

Knowledge as A Star Map

An Introduction to The Firmament Series

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About The Firmament Series

The Firmament Series is a series of mini-essays aimed to define, explore or argue for concepts used in my more extensive essays. The main purpose of The Firmament Series is to provide curative reading for those inclined to deeper understand my

perspective. This is an organically evolving series of very short essays, occasionally updated with changes and comments, if I feel that new insights. The Name of this project is inspired by early-modern astronomy. The *Firmament* was a common name for what was considered to be the outermost sphere of fixed stars in the night sky, populating the

highest realm of the superlunar world¹. These short essays could be considered the brightest stars of that night sky; sometimes arranged in constellations. Although The Firmament Series isn't necessarily a serious academic endeavor, I will borrow from academic conventions for the sake of clarity.

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Magnetic or Stellar North?

Before the early-modern era, western sailors took the compass' alignment for the North Star or *Polaris* as given, something with was complicated when sailing beyond the Medierainean. That story always stuck with me as an analogy for how perspective matters when constructing an argument. Learning new things inadvertently re-contextualizes what you already know.

Ever Present Inner Space

For the better part of a decade, the image of a star map or a night sky has been ever present in my inner world. Sometimes it's been overtly present, and other times it's been just subtly bubbling in the background. Space has been

ever present in my imagination since early childhood, where I admittedly probably knew more straight facts about our Solar System than I do today. Past my teenage years and into my twenties, an interest in art and aesthetics probably helped realigning that present interest towards more pure symbolism. Some of my earliest poetry frequently featured a starry night as its backdrop, often as an analog to that of a city at night. My first music album under the name One Eye Dreaming made extensive use of that image in its lyrical content. At the time of writing this, I've chosen to keep that work private, save for a few CD:s made which were gifted to family and close friends. The portal phrase which became a theme setter for that album was inspired by my brief fascination with French surrealist poet André Breton, before

¹ Lawrence M. Principe, *The Scientific Revolution* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 39-40.

moving on to perhaps more light and jovial sources of inspiration.

"We Let Pale Stars populate our
dreams at night /
An when those stars become
streetlights in the mist,
we chase them"

The album was recorded and produced amidst personal struggle as is not too uncommon for your early 20's, hence why I eventually withdrew the release to keep it private as I felt it was no longer representative for the more jovial person I am today. Much like the navigators on the open sea having their compass needles no longer aligning with the *North Star*, moving past that album, I felt that further life experience had me aligned elsewhere. For the longest time, that perspective shift had resulted in presenting what I considered to be a very naive symbolic language to have grown stale and uninspiring, something which naturally led to writer's block for the longest time, an all too common feeling I'm sure most creative people have once felt. Interestingly, while this core imagery of a starry night sky faded into the background as I sought a new perspective, taking an intro course in the History of Ideas came to bring the imagery back to me, front and center, although from a different angle. Suddenly my inner compass didn't necessarily point towards the *North Star* which I had once aimed towards, and I found new inspiration in unexpected places, illuminated by that portal phrase above. Instead of being inspired to write poetry again, which would be expected (and at times deeply desired), I started to find new applications for the core imagery which at that point had felt stale for the better part of a decade. All of a sudden, new stars began to appear on what I had felt was an all too static backdrop which I thought I had turned away from.

A "Stella Nova" moment

Like how Tycho Brahe's discovery of a *new star* in the sky in 1572, This rather dramatic shift began to emerge as a result of a recently finished model involving the Scientific Revolution. Through that literature, my previous vocabulary was added onto by the corpus of astronomical discoveries which eventually came to linger past the module in question. The fantastical aspects of the analogous thinking which permeated the natural philosophy of much of Western history until the Scientific revolution proved to once again have me look to the skies, albeit for different reasons.

Stars and Constellations

Through the emphasis on Astronomical discovery, the symbolic imagery of stars and constellations once again started to re-emerge as part of my inner life, now with a much wider focus. Throughout the intermediate period between that first album and the present day, studies in everything from Art History, Chemistry and Political Science provided an extensive academic backdrop, onto which the symbolic thinking of stars and constellations came to not only fit, but to provide infrastructure for connecting everything I had learned and experienced in this intermediate period.

Connecting the dots

I found the analogy of constellations of different stars to be a very engaging way of recontextualizing previous insights and experiences. Aside from the academic context, where ideas, models and concepts could be connected horizontally by imagining them as stars on a night sky, even personal experiences which at the time seemed to make little sense, were found to provide insights, once connected to the bigger picture. This re-alignment has been

an ongoing process for many years, and I believe the reason for this particular symbolism to make a triumphant return without warning is to be attributed to these connections having been made in the background.

The Aim of The Firmament Series

What I'm describing above is for all intents and purposes a very novel discovery, where the imagery associated with it is ever evolving. Starting to view life in general as a firmament of stars, new stars appear weekly, if not daily as

the course I am currently taking is still underway. This means that nothing about the Firmament Series is particularly formalized or set in stone. I intend to have this loose format as a platform for testing ideas and sharing concepts or views which I find interesting or necessary to focus on, should they become the subject of deeper reflection. This is very much a voyage underway, and I expect continuous, if subtle alignment shifts to have the stars and the constellations to ever shift, if not in composition, at least in perspective.

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Further Reading

Lawrence M. Principe, *The Scientific Revolution, A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2011.