.”

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“To say that everything is idea or that everything is spirit, is the same as saying that everything is matter or that everything is energy, for if everything is idea or spirit, just as my consciousness is, it is not plain why the diamond should not endure for ever, if my consciousness, because it is idea or spirit, endures forever.”

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“There is no true love save in suffering, and in this world we have to choose either love, which is suffering, or happiness. And love leads us to no other happiness than that of love itself and its tragic consolation of uncertain hope. The moment love becomes happy and satisfied, it no longer desires and it is no longer love. The satisfied, the happy, do not love; they fall asleep in habit, near neighbor to annihilation. To fall into a habit is to begin to cease to be. We are the more—that is the more divine—the greater our capacity for suffering, or rather, for anguish.”