



Interview with Ahriman

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Recently, editors from a popular theosophical web publication dispatched me as a reporter to obtain an interview with one of the most polarizing figures since the time of the Chaldeans. Someone, who we might call a thought leader in the true sense of the word. The occasion was an announcement. A single press release, no further comments, that had detonated across global news feeds. It carried nothing but the words "Human potential: unlocked". Quite naturally I was daunted by the task, but equally excited to sit across from someone who was considered, by all credible accounts, as a force of nature, and who was, on top of it, about to unveil something revolutionary.

Even though I came to this meeting venue nearly an hour early, hoping to drink a coffee undisturbed to mentally prepare for the interview, it was a surprise to find Ahriman already present, confidently sitting in a chair being groomed by an attractive assistant wielding a make-up kit. Immaculately dressed and exuding confidence, Ahriman was looking very debonair.

'It is not easy getting an opportunity to see mister Ahriman. He is so terribly busy', said the young lady, not looking up, finishing a final pass along his jawline before stepping out of the room.

Ahriman sprung up to shake my hand and introduced himself saying 'I must say that of late I have been positively surprised by your organization. You guys finally seem to be going with the times. Blavatsky AI; great idea! Hell, right now I can whip out my personal phone', and here he did in fact produce the phone, though he didn't

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unlock it, but just held it up as a prop. 'Open the app or go online, query my name, and it would come up with all the information one would need. Sourced, cross-referenced, no hallucinations. We fixed that, by the way. You're welcome.'

'Thanks, I guess', I said, 'artificial intelligence can be a very useful tool. But the occasion of this interview is not Blavatsky AI. You surely have been occupied with greater things?'

'Indeed. Glad you asked. So, my team have been measuring brain states', said Ahriman, and here he gestured, intently sweeping his hands apart as if he was making room in the air for what he was about to say, 'and I want to be clear, we collected, and I cannot stress this enough, mountains, absolute mountains of evidence. EEGs. Theta-Alpha-Gamma waves. Neurotransmitters and receptors; D1/D2, μ -opioids. A whole, picture a web, okay, a mesh, of small circular patches, adhesive, latex-free for the allergy people, finely packed with sensors. Then we brought in all manner of gurus, yogis, saints, arahants, advanced meditators. You name it, the whole gamut. The sensors were then applied to their temples and to that one spot right above the eyebrows, the ajna chakra spot. Simultaneously we're tracking dopamine rushes in real time, quantifying the flowing of bliss; *piti* and *sukha* down to the finest nano molecular pictogram. Plus, and this is the part our head of research gets most excited about, quantum-statistical analysis, run over years, upon years, upon ... I mean literal ages of longitudinal data.'

I blinked, trying to keep up with my note taking.

'All this time, we have been working hard in developing a pill that, now wait for it, wait because I want you to actually sit with this for a second,' said Ahriman, following up with another carefully engineered hand gesture, 'grants enlightenment. Full stop. The cure for enlightenment. This is supreme liberation from worldly suffering, and it comes packed, and this is the beautiful part, in a small capsule. Vanilla flavored. Or mint. We're still A/B testing the flavor.'

'Let me see if I get what you're saying,' I said. 'You will bring to market a pill that affects the brain of the consumer in a way that mimics the

state of enlightenment?'

'Mimics', Ahriman repeated. He sat up slightly, almost laughed, and pointed at me like I'd just said the magic word. 'No, no, no, and I want to stop you right there, because this is exactly the kind of legacy thinking that is holding back the field of spiritual science for about as long as I can remember. It doesn't "mimic" enlightenment. It is enlightenment. No simulation is happening here, there's no as if, there's no Chinese Room. It truly is the real deal. The brain state is the enlightenment. There was never anything else to it. We just lacked the technology to back that up.'

I interrupted him, looking to force him to commit to his argument. 'You are offering a quick fix?'

'The quickest', said Ahriman smugly.

'You're talking about awakening as a chemical reaction, instead of a state of consciousness? A consciousness that is the result, or the equivalent of a genuine and profound realization? The dawning of an inner light?'

'See, and okay, I love your question, I really do, because it's got this hidden assumption baked into it. By that I mean the assumption that there's an "inner light" sitting somewhere behind the brain state. Like the brain state is the smoke and something else underneath it is the fire. But that's just not been my team's experience of the data. An obscene amount of data, to be perfectly honest. What we found is that there is no "behind". There is no man, woman or, God forbid, eternal soul behind the curtain doing the "real" realizing while the theta waves just sort of narrate it after the fact for the benefit of the neurologists. The brain waves aren't the signals. Rather, they're the event itself. Cognition, consciousness, what you'd call creativity, insight, grace, satori or whatever vocabulary your tradition's comfortable with, it's all just information being processed, and processed very, very well, in this case, because we've had many years and a multi-trillion-dollar budget to make sure of it. And I know how that sounds. It sounds like I'm taking something away from you, some sacred interior thing, but I'd push back on that, because what I'm actually saying is the opposite; if

it's processing, we can measure it, and if we can measure it, we can optimize it, and if we can optimize it', here the gesturing hands again, parting, opening, offering 'we can hand it to anyone. Not the lucky few who have time to wander off to sit still in a cave for forty years. Anyone. That's not a reduction. I'd call it democratization.'

Here he paused, reached for a glass of water to take a sip before continuing.

'People have been maligning my endeavors for about as long as I remember. As if I were a devil incarnate. As if I was intent on the destruction of humanity. Which, frankly, is absurd. I love humans! I just want to improve them. Let's take it to the next level.'

'So you are optimizing humanity?' I asked.

'Correct.'

'Towards what end?' Ahriman scoffed at the question.

'No offense, but that's such a loaded concept. "End", as if there exists a finish line. As if we can make it to the pearly gates and collect a prize. A medal for having adequately suffered. There is no end, and that's the point. It's been dragging on for aeon upon cyclical aeon. Aeons of Grief. Doubt. Despair. And look, I know what you are about to say, that you guys aren't masochists either, that you aspire to growth, that wisdom is something you learn to embody rather than just, you know, consume. But all of that growth stuff? Unnecessary. That is the part everyone gets wrong; all of that was never wisdom. Latency, that's what it was. Friction waiting to be engineered away. Yet, you call it self-realization because self-realization is the romantic word you had lying around for a flaw nobody bothered to fix.'

A creaking of the door anticipated Ahriman's assistant. She walked over to her boss and discreetly whispered something in his ear.

'I am very sorry', Ahriman said, but the time allotted for this interview has run out'. He extended his hand, and I took it, and it was, again, timed and firm.

'For what it's worth', he said, not unkindly, 'I don't think we disagree as much as you think we do. You want liberation. I want liberation.' He

reached into the inner pocket of his jacket and produced, between two fingers, a single capsule. Small, pale, a color that wasn't quite mint and wasn't quite vanilla, and set it on the side table next to my untouched coffee. 'On the house', he said.

Then he was gone, and the assistant was gone and I sat for a moment alone with my stale coffee, and the capsule, which looked like nothing. Really nothing at all.