

Virtual Reality: The Third Wave, Chapter 1

"Wow!" she said, turning her head and pivoting her torso to the right, "there's that shark again."

"He seems to be following you around?" This is the third time she spoke about a shark.

"My Dad says there's a cave down here where you can hide and be safe."

Word seems to be getting out about this environment....seeds of a family myth?

"The turtle and the eel . . . they swim in the deep caverns" -- tilting her head upward --
"then float up near the surface."

"You are starting to see patterns in the way they move?" I continue to hear the bubbling of her exhales....

First nodding her head, then suddenly lifting slightly off the couch cushion, "WOW! There he is again! That was close!"



The WOW was uttered by my college-bound teenage granddaughter in May, 2015. She had come for a copy of my 1993 book *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. The book was published three years before she was born. During her visit, she dons the *Oculus Rift* headset, a piece of Samsung VR Gear for the Galaxy Note 4 smartphone. This version is the prototype of a commercial product Samsung plans for 2016.

Her WOW! is a subjective response. We usually don't ask "What do you mean by 'WOW'?" The exclamation says squat about any virtual world you may have entered. You feel transported and you simply express shock. Yet WOW says a lot if we listen to its perennial echoes. Language may be a "raid on the unspeakable," (T.S. Eliot in *East Coker*). It can be one small step away from the "booming, buzzing confusion" of naked experience (William James, *Principles of Psychology*). WOW conveys something of import emotionally, not a description of a substantial entity but a token of wonder, surprise, even awe. Wonder may trigger a much longer statement. In fact, Aristotle attributes the lengthy history of Western philosophy to the impact of wonder. Who can gainsay him that Western philosophy has been a prolonged and very wordy response to an amazing world?

Here I am, over twenty years after writing *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, totally immersed and meditating, considering the three waves of Virtual Reality that span several decades into the 21st Century....