

April 2010

THE TANGIBLE AND THE INTANGIBLE

No doubt you've heard the popular expression "keeping it real." As a person who is approaching the age that qualifies one for discount prices at the movie theater, I confess to reacting to such colloquialisms with a mixture of amusement and mild annoyance. To my way of thinking, the phrase "keeping it real" has nothing to do with seeking out lasting values in life, and everything to do with adapting one's mode of dress, speech, and behavior to the trendy and tenuous fashions of the day. Such a perspective comes with age, and I admit that my generation had its repertoire of youthful slang, as I'm sure is the case for each generation.

Last month I raised the question as to whether an abstraction was less real than a tangible object. Let's explore that question through numbers. Take for example, the number three, something that any five-year old can understand. But wait. Have you ever seen three? Your immediate reaction might be "yes, countless times." But have you? I submit that what you've seen were merely illustrations of the number three—three apples, three bottles, three shirts, or even its numerical symbol—but you've never actually seen three in its pure essence. And you never will. A pure number is a mathematical abstraction. A bowl of three red apples provides a tangible example of the number three, but when those apples are eaten, the concept of three continues unchanged while the apples are no more. So which is more real: the number three as an abstract principle, or three freshly picked red apples?

H. P. Blavatsky said that the Theosophical Society was formed to show mankind that "such a thing as Theosophy exists, and to help [us] ascend towards it by studying and assimilating its eternal verities" (*The Key to Theosophy*). You may gain an understanding of the eternal verities, but you'll never see or touch them in the empirical sense, as they do not belong to this world of finite and ephemeral objects. Truth exists outside of time, casting its periodic reflection on the temporal world through the purified thoughts and actions of human beings. When talking about "keeping it real," I believe this is about as real as it gets.

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