

Wihraghfhagoieawegoihhhgga9h9uh9hfehaghhaegsipubgaqu Sense from Nonsense

“Qewweg eogpneg gopiergnqegr”
“weoignwwrohnweogiqeg” – wpe eriwpinrbe

Introduction

In the middle of a career fair, I stepped up to a table and waited to speak with some HR rep. I think her name was Bailey, but I could only remember that fake smile. “What’s your name?” she asked.

“Mack.”

“So, tell me about yourself...” And I realized I could only answer that in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced. To the eyes of the company, I was only a human resource. Something about an elevator pitch felt dehumanizing, and I couldn’t figure out why. We both did our little dance like the birds on the discovery channel: was I impressing her? Did I sell myself to the cooperate biome?

It made me wonder: if not that, who was I? I know myself, but how do other people know me? How would they describe me? What words do they use? And when they’re not around, do I even exist? This sent me into a spiral that I would fall into over the course of months.

I have this vivid image of myself at 11 p.m. on a school night some time near the end of my sophomore spring semester. I just finished eight 100m dashes on the auburn track. It was partly cloudy, but the moonlight struck the clouds just enough illuminate the field. I walked to the center and laid down, wrapping my hands across my stomach as I stared into the sky. I wanted

something to talk to me. I said to myself: *If something's out there, I want to feel it.*

I laid there for fifteen minutes. Cicadas chirping, the wind howling in my ear, the grass itching my back. I could almost hear the wind speaking, though I can't remember what it said. If you've never stared into the darkness for twenty minutes and really contemplated the idea of never existing—not through the lens of religion, but through the nihilist view of nothing—you don't know how humiliating it feels. It crushes everything you've ever done, and everything you ever will do.

This lonely exploration led me to the bizarre conclusion that nothing really makes sense. We are born into these strange wet bodies and cling to familiar patterns—relationships, sciences, languages—because they give shape to the void. But if I were born into the body of a cow, I would absorb that cowish reality as naturally as I accept this one. Why not just let go, if we all end the same? Forgotten.

This was a terrifying conclusion, so I denied it. And if I could articulate it, at least I had something definitive to explore. This work then emerged: late at night, worried about death, begging the universe for mercy. The end goal, I hoped, was to figure out what I should do before I die.

When I began, I thought religion and science were mutually exclusive. But now I understand: science is a method of observation, religion a method of speculation, and everything is absurd. Each is an attempt to wrestle with the same affliction: the conscious disease of uncertainty.

When I demanded reason, I saw that all logic is built from nothing. However, tracing the limits of science realizes that nothing should have ever existed. And, after the initial wave of pessimism, I concluded that there's no gold medal for nihilism. Doubt is necessary to know ourselves, but at some point, we must

find faith to love our lives. Through this process, I've made peace with the idea of ending, realizing that love only exists because of the promise of death. Without it, there is no sacrifice—then no reward for living. But maybe this book is my fear of death cementing itself before I go.

Part I: An Agnostic Framework for the Universe

“The Universe is under no obligation to make sense to you.” – Neil DeGrasse Tyson

The most natural place to start any existential crisis is with religion: the basis for any feasible answer. But this never felt like enough for me. It was too arbitrary that I could grow up somewhere else and believe in a different God. So, I've shifted the way I look at things to take in all views at once; how can I live under the average of all religion? Though, now I understand this concept of faith and idealizing a certain belief. But this didn't feel right for me either, because my motivation for any one religion will be skewed by my personality. And my personality, again, a result of where I was born. I needed something in between that still made life feel meaningful; something that could broadly determine what I should do. From there, I could at least pretend that I understand life for the sake of living.

This framework is a skeleton for universal answers; the truth is probably some wild combination, unfathomable by human perception. I could never possibly come up with the words to describe the universe—which is the same issue that emerges under doctrine: interpretability leaves room for our own delusion.

And on this predicament of delusion, I must remain aware of *why* I choose the words that I choose, make the arguments that I make, and draw the conclusions that I draw. Because absolutely everything that I think of is a result of my own biology. And my biology, a result of lineage. As we journey deeper into the origin of thought, we naturally find ourselves at the origin of man. Before drawing conclusions about the universe, we must understand the engine driving us to create this framework in the first place; why do we wonder?

Natural Law

Humanity emerged from the infinite void of space through the engine of natural selection. Nature's rule is simple: if something thrives, it spreads. Over time, each form of life molds to its environment—not by intention, but by random variation. Because specific mutations reproduced and lived longer, their genes spread—hence, selection. Our ability to think is simply the newest advantage in this process, allowing reason to compete with instinct in the calculation of survival. In this way, biology is a historical science. Our beautiful complexity is an outcome of a timely journey—evidence of process, not necessarily a divine architect.

Pleasure evolved as a biological tool to motivate behavior. Food tastes good, sex feels orgasmic, and pain feels bad because these reactions keep us alive and reproducing. But as human intelligence matured, a new force of pleasure emerged: heroism. The drive to see ourselves as the protagonist and earn regard from others allowed us to cooperate, take risks, and accomplish more than instinct alone could achieve. Like a fox hunts for food, we hunt for virtue.

If we go deeper into this observation, we might come to the haunting conclusion that even love is just a biological tool. We

needed that initial attraction to reproduce, but we also needed to love each other so we could sustain society. When our kids were born, we needed some incentive to protect them. Because of this, some darker instincts emerged.

Self-preservation, territorialism, and resource-guarding were evolutionary necessities. To survive, we had to hoard scarce resources and defend our land. In nature, selfishness is often rewarded in the short term, while cooperation evolves when repeated interaction, reputation, or kinship make it pay. These instincts carved themselves so deeply into our biology that even when abundance arrived, the habits remained.

Heroism often distorts our moral compass, bending “righteousness” to fit the story we tell about ourselves. Hence, our selfish instincts prevail even in a civil society. The same self-image that fuels compassion and perseverance can just as easily justify conquest, war, or exploitation while preserving the illusion of virtue. In this way, the human is not an objective judge, but a selfish protagonist—guided less by truth than by the relative standards of their own narrative.

As we mature, we learn to treat others as if capable of pure empathy, yet even our generosity is steered by internal reward. At its core, the mind is hedonistic: every intellectual and moral pursuit still triggers the same pleasure circuits that evolved to keep us alive. The deepest pleasure of all is the one that validates our heroism—one that tells us that we are as special as our mind wonders. But the sobering reality is that we can only reason from relative observations, and no complete guide to becoming a “universal hero” will ever be given to us. Faced with that uncertainty, we crave meaning and resist the void; uncertainty feels like a threat, so we rush to narrative to quiet it. Humanity has long reached for something greater—crafting stories, laws,

and philosophies to anchor our heroism in the infinite. This is how faith sprouted from nature.

A Brief History of Theology

When man first developed the ability to question, the answers molded to the environment around him. Spirits lived in animals, storms meant the gods were upset, and an eclipse must have been a curse. These early beliefs were the first attempts to make sense of a mysterious world.

But when the inexplicable struck—droughts, plagues, floods, earthquakes—man had no framework but faith. And the question of death was a mystery everyone recognized, so perhaps death could be bargained with—offerings became the logic of exchange with the gods. Today we pity the amount of sacrifice in ancient religions, but what modern rituals will look equally absurd?

As societies grew more complex, religious doctrine hardened. By the time of Mesopotamia and Egypt (around 3000 BCE), gods were already tied to all walks of life. Yet it was in Greece and Rome (roughly 1000 BCE–400 CE) that religion assumed distinctive civic and state-cult roles within public life, rather than being only about explaining the world—it was also about control (like promising fallen warriors a glorious afterlife).

But not all religions do this. Somewhere in the Indian subcontinent around 1500 BCE, a radically different kind of faith emerged. One that didn't justify power, control, or primal bias; one that wrestled with our attachment to meaning rather than embrace it. Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and much later,

Sikhism—share a root idea in dharma, a word meaning cosmic law or duty, that allowed them to turn inward and find peace.

This was not a denial of self but a profound acceptance of it: the self is not special, and clinging to its illusion leads only to suffering. Such a way of life weakens worldly ambition while strengthening inner virtue. In India and much of Asia, these traditions endured for thousands of years, steady and cyclical like the philosophies they taught. Their simplicity made them enduring, but also less aggressive in the global arena.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Abrahamic religions ignite the internal flame of heroism. These religions trace their lineage to Abraham, who first made covenant with God. Instead of dissolving the self, they sanctified it eternally: your soul is unique, chosen, and judged. Life ends with infinite reward or punishment. Such a vision gave unparalleled incentive—not only to live righteously, but to spread your faith. But history makes the danger clear: when each side believes it holds the only true map to salvation, conquest becomes virtue. The promise of eternal peace and judgement creates room for delusion, because no one can agree on whose absolute morality is the real one. In some eras this led to massive violence, but more commonly, it puts ourselves at the center and casts judgement onto outsiders.

The pattern is clear: Abrahamic religions often align with the heroic instinct to conquer, expand, and reinterpret. Dharmic religions often reflect the humble instinct to endure, surrender, and simplify. One spreads through empire and splinters into a thousand interpretations; the other sits like an ancient river, changing course slowly, always flowing.

The first big cracks in absolute faith were among a frustration with the church-state's corruption. Martin Luther, hammering his theses to the church door in 1517, shattered the illusion of a single, unchanging authority. The Reformation was less a denial of God than an acknowledgment that no institution can hold the universal truth.

From there, skepticism gained momentum. Enlightenment philosophers denied miracles, demanded reason, and pushed God further into abstraction. Science followed, not to erase faith but to humble it. Galileo's telescope dethroned Earth from the center of creation. Darwin traced life to natural selection, a blind force of chance. The Big Bang suggested a universe with a birth, perhaps even one that Genesis foreshadowed. Science never killed God—it only reminded us that the divine cannot be captured by language or doctrine. What we now know is that we will never know everything, and therefore we will never reach a moral absolute.

Belief in the modern world is less about allegiance and more about exploration. Recent surveys show nearly a third of Americans now identify as religiously unaffiliated, yet most still cling to some idea of a higher power.¹ A friend might call themselves Christian out of commonality but never really read the gospel. Another might reject all institutions yet meditate daily, borrowing from Buddhism without accepting its metaphysics. Even the word “atheist” feels incomplete, because it suggests emptiness, when most skeptics still believe in something.

So, what does it mean, today, to be “Christian”? Must one believe Jesus was literally superhuman, walking on water and

¹ Pew Research Center, “Has the Rise of the ‘Nones’ Come to an End?”, Jan. 16, 2024 (religiously unaffiliated ≈ 28–30% depending on series)

rising from the dead? Or is it enough to believe that he was right about love—would that get us into heaven?

With a modern understanding on the origin of man, we have the opportunity to approach religious ideologies through a critical lens. The Dharmic traditions survive as practices of peace; the Abrahamic traditions survive as stories of meaning; skepticism survives as the humility to doubt. Where ancient man sought absolute answers, modern man learns to live with questions.

And perhaps this is the true maturity of belief: to embrace faith not as an absolute, nor as inheritance, but as a philosophy of hope. To be faithful in our time is to hold the paradox—science explaining what we see, religion speculating why we see, humility reminding us that neither has the final word.

The Modern Approach

Religion is how we romanticize the universe, with the goal of loving our life. Zoom out on why we’re drawn to faith, and two forces do most of the pulling: the culture we’re born into and our denial of the unknown, branching into our fear of meaninglessness and death. That mix makes early belief inherited rather than chosen.

This is why teaching religion to children before they can contemplate existence can be dangerous: it polarizes the mind, swapping one doctrine for universal truth. A child doesn’t “decide” their faith any more than they decide their native tongue. Later in life, those cultural defaults become harder to question, because they shape what even feels plausible. Ideally, we meet all ideologies at an age of discovery, though total impartiality is impossible.

The second force is deeper: our refusal to live without answers. The human mind is a pattern-seeking engine; when we face the abyss, we stitch together stories to make it less terrifying. Faith promises that the chaos has a reason, and that we are not just dust in the void. But when faith is built from fear, it offers comfort instead of courage.

The weight of this fear shaped religion's sharpest tool: the holy ultimatum. If culture planted the seed of belief, judgment watered it. What better way to guarantee faith than to make life itself a test? A short, chaotic life could still matter if it ended with eternal reward—or eternal punishment.

This was the genius and danger of the Abrahamic turn. By anchoring morality in an afterlife, religion gained a power beyond myth or ritual: it could compel people to live, fight, and even die for a promise that could never be disproven in this life. The fear of meaninglessness became the fear of damnation, and that fear kept whole societies in line. But this bargain also poisoned faith. When belief leans on fear, it risks turning love of life into submission before power. The holy ultimatum gave purpose, but it also shackled imagination to judgment.

Seen more broadly, this is not just about Abraham or Christ—it is about the psychology of meaning itself. Faced with death and uncertainty, humans sought patterns strong enough to order life. Religion did not begin as abstract dogma; it began as ways to carry meaning across generations.

With that in mind, we can approach faith from a less biased lens. When first exposed to religion, most of us do not stop to ask why people believed in the first place. Take the Bible: who was it for? How did the accounts arise? How were they transmitted?

In the first centuries, Christian texts spoke to communities that weren't modern skeptics, and most believers heard Scripture performed—read or sung—because literacy and access were limited. That communal, oral setting shaped how messages were framed and remembered. Because the earliest stories of Christ were performed to shape belief, the fair reading is to treat them as testimony aimed at formation, not as forensic reporting by modern standards.

Our earliest physical witnesses to the New Testament are fragmentary papyri and later complete codices. The earliest scrap of John 18 dated to the early 2nd century.² Besides that, the earliest we have area early 3rd-century leaves with portions of all four Gospels and Acts, and early 3rd-century writing with extensive Luke and John.³ And the set of books we now call the New Testament was gradually agreed by churches over generations. Athanasius's Festal Letter 39 (367 CE) gives the first extant list of the twenty-seven books used -today.⁴

This chain—from fragments to codices to a fixed list—shows a normal historical process of copying, selecting, and standardizing across communities. Even if the books were immediately written down by their respective authors, those autographs are lost; some stages of transmission are simply gone to time. So, the question becomes, what did these communities preserve and why?

All stories include a divine savior, hope, and miracles. This formula reassured people in the face of uncertainty, because

² CSNTM, “P52 (Rylands St John Fragment),” commonly dated 2nd c.

³ CSNTM, “P45 (Chester Beatty I),” early 3rd c

CSNTM, “P75 (Bodmer XIV–XV),” early 3rd c

⁴Athanasius, *Festal Letter 39* (A.D. 367), first full 27-book list

backing faith in the supernatural made it easier to trust. But all of these stories are documented with the same tone of countless other ancient miracle stories that we never talk about.⁵ If we dismiss those, intellectual honesty demands we apply the same standard to religious claims. The Christian resurrection, at the center, leaves us only with testimony and inference.

It wasn't until the emergence of modern science that we finally reinterpreted Genesis. Now we can view it as a metaphor that doesn't directly debunk religion. Interpreting literally is almost an insult to nature; backing our faith by breaking the observable world. Trillions of atoms, arranged in such a way that I can sing creed on karaoke on a Saturday night. Is that not a miracle? Is natural selection not a miracle? Or the Big Bang—an inconceivable event that birthed reality itself, is that not enough?

Yet, all of this can be explained to some relatively simple cause and effect equation of time. We are complex because we survived, and we survived because the world existed. Therefore, it's not necessarily a miracle that the earth is beautiful; we wouldn't exist if it wasn't. However, there remain some inexplicable coincidences in our universe, that I take as a sign from God. For example, why does the sun appear the same size as the moon? The Sun is almost perfectly 400 times the distance and 400 times the size as the moon. Without a comprehensive explanation of why this needed to happen for life to emerge, I take it that worshipping eclipses was the right idea: this is something we could never explain, so this must be divine!

⁵ Tacitus; Suetonius; Cassius Dio; Philostratus; Livy/Plutarch; Herodotus; the Epidaurian *Iamata*; Mishnah/Josephus; Pliny.) ([Penelope](#), [Lexundria](#), [ToposText](#), [The Latin Library](#), [Attalus](#))

From here, we see how to remain spiritual without succumbing to the fallacy of ancient tropes. Afterall, the religious are more likely to lead good lives, because they are guided with in an incentive to look inward. Yet, at the same time this reflection can turn to delusion when they believe the voice that guides them is the same that guides everyone else, and that scripture is a universal truth; because a relationship with God is deeply personal and self-motivated.

When the religious argued that “God will show you the way” or that we must “spread the gospel,” they were right—broadly. The mistake is in how we traditionally absorbed those words: that God would speak to us in some universal voice, or that spreading the gospel meant converting people to Christianity. The idea should be to listen to our internal compass (God), and to spread love to each other (gospel). And most controversially, the idea of hell emerged to drive fear into faith. Logically, God could only judge us by our internal effort to be good, because that is all a human can do. Then, God essentially becomes a voice of conscience: encouraging curiosity to sharpen his voice of reason.

Interpreting religion through this nuanced lens breaks religion’s greatest contradiction: **an eternal damnation based on cultural inheritance**. Because, even if we do not call ourselves religious, we still meet the criteria for afterlife by following our internal compass. Everything depends only on how the soul finds peace. From here we begin to see the combination of all religions into one; if all we need to do is make peace with our internal voice of God, it molds into the ideas of Karma.

At its best, religion gives language for mystery, comfort in suffering, and a framework for virtue. At its worst, it hardens into moral absolutism—the conviction that one way is the only way, and that all who disagree must be converted, condemned, or

silenced. Hence crusades, inquisitions, jihads, and schisms—not because humans believe in God, but because humans believe they know God.

The same impulse extends beyond religion. Political ideologies, economic theories, even personal philosophies rot when they become absolute. Tribal bias turns debates into arguments, arguments into conquests. The logic is always the same: we are right; they are wrong; therefore, we must win. Heroism fuels the desire to be righteous in our own story, but it traps us in a delusion of truth.

If faith without humility is blind, skepticism without humility is arrogant. To live well, we must resist absolutism in every form and approach belief—religious or secular—with curiosity. Unless someone asks, or suffering compels intervention, leave others free to their path.

Religion is a mirror for something deeper in us. Why promise an afterlife? Because we can't fathom death. Why is there a holy judgement? Because we crave meaning. This isn't about any single creed; it's about the way our minds are wired. We gather in communities to shelter from uncertainty because we weren't built to face the void alone. From the first time we asked what happens when we die, the answers began to shape the architecture of belief. Behind all those answers lies a universal foundation: bias. To pursue understanding, we must confront the force that bends our thoughts.

Some Universal Foundation

Whether our judgement is based on community, religious, or social standards, our internal compass is built off our local

perception. We will only see the world through our eyes, and our memory is skewed by emotions. The task, then, is not to find perfect objectivity but to understand our bias.

If all thought is biased, then every idea is an abstraction of an abstraction. To illustrate this, imagine our brain as a massive neural network.⁶ Just as trillions of nodes process signals through their connections, our minds process experiences through memories, emotions, and language. Therefore, we are only capable of interpreting the world based on our prior understanding of it. As Carl Sagan wrote, “If you want to make a pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe.”⁷ Every ingredient in a pie abstracts itself into particles, so the only true ‘scratch’ was the Big Bang. Likewise, the only original thought was the first one you ever had—but even that was based on sensory information and genetic code.

Language works the same way. Each word gains meaning only by its relation to other words, like nodes in a dictionary-sized network. To minimize this ambiguity, I’ll use a short glossary of working definitions.

Term	<i>Working</i> Definition
Divine	Something immeasurable by science; unobservable.
Soul	A divine aspect of life.
Life	Something that dies.
Consciousness	Something capable of contemplating itself (e.g. death, purpose, origin).
God	Divine intervention at the beginning of time; the creator.

⁶ A neural network is a model made of simple units (“nodes”) that combine inputs, apply weights, and pass results forward. Alone, a node knows nothing, but together the layers recognize patterns.

⁷ Sagan, C. (1980). *Cosmos*. Random House.

My definition of consciousness may be protested, but I suggest it for the sake of awareness required in the conversation of fate. A bug may have an instinct to avoid death, but that doesn't imply it has any idea of what death means. And a child might be smart enough to play on an iPad, but I wouldn't call them truly conscious until their confrontation of death.

Secondly, it's important to view life as anything that dies to transcend our organismal perception of that word. If a single cell can live, then a star lives too. And a civilization has a lifecycle parallel to a human life: growing, remembering, and dying.

Lastly, by my definition, there must *have been* a God. Edwin Hubble discovered our universe is expanding uniformly from a singular point, which implies it had a definitive birth date. As Steven Hawking put, "...there was a time when the universe was infinitesimally small and, therefore, infinitely dense. If there were events earlier than this time, then they could not affect what happens at the present time. Their existence can be ignored because it would have no observational consequences."⁸ We can only understand the observable universe, so we know that something above our physical plane of understanding intervened; something divine. All universal contemplation stems from this event: *there was something divine at the beginning of time; a creator.* Based on what we observed using the Hubble space telescope, this is a fact. However, I must distinguish this from the statement: there must *be* a god. We only know that there was a God—by my definition—at the beginning. Not necessarily that God still exists.

From here, we can imagine several possibilities. The soul, if it exists, is immeasurable, so we cannot prove or disprove it. Yet we know immeasurable aspects of the universe do exist (like the Big Bang), so the soul is a reasonable assumption. If the universe

⁸ Hawking, S. (1988). *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*. Bantam Books.

itself dies, perhaps it is alive. From here we might make the jump: perhaps all life is an extension of one universal soul. Conversely, if the creator intervenes directly, then each form of life may hold a unique soul. However, because all our observations are relative to human perception, there is always the possibility that nothing exists outside of sensation—that everything is an illusion.

These thought experiments highlight how speculation multiplies, but they also show the need for clarity. To move beyond endless possibilities, we can map the minimal frameworks humans have consistently returned to across cultures.

A Framework for the Soul

Humanity has never lacked answers to the question of what animates our existence, but those answers almost always fall into a few recurring archetypes. These routes shape how we live, how we judge others, and how we orient our faith:

	Assumptions	%	Religions / Philosophies
Nothing	The universe is soulless.	~24.2	Buddhism, materialism/atheism, naturalism.
Singularity	All life extends from a universal soul.	~14.9	Hinduism, Sikhism, strands of pantheism.
Uniqueness	Every life has an eternal soul.	~54.6	Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Jainism.
Illusion	Nothing exists outside of my experience.	>1	Solipsism, <i>Schizophrenia</i>

Nothing

The assumption here is that: *the universe is soulless*. Whatever divine spark existed at the beginning of time did not follow us into life; it burned out in the first instant, leaving only

matter, energy, and the blind mechanics of physics. While this is adjacent to atheism, they only believe in the absence of deities.⁹ This has more in common with nihilism: that nothing in the universe has any meaning. From this view, creation was an unrepeatable accident, and consciousness is a temporary byproduct of chance—like a flame flickering in the wind before it goes dark forever. It's almost arrogant to reject everything we can't understand, and yet there's a strange liberation in it. If life truly has no divine thread running through it, then all meaning comes from what we can build before the lights go out.

Buddhists see any light in this flame as suffering itself. The tragedy is not just that the flame will go out, but that we grasp at its light as if it could last forever. In their view, clinging to the illusion of permanence is what chains us to pain. Yet this denial of an eternal soul does not collapse into despair. Instead, it opens into a recognition of radical interdependence: nothing exists on its own, but everything exists together. This anticipates the intuition of Singularity—that behind the veil of our separateness, life flows from a deeper, universal order.

Singularity

The assumption here is that: *all life is an extension of a universal soul*. At the beginning of time, when the universe was born, so was this soul—and everything that has ever lived is a fragment of its experience. In this view, nothing really dies; we are like a fingernail on a universal body. We may imagine this as a kind of eternal reincarnation. The soul continues, but the self is gone.

This kind of thinking implores us to sacrifice all external judgement and embrace experience. If you lived anyone else's life, you would be exactly like them. But dissolving into a

⁹ Deities: supernatural beings considered sacred and worthy of worship

universal whole offends the core of our self-preservation bias. However, the construct of singularity still often borrows the comfort of Uniqueness. Religions that preach union with a universal soul still speak to us in personal terms—promising that our journey, our devotion, or our karma somehow matters in that merging. This is why the line between the two is blurry: both offer a kind of eternity, one through the preservation of identity, the other through surrender to something larger.

Uniqueness

Uniqueness preserves meaning, making it the most seductive form of religion. The premise of this is that: *every life has an eternal soul*. Even though physical conscious experience is finite, our spiritual experience is eternal. The moment of our soul departing from our consciousness is what I call transcendence. Painting any clearer picture of this would draw too many assumptions, out of the scope of this work. We can look at religious texts, but they should only give vague descriptions. Just as we cannot fathom not existing, we cannot fathom transcendence, because it is not reality as our minds comprehend.

Because our soul is the nonphysical essence of our person, it can only transcend carrying the weight of our internal judgement. An external judgement (by some holy creed) makes no ethical sense, because we can only be expected to give an effort from our internal understanding. How could you blame a child of the Nazi youth for becoming a Nazi? Or a child of a Buddhist monastery for never repenting in Jesus' name? We can imagine, a healthy soul might transcend to a state of heaven and an evil soul to a kind of hell.

Uniqueness is dangerous: if every soul is eternal and distinct, then it is easy to fall into the delusion of our ego. We begin to see our own story as the axis of the universe, polishing our self-image

until nothing seems more real than our reflection. This reminds me of the character Narcissus of Greek mythology, so captivated by his own looks that he fell in love with his own image, not even realizing it was just a reflection.¹⁰

In this way, the pursuit of uniqueness can cave in on itself. What if we are constantly staring at a reflection of reality, like Narcissus? What if our eternal soul is not part of a shared reality at all, but only the projection of our private mind? When the self becomes the only thing that endures, the outside world starts to blur, and we arrive at the final route: the possibility that everything—heaven, hell, and even other souls—is only an illusion.

Illusion

This last route can lead us down a schizophrenic rabbit hole. I also call this the Truman Show Paradox, making the assumption: *Nothing exists outside of my experience.*¹¹ We can only know what happens in our mind: our senses and thoughts. For everyone else we meet, we assume has the same relationship with their mind. We might know they walk, talk, and look like us. But we will never know if others are truly conscious or a figment of our imagination—because we are only capable of listening to what our brain tells us.

In this scenario, my experience might be the only thing in the universe, so the universe might not exist without my life. I might be the creator and the universe, meaning nothing matters besides me. But accepting this will only trap me. However, acknowledging the possibility of an illusion is the single most important realization in the search for a genuine truth; even if it's

¹⁰ [Narcissus \(mythology\) - Wikipedia](#)

¹¹ Weir, P. (Director). (1998). *The Truman Show* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.

only a thought experiment, illusion forces us to accept humility—because everything else depends on trust.

Illusion, then, is the most dangerous but also the most humbling of routes. It tempts us to collapse the universe into our own reflection, but it also forces us to confront the limits of what we can ever know. And in that sense, it completes the circle.

Across these four assumptions—Nothing, Singularity, Uniqueness, and Illusion—we've mapped nearly every way humans have tried to explain the soul. Each route offers comfort, but each also traps us: *denial can lead to despair, singularity to the loss of self, uniqueness to narcissism, and illusion to madness.*

None of these paths can claim certainty. What they give us instead is a framework: four windows cut into the same dark wall, each revealing only part of the view. Living with them means accepting that truth may always sit just beyond our grasp. And it is here, at the edge of these possibilities, that we turn to the wider task of this book: not to choose the “right” route, but to learn how to live with uncertainty itself.

Living With Uncertainty

If we have the luxury to anticipate our death, I imagine a symphony composed of memory. We look back on what we did, and what we didn't. We wish we could go back for one last dinner with our parents, dance with our loved ones, or game with our kids. And unfortunately, the framework still leaves us in the same place: without any sense of direction or purpose. I still have this nightmare that I live a cookie cutter life and die. But there should not be a problem with a simple life. I think it's just the idea of time passing. Of course, life rarely gives us the time we want.

Suddenly, your skull gets crushed by the front axle of an eighteen-wheeler driving south, drifting just a little too far left on

I-85, 7am no coffee; the trucker was working double. You had to get in early to prep for your performance review. You had been practicing in the mirror all night asking for a 5% raise. You're half asleep when you hear the horn, forty tons of all American steal driving sixty miles an hour into your two-ton sedan moving eighty-five in the opposite direction. It's over.

The greatest tragedy of sudden death is that it rarely comes after you've put your life into frame. You spent your whole life thinking you had your whole life ahead of you. You never make amends with family, never leave the cubicle, never set true intentions in motion. The opposite is what I call the *Walter White effect*—an awakening that forces you to grip time tightly and act with purpose.¹²

This agnostic framework for the universe is not a final answer, but a way to orient ourselves in uncertainty. To live well, we still need faith. Religions, in their search for certainty, too often lean on extremes: the Abrahamic promise threatens exclusion, the Dharmic dissolves the self into the whole. Both offer comfort, but risk choking the flow of life.

My biggest critique of religion is labeling something we couldn't possibly come up with the words to describe. We assign boxes of 'Christian' or 'Atheist' yet carry vastly different interpretations of these words. And I guess that was the problem with physical doctrine in the first place: applying definite constructs to something totally beyond comprehension. But I still believe a religious person has a better way of living than someone who calls themselves non-religious. I just always wanted something in between—maybe I just wanted to be unique! Ha! I can't escape this game of uniqueness even in rejecting Abraham! But that said, I've come up with two faithful assumptions that are broader than some doctrine:

¹² Gilligan, V. (Creator). (2008–2013). *Breaking Bad* [TV series]. AMC.

1. Universal Truth exists.

The existence of truth gives us direction. Our thoughts and feelings are the compass we've been given; we must listen intently. Whether you call it prayer, meditation, or reflection, the practice is the same: an internal conversation with the part of you that feels closest to truth. Follow it, even knowing your moral path will be imperfect.

2. All life is Divine.

By divine I mean: every form of life carries something unknowable, something beyond our comprehension. Planets, organisms, cities—each holds mystery. Though truth exists, we can never see it in pure form; goodness cannot be reached by certainty, only through openness.

From this judgement, *reality is Schrödinger's box*: we circle it endlessly, but never fully open it. Still, assumptions must be made; we must, for the sake of living, assume the cat is alive. Just as we should assume there is a God, assume we have meaning, and assume we are good. From here, we can see how ignorant a sane mind must become. But there is nothing wrong with that; the problem emerges when we interpret our assumptions as facts. We should give great praise to moments we are proved wrong, as hard as that is for our ego.

Selflessness begins with the assumption that you are wrong—that you know nothing, and that your private struggle has no claim on the world. Yet to act at all, you must still choose, and every choice will carry selfish motives. My proposal is simple: *Honor the divinity in life, remember truth is always bigger than you, and*

live as if your time could vanish tomorrow. That is how to be a hero in a universe that will never give you the full map.

If there is any meaning in life, it is through our attempt at selflessness. From there, our experience will elevate to the highest form of awareness: a local maximum of cosmic interpretation. When we zoom out onto our infinite insignificance, it's easy to fall into a nihilist observation. And yet, by all logic, *nothing should have ever existed in the first place*. And the fact that humans have a relatively complex experience should be significant too. "*We are the way for the cosmos to know itself*," Carl Sagan explained. Our thoughts essentially *are* the universe; a product of a divine natural law. A force that took billions of years to look backward and search for the beginning.

As a conscious life, this is our duty to our hydrogen and single celled forefathers; the neanderthals and the civilizations lost to time. If we are not individually significant in the total order of time, at the very least, we are significant to ourselves. That thought alone should be enough to satisfy this problem of death.

But the problem of life still remains. What do we do with existence itself? How do we explore? From these two axioms—that universal truth exists but is unreachable—we draw the motivation to look inward and reach as far as we can. From this descent arises the question that will guide the rest of this work: what is the best way to cultivate a curious mind without falling into delusion? But before we stretch out our hand in to discover our personal truth, we must first peer into the abyss: the limits of consciousness itself.