From Slumdog to Maddog

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A Hearing in the Court of Sanity

“If God had made me a little less insane, I would have never discovered that He exists.” – Kedar Joshi

“Too much sanity may be madness. And maddest of all, to see life as it is and not as it should be!”—Miguel De Cervantes, Don Quixote

Scene: 7:00am. Ram’s well-appointed house in the hills of Pune, India.

Players: Ram, an older philosopher and Kedar, a troubled younger philosopher (for other philosophical adventures of this duo, go to slumdogphilosopher.blogspot.com and definingknowledge.blogspot.com).

Ram (opening the door for Kedar): Good morning. I don’t know if we’ve ever met this early before. And it’s Thursday—Thursday’s are good for you aren’t they?

Kedar (entering): Yeah, astrologically Thursdays are for me a day of self-discovery.

Ram: Excuse the mess—that’s what happens when a philosopher is on his own for a while. Want some breakfast? I’m just going to boil an egg.

Kedar: Aren’t you a vegetarian?

Ram: Well supermarket eggs are unfertilized so there is nothing living in them. They’re like a chicken’s period…so they’re a good source of protein for a vegetarian.

Kedar: A chicken’s period—I’m glad I don’t eat them. But tell me, how do they know which eggs are fertilized and which ones just the period?

Ram: Well they keep the rooster away when they want eggs for the market rather than chick production.

Kedar: So there’s a grave sin even in unfertilized eggs. To get them they keep the rooster away from the hens. Forced sexual frustration is a form of torture.

Ram: Let’s put a period on all this egg talk. What’s troubling you?
Kedar: Maybe like the rooster, sexual frustration is what’s troubling me, being a 30 year old virgin and all—anyway, you know yesterday, when you said I should see a psychiatrist...

Ram: Yeah, I said that because I found out from your parents you expressed the desire to kill yourself. I didn’t think you were serious but my parents suggested I talk to my psychiatrist about you.

Kedar: I was serious. You might not realize it because I’m so jovial with you but I’ve been very depressed, especially when I’m back at the concentration camp I consider my flat. That’s why when we’re out on the town, I am anxious to prolong the experience as long as possible. But I’m curious—what did your psychiatrist say?

Ram: He said a suicide threat should be taken very seriously. I then suggested bringing you to see him and he agreed. I don’t know if you’ll agree.

Kedar: You know yesterday, when you first said it, I was inclined to dismiss it: you see a psychiatrist so you think everyone should see a psychiatrist. But Thursdays are a day of self-discovery. In the morning I thought what if I am crazy? That would explain a lot...my depression, my irritability with my parents and others, my tendency to obsess about certain things, to get ‘stuck’ in jokes I alone find funny, the fits of laughter, in general not acting like a mature, manly man, almost like your unfertilized egg, devoid of even the initial sperm. It’s almost as if I could benefit from some hormone replacement therapy. Do you think the psychiatrist would prescribe testosterone shots? I would like to be confident enough to sweep women off their feet.

Ram: If psychiatrists prescribed testosterone, a lot more people would see one. But let’s be serious. You have to put yourself in the psychiatrist’s hands. Whatever he prescribes, you have to trust is best for you, even if it’s not testosterone shots.

Kedar: What does he give you, pills? How long have you been taking pills?

Ram: Oh it’s been so long. I was hospitalized for a month in the US after my visit here in ’97, and I’ve been taking pills with occasional lapses ever since. So it’s been over 13 years. But the dosage has been reduced gradually. My psychiatrist even thinks I could be off it entirely one day.

Kedar: Did the pills change you? I mean I think the illness has been good for me. I wouldn’t have made my philosophical discoveries if I had been too normal. And I like my personality. My biggest worry is if I take pills, I will become just another zombie. In fact taking mental pills could itself be a form of suicide, a dying inside. (Chuckling) I see you like the dog extolling the virtues of being
tame to the wolf from the Aesop’s fable. It’s scary if you’ve been howling at the moon all your life.

And maybe I don’t need pills. Just on my walk here today I caught myself thinking like an immature child again and the moment I realized what I was doing, I stopped…I became normal. Maybe now that I realize I have a problem, I can catch myself like that, righting myself like when you first learn how to ride a bicycle, until the balancing becomes second nature.

**Ram:** You need training wheels, my friend. That’s what the drugs have been for me. They’ve stabilized me, making me more productive. Like you I didn’t think I wanted to change but it’s been like rediscovering the real me, the me that got derailed following my divorce. I was depressed. I didn’t even do philosophy because my wife had said it made me too argumentative. The reason I’m almost off the drugs now is partly because of the fellowship I’ve found in India (gestures to Kedar) and partly because I’ve become so used to the mental state that the drugs induce that I can summon it effortlessly, with even a low dosage. To use your phrase, the balancing has become second nature.

Maybe you too can get off the meds one day but first you have to get on them to undepress yourself, which if my experience is any guide, you’ll like. It’s good to rediscover yourself.

**Kedar:** Hmm…rediscovering the real me. But like when you lose something, I don’t know where the real me stopped. It must’ve been so long ago that this feels like the real me, the me that doesn’t want to go away under the influence of pills.

**Ram:** C’mon it wasn’t so long ago. Your parents say you changed after coming back from England.

**Kedar:** No. I was thinking about it on my walk over. My earliest memory of uncontrollable laughter was when I was just a boy. I remember this day my father had undertaken to teach me the multiplication table. Because he had never taken an interest in us, I remember thinking his suddenly teaching me was so funny that I just couldn’t stop laughing.

**Ram:** Hmm, that’s interesting. You do always find the incongruous side of things, like the oddness of your dad teaching or paradoxes like your God paradox from our Deccan Dugout discussions. Let me see…you’re the youngest of two, right? (Kedar nods) Maybe pointing at the world and showing its incongruous underbelly is characteristic of younger siblings—they have to do that to get explanations from their elders. And the eldest child is conditioned to be the explainer. Hmm, maybe that’s why like in our earlier discussions, I, always the eldest child, seek to resolve the paradox.
Kedar: You’re being the explainer even now with me as the paradox. But there is a problem with your theory. I resolve paradoxes too. My NSTP theory resolves quantum mechanics’ EPR paradox. And in our earlier discussions you stated your own paradox, the paradox of perfection.

Ram: You know it’s interesting you bring up these things. They support my theory rather than disprove it. Your NSTP theory’s idealism is itself a paradox, something far removed from common sense. And my paradox of perfection actually is an extension of common sense, which finds hyperbolism of any sort paradoxical. To point out the paradoxes in a non-commonsensical notion like perfection is not defying commonsense—it’s rallying in support of it.

Kedar: You’re always fond of pointing out our differences, I, our similarities. We’re more similar than you realize. (Excessively dramatically) After all, let’s not forget, I solved your paradox of perfection.

Ram: Very funny. You know very well I solved my own paradox...I just put it into your mouth in the dialog for dramatic effect. In fact sharing the credit, being patronizing, may be another elder sibling trait.

Kedar: Yeah I was just teasing you. Your theory might be on to something. You know you could be a psychiatrist. Maybe I could just talk to you.

Ram: I can’t really take credit for the birth order theory. It’s folk psychology, like observations of the differences between men and women—for example, that women don’t like philosophers because they don’t make good ‘nesters’. It’s folk psychology because everyone is exposed to it. It has its merits but, like your astrology, seems to ‘explain’ too much. Nevertheless, as I’ve heard one noted philosopher of science say, psychology has never satisfactorily progressed beyond its roots as say physics or even linguistics ...perhaps because there simply is nothing to psychology beyond folk psychology.

Kedar: I get what you mean. But didn’t Wittgenstein compare psychology to mathematics of all things?

Ram: Yeah, but he did it disparagingly. He said both have sound methods—experiment in psychology and proof in mathematics—but both are subject to conceptual confusions.

Kedar: Anyway, you might laugh but I can’t help but think of another sense of folk psychology: it is the ‘psychology’ that your folks practice on you. It’s terrible: my parents, the aunts and uncles, they all lecture me, to get a job, to get married, to live like everyone else; my mother even sees it as ‘counseling’. You understand me better, my philosophical theories—I think you would make a good counselor for me.
Ram: I’m flattered. I do need something to do now that I’ve retired to India and maybe all those years of talking to therapists as a patient have given me insight into how to be a good counselor myself. If only I’d completed my PhD in philosophy…did you know in America a PhD is all you need to hang up a shingle as a psychologist? The PhD could even be in physical education.

Kedar: The standards are probably even more lax here. Maybe you can call yourself a psychologist just on the strength of your MPhil in philosophy.

Ram: But, not having an MD, I can’t prescribe medicines and I’m firmly convinced you need medicines.

Kedar: What do medicines do that simple talk therapy can’t? I mean I think I’m benefiting a lot just by talking to you.

Ram: Well a lifetime’s worth of conditioned behavior is pretty hard to counteract with an hour’s worth of ‘insight’ even if it is self-discovery Thursday. Psychiatry today is much more biology than philosophy, more push-pull the mechanism than convince the mind. I don’t think psychologists in America, counselors if you will, get much business these days, and if they do they’re always subordinate to psychiatrists.

And that’s to the good: nearly all the psychologists I’ve talked to—and there have been several—have indulged my bipolar fantasies, been enablers for them, just like I fear in lending you a sympathetic ear, I’m being an enabler for you.

Lecturing you as your parents do isn’t good because our natural tendency is to rebel against advice we find unpleasant, but if only we could be made to rebel against something we find too pleasant for our own good, like an all too patient listener. Maybe if the therapist seems to the patient crazier than himself, it would jolt the patient back to reality. Yes, a reverse psychology, which again is more folk than Freud. What do you think? Maybe with a counselor like that you wouldn’t need medications?

Kedar: You know there are times when I think you’re crazier than me, like in your paranoia when you thought I was taking advantage of you over a measly rickshaw bill, and that time you got really upset when your sister accidentally served you some chicken with your vegetables. I don’t think we’re similar at such times. But you weren’t consciously doing reverse psychology then. Anyway it would be a tough act to pull off, and the efficacy of it may not be so lasting. Maybe pills are better. Maybe that’s what I really need. Pills and money, or at least a friend with money.

Ram (smiling slightly): So you’re at least open to taking medication. That’s good, though I should mention there may be side-effects.
**Kedar:** What kind of side-effects?

**Ram:** There can be some serious ones. For example, I became a diabetic because of one medication I no longer take. There was even a class action suit against the makers and prescribers of zyprexa I was not litigious enough to join. Also I was much heavier in the US when I was on the higher dosage. But we learn by trial and error. The drugs that they use nowadays probably have fewer side-effects. I haven’t noticed any for the one drug I now take.

All the same, I’m weaning myself off the Western allopathic drugs, trying alternative therapies like homeopathic medicine, even hypnotherapy.

**Kedar:** Hmm…sounds like the thing to do is take allopathic drugs initially to treat the worst of the symptoms and then once you feel you’ve stabilized, switch to milder treatments that have fewer side-effects.

**Ram:** Whoa. I didn’t mean to mislead you. I’m getting weaned off the allopathic medicines all right but it’s under the care of the allopathic doctor. I’m entirely guided by him. In fact—you ought to appreciate this paradox—one serious side-effect of the drugs is that they make you feel better. The side-effect is you think you’re cured when the disease is merely in remission. You take yourself off the medications before you’re ready and before you know it, you’re back to where you started. I did this several times myself. The lesson I’ve learned is to try other things sure but be guided by a good medical psychiatrist. For example, my psychiatrist knows about these other treatments I try and even thinks they may help.

**Kedar:** I’ll have to remember that. Still it’s interesting about these alternative therapies. I knew about the homeopathic doctor you see but I’m curious about the hypnotherapist. What does he do exactly?

**Ram:** It’s a she. The hypnotic trance is apparently one in which she can access the intuitive right brain which for most people is buried under the dominance of the rational left brain. We’re actually two very different people. The hypnotherapist gives you affirmations to say to yourself that reflect the needs of the buried subconscious personality, the frustrations of which are responsible for most diseases. My hypnotherapist says that diseases are really a good thing, the self’s way of demanding a more balanced course than the one we might be following.

**Kedar:** A lady doctor that puts you in touch with your inner self. Very interesting. Maybe I should see her.

**Ram:** It’s not like that. Sure, you can see her but you should see the psychiatrist first. When do you want to go?
Kedar: We can go tomorrow. I didn’t mean to be so resistant to going. Deep down I know I need professional help. You were just coming on too strong for the meds. Now that I know your psychiatrist won’t drug me for the rest of my life, I feel OK about going.

Let’s discuss my symptoms. It’ll help me think about what I’m going to say to the psychiatrist.

Ram: Well if you think it’ll help. But remember I’m just a philosopher. The best I can do is remember what you say so that when I accompany you tomorrow I can recall any details you leave out. That and act as an ‘objective’ reporter of your condition just as my father does when he accompanies me on my visits to the doctor.

Kedar: Fair enough, I’ve already mentioned my irritability, my depression both of which you haven’t really seen so you’ll just have to take my word for it. What you must’ve seen is my root problem: my lack of self-control, the kind of control anyone who’s 30 years old should’ve by now been able to exercise.

Ram: I’ve certainly seen that, in your drinking, for example—though I know you don’t drink alone so you’re probably not an alcoholic.

Kedar: The drinking is certainly one manifestation. But the lack of self-control explains everything, all my obsessive tendencies, my overarching love of all things England, or rather how I go on and on about it. And my dwelling on the same joke like yesterday when I went on describing how each of our relatives would be as the Hulk, how funny it would be (laughing), to see Shyam’s arrogance magnified out of all proportion…

Ram (uneasy): You know, we never did Hulkify ourselves, what we’d be like if our natural tendencies were exaggerated to the n-th degree.

Kedar: You would be the monster of paranoia and I would be (laughing) a five-year-old girl—(laughing more) a really strange Hulk, a green, muscular five-year-old girl, (laughing uncontrollably) with green curly hair.

Ram (irritated): Go on—get it out of your system. I think you do these things because you think you’re being interesting and provocative. The discomfort others show when you carry on like this positively reinforces your belief that you’re being provocative. What you’ve got to realize is that these things may be funny to people initially but as you Hulkify them out of all proportion, they simply find them boring, loud and boring.

Kedar (stopping laughing): It’s hard not to lecture isn’t it, even for you. I liked you better as the reverse psychologist.
**Ram:** I’m sorry. I didn’t know when you were going to stop.

**Kedar:** I’m sorry. I do like to provoke people. Maybe it’s the younger sibling in me, pulling out all the stops to grab my share of the spotlight. But that’s not the madness part. The madness again is the lack of self-control. I enjoy laughter so much I do anything to prolong it.

Similarly, there is my love of the smell of new books. Even though I know I can’t afford them, I’m always buying them. But like your hypnotherapist said, there is a good side to this aspect of my disease. The books have brought me into contact with great minds. That’s why I like quotes so much. And of course they’ve spurred me on to my own philosophical theories.

The lack of self-control may be beneficial also in intellectual discourse. With you—usually—I enjoy intellectual discourse so much I dance on the high-wire to keep it going as long as possible.

**Ram:** Well I don’t know about the intellectual discourse, but the drinking, the laughter, maybe even the buying of books when you know you can’t afford them, it’s *akrasia*. (Incidentally, I can help with the buying the books part, as I intend to help less with the drinking.)

**Kedar:** Thanks, I think. But what was that word you used: a-crazy-a?

**Ram:** No. A-k-r-a-s-i-a. Akrasia, is the Greek word for weakness of the will. Only people as obsessively rational as the Greeks would think weakness of the will posed a philosophical problem.

**Kedar:** What is the problem?

**Ram:** Basically it’s, if you know some course of action is bad for you, why do you still do it? The Greeks did have an irrational side, the Dionysian as well as the Apollonian but it was like Plato’s charioteer metaphor: the soul is a chariot with an unruly black steed as well as a noble white steed, but reason the charioteer holds the reins, making akrasia a bit of a puzzle.

**Kedar:** I guess the Greeks didn’t realize that the reins also enable the horses to drive the charioteer.

**Ram:** That’s like the later Plato. Whereas Socrates viewed akrasia as impossible, the later Plato viewed akrasic action as caused by the appetites taking over, the black steed proving stronger than both the white and the charioteer as it were. But Aristotle recognized that not all akrasic actions need be appetitive; some can have a reasoning all their own, as when we rationalize, for example. Aristotle accounted for akrasia by maintaining that the akrasic has a syllogism for the
right course of action—so he does know what’s good for him. It’s just that a practical syllogism for the wrong course gets executed in its place.

**Kedar:** So weakness of the will comprises more than one type of phenomenon. In fact before this philosophical digression, I was going to mention another fundamental problem I have. It may be another form of akrasia. It’s sexual staring—you must’ve noticed it.

**Ram:** You mean that odd staring you do sometimes? I never realized it was sexual. If I had, I probably wouldn’t have invited you to ‘come over and see me’ as many times as I have.

**Kedar:** That’s just the thing. I’m not gay but the thought sometimes comes into my mind, ‘What if I stare sexually right now’ and before I can control myself, I’m doing it. I do it with potential students for our English classes, with potential astrology clients of both sexes, with even the 5-year-old girls my mother teaches.

**Ram (shifting uncomfortably in his seat):** Are you sure that on some level, you don’t find these people sexually attractive?

**Kedar:** Emphatically no. You know my preference for older women, the auntie types. In fact I do it most with people I don’t find sexually attractive. It’s a real problem man. I scare off potential clients all the time because they think I’m coming on to them. I have the same problem with gas: I sometimes think, ‘What if I break wind now’ and before I can control myself, I’m breaking away.

**Ram (suppressing a laugh):** Let’s say the lack of self-control causes you to repel people in several ways. But seriously, what you’ve described sounds like obsessive/compulsive disorder, which may be a third kind of akrasia (besides appetite and rationalizing). But knowing you, I would say, it’s not really o-c, since I think it’s due to your conscious desire to accentuate the incongruous. Tell me, do sexual stares, not to mention farts in mixed company, strike you as (chuckling) a ‘gas’?

**Kedar:** To you it must seem like a conscious decision, to scandalize. But most times, I just find myself staring sexually involuntarily. Aristotle may say it’s a practical syllogism, based on the premise ‘This would be fun’, executing too quickly before my knowledge that this wouldn’t be fun has a chance to be exercised. But I don’t think it’s any type of reasoning. I just fear I’ll stare sexually and like in a bad dream, the thing I fear inevitably materializes.

I wish I could be cured of this. Do you think the pills will help?

**Ram:** Pills are effective in treating negative moods like irritability and depression; I don’t think they affect habits, and come to think of it, they don’t
affect memory. I for one remember every crazy thing I did, my motivations, everything! It’s not like a soap opera in which fits of madness conveniently are followed by a bout of temporary amnesia. I think that’s why as much as my behavior has changed, I don’t think I’ve changed in the philosophically interesting personal identity sense. Memory has enabled me to say the ‘now-me’ must’ve been there all along potentially—that’s why he’s only been rediscovered.

**Kedar:** You know I googled personal identity a bit before coming. Don’t know why really. With my depressed, suicidal state when I’m alone I rarely take much interest in philosophy anymore. Maybe deep down I was opening myself to the possibility of taking medications, which was making me wonder whether I would be the same afterward.

It’s really depressing you know—both the illness and the prospect of a long course treating it.

**Ram:** How much of what you read do you remember? (Seeing Kedar shrug reluctantly) C’mon humor me! I want to make a point.

**Kedar:** Well, the criterion for personal identity—what makes a person the same over time—seems in the face of counterexamples to retreat ever deeper into more and more mysterious entities: from saying having the same body constitutes the same person, which is challenged by imagining brain transplants which are really body transplants; to character which can change with injury to the brain; to the conscious record of memory which two people can conceivably share down to the last detail; to the soul which is most mysterious.

For me the choice is like being given street directions: you’re told how to get where you want to go but you’re also told by what sign you should recognize you’ve gone too far and turn back. For me the soul is that sign. It’s like throwing up your hands and saying, ‘You are who you are.’ From its simple-mindedness I turn back to the psychological continuity or memory criterion. The problems with it—the hypothetical possibility that two people might have the same memory—just don’t seem real enough to worry me. And when the article I read tried to make it real by mentioning that the two hemispheres of our brain, each containing a complete set of memories, could be transplanted into different bodies, I thought so what? Maybe one person can split into two. The theory that we are a composite is as old as Plato. And what you said about the hypnotherapist certainly supports it.

Now what was your point?

**Ram:** My point is, depressed as you are you can still philosophize. You like quotes right? Remember Milton? “The mind is its own place and can in itself
make a heaven of hell and a hell of heaven”? I want you to realize as bad as your ‘concentration camp’ is, you still have philosophy, your mind to “make a heaven of hell”. Being a philosopher is part of your personal identity. I say this because though the pills may alleviate your depression, they won’t give you a purpose. Philosophy has given me a purpose, a purpose I had lost in America. You gave it back to me with your outlandish theories I just had to try to refute. And now I want to give it back to you.

**Kedar:** It’s hard. With the NSTP and UQV theories, I think I’ve done all the philosophizing I’m ever going to do. I seem to be stuck in solipsism.

**Ram:** You know who Milton has say ‘The mind’ quote? Satan. I don’t mean to advocate Satanism but you’ve got to rebel against your Philosopher-God that’s saddled you with the dead-end theory of solipsism. Isn’t it something like you and he are the only beings, him asking you about his own nature out of vanity? If you view everyone else as a zombie it must be hard for you to take an active interest in people, to see them as ends in themselves.

**Kedar:** Well it’s not *that* hard. You know the saying, ‘There are no atheists in foxholes’? My solipsism is like that—except I guess solipsism is hard to practice out of the foxhole.

**Ram:** Yeah, I guess so. It’s unlikely philosophy has shaped your behavior from childhood from where you trace your condition…though I think it can play a role in your treatment. More likely the same character-traits that distance you from people, predispose you to solipsism when you’re doing philosophy.

**Kedar:** Since I think we’re doing philosophy right now—it’s hard to tell: we keep switching between that and psychoanalysis—, what you said would be dismissed as a *ad hominem* argument. I’m a solipsist on the purely philosophical considerations of morality and inference to the simplest explanation—morality because I think God would have to be too evil to create so many sufferers and simplicity because one man deluded for some greater good of God’s choosing is easier to imagine than the creation of billions of completely distinct individuals for what purpose.

**Ram:** It’s interesting: your solipsism is not based on epistemological considerations like how do we know there are other minds and the weakness of the argument from analogy, since it relies only on one’s own experience. But solipsism has it’s own problems. For example, an idealist/solipsist like yourself, without any external criterion to identify what kind of thing he is, can’t even say, “I think therefore I am.” He can only say, ‘Thinking therefore thinking’. Even the ’I’ can’t be established without some criteria for distinguishing the I from the thinking.
Besides I think the argument from analogy has it backwards. Whether we’re doing folk psychology or something more elaborate, we understand our own mind by subsuming it under generalities we make about other minds, the behavior of other eldest and younger siblings for example.

**Kedar**: Well I don’t know about psychological theories but I’m perfectly comfortable with your ‘Thinking therefore thinking’ argument. NSTP theory adopts Hume’s bundle theory of consciousness. There is no self, no I, in which feelings inhere. Our consciousness of feelings is just another feeling. It’s as if there were no canvass to which paints are applied — there are only paints.

By the way, we don’t have to talk about solipsism. It’s a bit pointless really: no one can convince me I’m wrong and I can’t convince anyone I’m right. Maybe it is a dead-end as you say.

**Ram**: Good. Let’s talk about the bundle theory of consciousness.

Denying that there is a self doesn’t explain why we feel there is a self underlying our experiences. No doubt memory has something to do with this just as it did with questions of personal identity. But memory is not the only thing that gives us a feeling of self. Dogs, for example, have memories too and yet they seem to be a lower sort of self. We have less compunction against treating them like dogs than we would human beings.

**Kedar**: I can agree. There can be different types of consciousness just as there are different types of color — that still doesn’t commit me to the existence of an underlying canvass.

**Ram**: But the gradations of consciousness are interesting from a philosophical point of view, from consciousness of pain which might merit a species some lower level of ethical consideration, all the way to consciousness of the future, of the self in the future, which characterizes human beings, entitling them to the highest consideration. I think an underlying ‘canvass’ for all our feelings is a reasonable postulate given this sense of ‘more’ consciousness for some beings. More has got to be more of something.

**Kedar**: I don’t accept that we’re ‘more conscious’ than dogs — we’re just conscious in a different way like blue is different from red.

**Ram**: We are conscious in a different way, being a composite of many higher faculties than a dog can have. But consciousness is the staging area we share with lesser animals, the stage on which the results of our admittedly more varied faculties play out. We have access to more paints but the staging area, the canvass if you will, we share with lesser animals. It’s made more in our case by being host to a greater variety of paints.
Kedar: This may be as dead-ended as the solipsism. Anyway, what do you think it is about us that gives rise to the characteristically human form of consciousness?

Ram: I don’t know what it is bio-chemically but conceptually I think it’s self-awareness. Remember back when you first started philosophizing—it was probably in your teens. Like me, you probably began by contemplating the self, a knowing of oneself. But self-awareness goes back much further to when we were babies and could identify ourselves in the mirror. Lesser animals can’t do that you know. Once we have an idea of the self, we are ready to mentally project it into the future and be subject to hopes, apprehensions, the whole gamut of mental states that entitle us to greater rights.

Kedar: But don’t forget: roosters have rights too, rights to hens, rights that preempt our rights to unfertilized eggs. Sorry. You were inspiring but when you recalled how we first started philosophizing as teens, I couldn’t resist recalling the humble way we started philosophizing this morning.

Ram: And having come full-circle, I’m afraid I’m going to let you go. My parents are due to come from their Aurangabad trip in an hour and I’ve got to make the house presentable again.

Kedar: Oh OK. But thanks for the sympathetic ear and stimulating discussion. Maybe you should write all this down…it could be another article, like your ‘Know Thyself’.

Ram: What would we call it? ‘Know thyself’ and Slumdog Philosopher are already taken.

Kedar: I know what would be good…