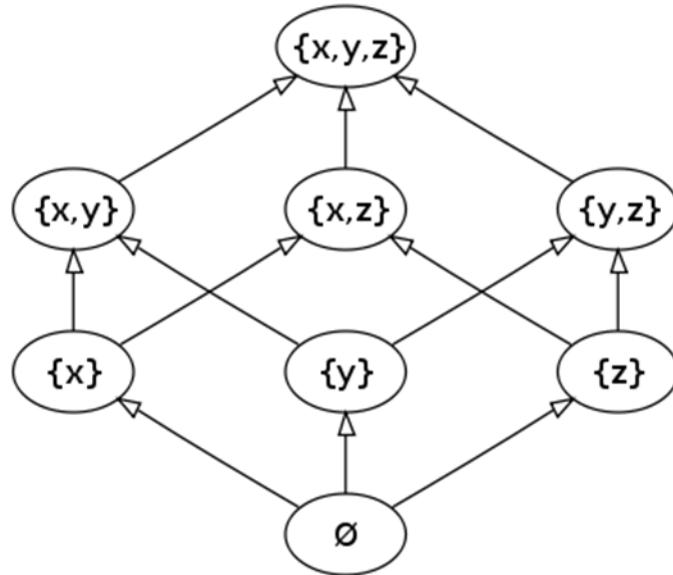


DAN MAY

*A Poem on the Hasse Diagram of a Three-Element Set, Realized as a Children's Book,  
with Apologies to Alan Lightman*



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In the beginning, all is null.

You think to yourself "this is pretty dull.

I think I'll go 'head and create another being."

But when she looks at the void, what is she seeing?

Is she hopeful about the darkness around,

Or does she despair that nothing abounds?

Or maybe she's sort of split between the two

And carries inside her a third point of view.

So creator, would you give life to an idealist?

Or would you prefer a pessimist, or maybe a realist?

(Idealist, go to  $\{x\}$ .    Pessimist, go to  $\{z\}$ .    Realist, go to  $\{y\}$ .)

{x = Idealist}

Your happy new creature is glad to be here,  
With nothing around, there's nothing to fear.  
She dances and sings in the great empty space  
But no suns are there to light her face.  
And she begins to wonder if she could have others –  
“What would it feel like to have sisters or brothers?”  
After a while (no watches to tell how long)  
She asks you to create someone else to share in her song.  
So creator, you decide to make a second, different from her.  
Will your new being shrug, or rage, when hard times occur?

(To shrug, go to {x,y}.                      To rage, go to {x,z}.)

{z = Pessimist}

Your angry new creature finds it difficult here  
In the expanse of nothing. She feels only fear  
And cowers and cries in the great empty space,  
But almost, just barely, wishes to show her face  
To friends, neighbors or foes – she'd take any others.  
But secretly longs for some sisters or brothers.  
After a while (no clocks to say how time flies)  
She asks you to create someone else who can hear her cries.  
So creator, you decide to make a second, different from her.  
Will your new being shrug, or laugh, when hard times occur?

(To shrug, go to {y,z}.                      To laugh, go to {x,z}.)

{y = Realist}

Your clear-eyed new creature is unsure of it here –  
The darkness allowing both safety and fear.  
She investigates every corner of the great empty space,  
Including, with her fingers, her own solitary face.  
And she begins to wonder if, maybe, there are others –  
Friends, neighbors, foes – even sisters or brothers.  
After a while (no calendars show how many months went through)  
She asks you to create someone else to investigate, too.  
So creator, you decide to make a second, different from her.  
Will your new being rage, or laugh, when hard times occur?

(To laugh, go to {x,y}.            To rage, go to {y,z}.)

{x,z = Idealist, Pessimist}

The beings you've created have such difference perspectives  
Each thinks the other is probably defective.  
One says "The void is blank canvas; I feel so ambitious"  
The other insists the blankness is much more malicious.  
They argue for eons in their empty land,  
Eventually realizing it has a part they don't understand.  
One says "someone's missing"; the other reluctantly agrees  
And they decide they must be not two, but three.  
Creator, have you figured what these two could use?  
They need you to bring the third type you didn't yet choose.

(Go to {x,y,z}.)

{x,y = Optimist, Realist}

The first being you created is glad to be seen  
By someone else who might just know what she means.  
One says "The void is blank canvas; I feel so ambitious"  
The other wants to believe but is a little suspicious.  
For eons they mostly enjoy their empty land  
But eventually realize it has a part they don't understand.  
One says "someone's missing"; the other basically agrees  
And they decide they must be not two, but three.  
Creator, have you figured what these two could use?  
They need you to bring the third type you didn't yet choose.

(Go to {x,y,z}.)

{y,z = Pessimist, Realist}

The beings you've created, when first they meet, are wary;  
They may complement each other, but not very.  
One is sure the void they're in is malicious  
The other's not sure; she's a little suspicious.  
For eons they interrogate their empty land,  
And eventually realize it has a part they don't understand.  
One says "someone's missing"; the other has to agree  
And they decide they must be not two, but three.  
Creator, have you figured what these two could use?  
They need you to bring the third type you didn't yet choose.

(Go to {x,y,z}.)

{x,y,z}

At each stage of creation, you were forced to pick  
Between one dour, one sunny or one pragmatic.  
But haven't you seen, felt it deep in your bones,  
That the selves you were building were really your own?  
And that no single take on the void is quite right  
But rather you need all three to let in some light.  
And so now that inside of you all three are in,  
Your dawn has broken and the real creation can begin.