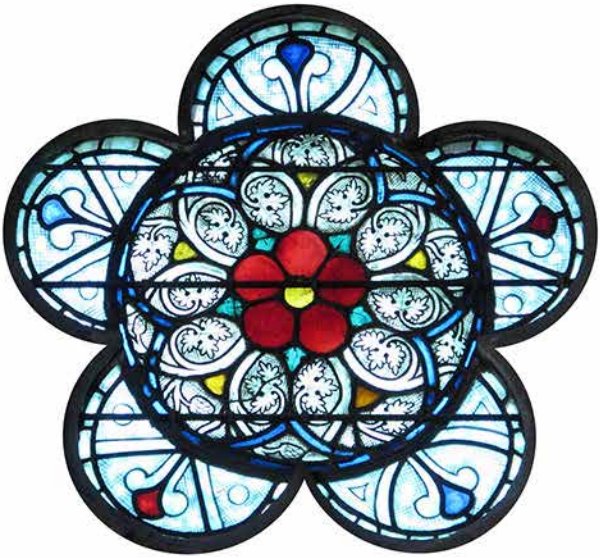
I Found You

Finding God at the Center of My Questioning



Rollie Byron

I FOUND YOU

I FOUND YOU

Finding God at the Center of My Questioning

by

Rollie Byron



Havenen Books
Celebration, Florida
2026

I Found You: Finding God at the Center of My Questioning by Rollie Byron.

Copyright © 2026 Havenen LLC.

The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

ISBN: 979-8-952090-00-2
Library of Congress Control Number: 2026951203

Published by Havenen Books, an imprint of Havenen LLC.
Celebration, FL
havenen.com

Cover design, typesetting, illustrations and interior layout designed by Grace Wadholm.

Grace, you are a gift that I don't deserve.
Thank you for everything.

From the one you have loved so strongly;
I only hope to love you the same.

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

1. To Begin? 5
2. Existence 21
3. The Mind 37
4. Found 59
5. True Seeking 65
6. Finding Perfection 81
7. Good & Evil 91
8. Laws of Nature 109
9. The Finder 125
10. To Be Found 133

INTRODUCTION

This book is about finding—the process, and what is found, particularly with reference to theological and philosophical inquiry. This introduction is about my own finding—the process of thinking through and writing the book. As is so often the case in life, understanding where a thing begins helps us to understand the final product.

The summer of my first year of marriage found me without a job and with plenty of time to meditate on life and my place in the world. This book began as a series of poems, loosely connected by variations on philosophical and theological themes. Slowly, as these poems were reworked into a semi-cohesive whole, the idea began to grow in me that perhaps the themes illustrated in the poetry might be more easily understood and digested if they were transformed into the shape of a meandering discourse. An outline was born, and

carried out over a period of about five years, until the book was finished (or so I thought). Unfortunately for me, unemployment struck again, and being without a job drove me back to the starting line with the book. Hashing out each chapter took a good deal of time and effort (and is still in the process, if the truth be told), and required a thorough editing, not merely of form but of content. For in the process of time I had found more that I felt might benefit the book and hopefully also you, the reader. It is now nearly seven years since the book's inception, but still the work remains. Still the flaws are cumbersome.

Nevertheless, all things must begin, and continue, if they are ever to reach their end. This work has become for me an odyssey of thought, a quandary of life, meaning, and God. My father told me as a young man to write down everything I knew when I was eighteen, because after that, time would steal all knowledge claimed and would leave me with an empty brain (as he claimed to have had at age forty). I knew very little when I was eighteen, but by the time I began composing the first lines of what would become this book, I realized that I knew much less than I thought. This book is a tribute to those whose knowledge shrinks as they grow older, whose experience of the world teaches them not only to ask more questions, but to find the answers. And even to live with the difficult answers.

The answers I seek concern mostly God and his word, my own place in the world, and the meaning of existence. I seek a road often traveled but rarely found. If I write from a distinctly Christian point of view it is no accident—that is all part of the discovery.

Rollie Byron
Bloomington, Indiana
July 3rd, 2007

1

To Begin?

Assumptions

Assumptions are peculiar things. Everybody has them, but very rarely does anyone want to talk about them. I am not going to pretend that I have no assumptions coming into this writing. This book contains many assumptions, some easily noticeable, some not so easily found (and probably some that I don't even know about). Without assumptions it is impossible to think or act. We must assume that we live in a real world, one in which it matters what I do or say. My actions have consequences. If I step off of a high building, I will probably plummet to the ground and die. If I sit in a chair, I assume it will hold me. These are assumptions based on experiences. We experience things one way and come to believe that they happen that way most of the time. We intuitively and experientially "know" many such things. Without a shared set of assumptions, I could not communicate with you right now. We both assume that words can be and often are meaningful,

that it is worth a person's time to read and write books (at least sometimes), and that books should start at the beginning, continue to the middle, and finish at the end. Well, here is the beginning. I assume you're still reading.

The problem with assumptions is that they are often wrong. We make assumptions from such small amounts of information that our assumptions become distorted, over-general, or just plain false. For example, I have never sat on a chair that has broken beneath my weight, so I might assume that all chairs must be able to hold people up. This is not true. Just because I have never broken a chair with my weight does not mean that it will never happen, or has never happened to someone else. An assumption or statement about chairs that might be a little more correct (and perhaps less general) would be: "most chairs hold me up." But even this might be wrong because I have not sat in most of the chairs in the world.

We should ask other people for their experiences so that we can form more of a basis for what we believe. If we get more people sharing experiences and ideas, hopefully we will get better answers to our questions. This book is about asking questions, searching for answers, and finding the truth as a *community*. While I sit at my computer writing this sentence, it should occur to you that I write from the standpoint of a community (no, not just a community of one). Everyone that has

poured their lives into me up to this point in time can be said to be writing with me. While I must ultimately take responsibility for what is said (and consequently for what is said poorly or wrongly), still these other people have furnished me with many words to say, thoughts to think, tools to analyze, experiences to draw on, and lives to explore.

Let's get back to our chair dilemma. Can we make a theory that will cover this experience and many similar experiences that people have all over the world? We could say that when I push down on a chair with my massive weight of 142 pounds, it must be able to push back with the same force, or it will cease to hold me up. Now we have a broader theory (which resembles one of Newton's laws) and it will help me to make better assumptions about sitting in chairs. I arrived at this assumption by exploring my own experiences and the experiences and ideas of others.

We could go further and figure out each chair's physical makeup by testing the density of the wood, plastic, or metal, and the molecular and chemical bonds, but do I really want to do this every time I sit down? And I could figure in Einstein's equations and predictions, and describe the chair's warping of space-time in a quantum field, in relation to myself, but that's a lot to figure out just to sit down in some old chair (besides the fact that I have no idea how I would figure all that stuff out)! By the time I figured even a tiny bit of it

out, the chair would have changed, and I would have to start all over again. Figure in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (which tells us that we can't know everything and that we can't tell the future), and what we have is a big mess: a problem that cannot be solved. So we must trust. We must have a reasonable faith in what we see and discover, and while we should continue to learn more about it, we should realize that there must come a time when we step back and realize that in order for the chair to hold me up, I must first sit in it.

In this book I have sought to do the same thing (though the job is far from perfect). I can't know everything, but I have sought to size up each chair, learn more about it, then sit in it. What I mean is that I want to discover with you who and what we are (as thinking people in an enormous physical universe), why we exist, what the world is all about, and who or what is behind all of this. We certainly aren't going to find everything, but I assume we can find something. Hopefully I have assumed only what is reasonable to assume. I guess we'll see as we go. This is no time for despair (it's only the beginning of the book). Are you willing to bear with me through this process of discovery? I assume this chair will hold up under both of us.

How can we start to think?

One of my first assumptions is that I can think (and you can think) and we can find. And if we can find, I

want to know why we are able to find, what is out there to be found, and where did this insatiable thirst for knowing come from? Let's back up a little. If assumptions require thought, how do we think in the first place (what is the origin of thought)? Thought often seems to be highly symbolic. A symbol is a representation of something else. We commonly think in terms of what we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. But humans are also capable of abstract thought (if not, you wouldn't be able understand the sentence: "But humans are also capable of abstract thought," and I wouldn't have been able to create the sentence in the first place). Where do abstract thoughts come from? Our experiences? Our parents? The mind itself?

Often, illustrations from the sensory world (the world that can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled) help us to construct non-sensory worlds inside our minds that we can then pass on to other people who will hopefully understand and appreciate our illustrations, and transform their own thought worlds in turn. These new thought worlds will be created in the light of the knowledge gained (unless, of course, there is no knowledge gained, in which case time has been wasted). Because humans think in terms of symbols, pictures, or stories, often illustrations bring light and clarity to ideas that are deep in the shadow of our minds. Unfortunately, when we think abstractly (out-of-the-box, non-concretely, above and beyond our senses and

what they tell us) we tend to lose sight of what it is that we are thinking about. In short, abstract thoughts tend to wander. But we will explore this weakness later. For now, let's just think about the beginning and origin of thoughts.

One of our first orders of business in understanding our world seems to be to discover how we can even start to think in the first place. This will hopefully give us a good place to start (it is the beginning, right?). We will use illustrations along the way to light our path, though we must remember that no illustrations are perfect. Illustrations can only point to deeper meaning, and cannot completely or perfectly express all that is to be found in the ideas being illustrated (if they did, they wouldn't be illustrations, they would be the original abstract ideas!). First, try to understand the illustration by itself, without the abstract ideas behind it. Just accept it for what it is and go on. Then, after you get it, try to discover what it is that is being illustrated. Seek meaning where the picture was. Ready? Here we go.

Imagine yourself in a violent action, such as throwing a wine glass. Fun, isn't it? Can you hear the shattering of the glass as it hits some other object? What if it never hit anything, or even got close to anything, but simply continued going in the same direction forever? What would that sound like—nothing, right? If it continued on forever, it would never smash into

anything, never break apart into a thousand pieces, and never make any noise. Sounds pretty boring.

What if I ran a race with no finish line? Could I ever win the race? Even if everyone else was behind me, and I was leading the pack, would that mean that I was winning? Without a goal there is no way to judge who is winning, or even who is in the race. So what's the use in running?

How do you know that you are done with something? Usually something happens. A glass shatters, a finish line is reached, a goal, an event, or a time is reached that tells us that something has been accomplished, completed. Something is over, and something else has begun. In our world we are accustomed to thinking in this way. Things have beginnings, and they have endings. Thought is purposeful like a race. It has a destination and makes its own kind of noise like a shattered wine glass. So how does it get to the point of beginning? Where did the wine glass come from and who threw it? If thought is an effect, what is ultimately the cause? Can we say that an unthinking universe can give rise to thinking beings? Can thought arise from non-thought? Where did it all start, and how have our thoughts reached the point that they are at now?

Our lives as humans follow the pattern of beginnings and endings. People are born, they live, and then they die. Their physical bodies come from many unrelated

molecules, atoms and even smaller particles. These particles have been in existence since the beginning of time. The parts that make up our physical bodies have been around since the beginning of the universe. And when we die, we will eventually become dust again, no matter how well we are embalmed. Those parts that were once "us" will become something else—a speck of dirt, coal, or plant matter, or maybe eventually a puppy dog or a water particle in a rainbow.

We should be used to this idea. We see things die all the time. When we get dry skin, our dead skin cells fleck off and into the earth, to be taken apart and used for something else. We do not have the same physical body we had when we began our life. We have different cells, different memories, and even different capabilities.

So why are we still the same person? And what is the process that brings us to our beginning as persons? DNA is a large part of the blueprint that brings about the formation of our physical parts. We are each encoded with a special plan to become physically what we are. And our parents are responsible for the DNA we have. But their parents were responsible for their DNA, etc., until we come to the question of where this organizing factor came from in the first place. Things do not organize themselves into complex workable systems. The fact that you can read this and think about it is proof that you are an extraordinarily complex system that works (both physically and intellectually).

A complex system, like you or I, contains a huge number of things that must be working properly and at the right time in the right way in order for anything useful to happen. Living things have been compared to a watch with a large assortment of interconnected doo-dads inside. Everything needs to be working in order for the watch to be useful for its intended purpose. If a woman who had never seen a watch before were to find a watch on the ground, and pick it up and examine it, she would probably not say: "This watch must have been formed by chance!" Instead, she might reasonably ask herself: "Who made this watch, and for what purpose was it designed?"

The creation of each human body (as well as all other forms of life on earth) is a beautiful and incredibly complex job. There is so much that can go wrong, so many interrelated systems within each one of us, that we should not dream of calling it chance. The DNA which "builds" us is too ingenious to have come from something like "blind" chance. It seems to come from a mind, not from the blind.

And what of our minds? Our minds give us the ability to comprehend and to act. How have we come to inherit our minds? Are we blank slates to be written on by the chalk of life? Our thoughts are not merely a bunch of experiences kept in our minds. There is a filing system we are all born with. The ability to analyze, reason, and sort things in our minds seems to

come standard in humans. Otherwise, we would have no way to process the information or experiences we came across in daily life. Things don't just organize themselves in your head. Instead, you were born with a built-in organizer, which is then able to process and store new and old experiences. I am not saying that you were born with thoughts (although children in the womb do indeed respond to stimuli in complex ways, something which might be classified as requiring a type of thought). But you were born with the natural ability to develop thoughts. And our minds grow as we grow. Our minds develop as working systems.

What is the mind? Is it merely physical? Is it a combination of chemical reactions, electricity, and marvelously designed cellular infrastructure (i.e. brain matter)? Can the brain be equated with the mind? To equate the two (the brain and the mind) follows from or leads a person to assume that: (1) nothing exists outside of the physical universe; (2) humans do not outlive their bodies; and (3) humans are completely products of their environments. For (1), even if everything in the world were mental, then the physical world would be mental, and the brain would be the mind. If there is something *not* part of the physical universe, it is mind and its contents, and thus if the mind is the physical brain, then what is non-physical? For (2), if the mind is the physical brain, then when the brain goes, so goes

the mind (and the person)—an after-death experience without a mind is not an after-death experience. For (3), if the brain is a product only of physical processes and its environment, then the mind and all of its special characteristics, if they are only physical, are only products of physical processes and their environments.

It does not seem reasonable to merely assume that nothing exists outside of the physical universe. A lot of people believe in supernatural beings and phenomena. True, all of those people could be wrong, but do I know for sure that they are wrong? I think it is safer to assume that there may or may not be things or people that exist outside the realm of the physical universe. We should be open to exploring what other people think about our world. We can investigate this issue later on, but for now what about the question of people outliving their physical bodies?

In order for a person to outlive their physical body, it seems that for that person to retain their identity as the same person, he/she must retain some form of mind. What good is outliving your body if you don't know it? So if people can outlive their physical bodies (a doctrine which most people in the world would subscribe to in some way), then the mind must be in some way distinct from the physical brain, which would mean that the mind exists outside of the physical universe and yet interacts with it (in part through and by the physical

organ of the brain). But we have not yet established that anything exists outside of the physical universe, so let's move on.

As for the last question: "Are humans merely products of their environments," the answer seems clear (though some would argue differently). Either humans are free in the sense that they are not merely bound to do what nature demands because of the physical makeup of the brain, or humans are not truly free in anything they do, think, or feel. Either we are thinking beings capable of meaningful abstract reasoning, self-conscious ethical formulation, and creative production and expression or we are mindless automatons who are mere links in a chain of random events that is ultimately meaningless and cold. If our minds are not free to make choices, to do as they please (within certain bounds), then the mind does not truly exist. If this paragraph is to make any sense to you or me, our minds must exist and be distinct in some way from our physical bodies, because if our minds are the same thing as our brains (and remember, our brains are physical and supposedly obey the laws of nature, which allows no true freedom) then this paragraph is a mere product of nature, the effect of natural forces interacting in our brains which means that this paragraph has no true meaning outside of physical causes. If I were to go back in time to the point when I began to write this paragraph, I could not do anything but write the exact

same words in the same order. And you would have to respond to this paragraph in the way that you are responding to it right now. There is no choice because there is no mind. So, if we are to continue in our quest, we must acknowledge that the mind does exist, that it is distinct from, yet interacts with, the brain, and thus that it may or may not outlive the body, and that it seems to somehow exist outside of the physical universe (whether or not we acknowledge that other things can exist outside of the physical universe). You are a "who" and not merely a "what." Our next question? "Where has the mind come from and what is its purpose?"

What are we?

Our complex bodies and minds are constantly changing, adding to the difficulty of making all things work together correctly. Yet they remain *our* bodies and *our* minds. An old proverb has said that a person cannot step into the same river twice. The river continues to flow and when we take our next step into it, it has changed, and moved on. All of nature is like this (except for perhaps the laws that govern nature, which we will explore later). All that we see around us and experience in the physical world is changing and continues to move. We are also changing and continue to move in our world-lines and thought-lines (which trace where our bodies have been in time and space and where our thoughts have been in our minds). So in the end, the

same person cannot step into the same river twice, because both she and the river have changed in some sense. However, while you may not be the same person in body or thought from moment to moment, you are still you. And when you die, where will you be? It seems that either you will continue to be you, or you will somehow cease to exist. If everything physical and mental around us and in us changes continually, yet we remain ourselves, is this not a small indicator that we are something beyond merely our body and our thoughts?

But though we may be beyond merely our body and our thoughts, we are also our body and our mind. Our bodies are in some way us, as are our minds. If we are to exist, it seems we are to exist with bodies and minds. Though we are not identical with our bodies and minds, we are identified with our bodies and minds. And our thoughts make up a large part of that identification. Through thought we identify with our bodies and our selves. Through physicality our bodies identify with our minds and with who we are. And through our selves we identify with our bodies, minds, and beyond. Thus, it seems we might conjecture that we are body and soul, and this is our self/identity.

Are all living things the same as we are? A tree is still a tree after it grows an inch or a yard. However, a tree is not immortal. Why? There seems to be fundamental differences between plants and us. Does the tree

recognize itself? Does it hold in its heart a concept not only of what it is, but that it is? No, in fact it holds no concepts at all. In the same way, all other forms of life seem to be fundamentally different from human beings. An animal may see its own reflection in a mirror and perhaps it could be said to recognize itself, but can it sit on a porch and watch the sun fall below the horizon and wonder at its beauty, and then turn its thoughts upon itself and realize its own existence in this world, and question within itself what the meaning of life is and to what purpose it exists, and then produce reasons to believe one way or the other? What a great wonder we are! If I continue to be myself through changes to my body and mind, and if I can truly begin to think of my existence as me, does it not stand to reason that I will continue after my body has been laid to rest? It will continue to change, but I will remain. And what about my mind? If it is merely physical, it will change and disintegrate or cease to be as my body dies. But if it is beyond physical, it will remain identified with me (for how can a mind be identified without a person to whom it belongs, and how can a person identify itself without a mind?). But it seems more reasonable to believe that both (body and mind) will at some point continue to identify with one another as one self, a whole human being (and indeed, there are compelling reasons besides those yet given that such a resurrection is more than possible).

Now that we have looked at what our minds are, where they came from, where they are, and where they are going, let's take a look at what it means to exist. We can assume now that our minds exist, but what is existence? It appears that we have never existed before in this world. That which makes up our physical bodies has existed from the beginning, and appears to have been made by a gifted mind, but we have never been. It looks like who *we* are is made of something different. We are not just physical, we are not just mental. We are us. But where did we come from?

Let's develop a working hypothesis so that we can get on with our search. Many people believe that an intelligent nonphysical source created our physical bodies (and even the entire physical universe) at some time in the past and, conceivably, this source or mind continues to uphold us and sustain our universe's information, order, and stability. This outside source (if it exists) must exist above space and time, and would be a point of reference that is a stable anchor. It must inject into us what we are. It must give us the ability to start thinking and feeling, experiencing and interacting with our world. And it must create out of nothing. In this theory, our bodies and thoughts are seeds that originated from greater thoughts. Are we truly seeds of a greater existence?

2

Existence

Be, Become?

Existence is beautiful. Puppies exist, stars exist, you and I exist, even our thoughts exist. All of these things exist in different ways, yet they still exist. What is existence? Maybe it means to be seen, felt, experienced, or thought. But if something is never experienced in any way, would it not exist? Perhaps "existence" is just how we would describe something that has the ability to change, whether through time, space, thought, etc., the ability to change, and the ability to remain itself, to remain what it is, through change. God is said to be the same yesterday, today, and forever. If existence is what allows for change (i.e. being is what allows for becoming), then either God does not exist, at least in this sense, if by the "same," we mean that God is always identical, or God is the "same" as himself, but is not always identical to himself; that is, he can act, he might suffer, he could create, just as I am the "same," except that his "same" did not begin to be, did not

become what it is. If God is the only person or thing in the world that did not begin to exist (which is a major assumption of Christianity), perhaps this means that the very nature of *created* existence with reference to itself is beginning to exist, and existing through change. What does this mean?

If God created everything at the beginning of time, beyond time itself, he can experience it and think about it beyond time. Nothing is outside of his sight. All things are open to him. Things exist because he made them, and he can experience them because he is their Creator and he continues to make all things able to exist. They draw from him their very strength of existence to continue through change, and to change. If a tree falls in the forest, and there is no human to hear it fall, it makes a sound, and God hears it. It exists because of him. Such a God would not have to respond to an experience after it has taken place, because he is outside of time and space and he can experience all created things beyond time and place (this does not mean he could not experience them all *in* time and space). Because we are all created things and not the eternal Creator, we experience things differently than God does. He does not necessarily experience things as changing in time and space. He sees the end from the beginning. To him they need not be separate events in a series of moments, but can all be seen as a part of the whole created existence. For created things, other

created things are commonly experienced through space and time. We have a tiny little view that is broken and imperfect.

Billy sees a cat walking down the street. He sees the cat moving and realizes that whatever it is that he sees is actually existing (whether in his mind only or in his mind and in the physical world). He realizes that if he experiences something, it exists. Now Billy just has to figure out if what he saw (the cat) was in the physical world, or in his imagination, or something else. His eyesight is not perfect, and he has been known to have delusions. How can he know for sure if the cat is a physical cat? He can ask others to help him. Billy's friends Sally and Jed are great cat-watchers, and he trusts their judgment. But what if all three are delusional? What if instead of a cat they have actually seen a shadow that resembles a cat? In that case, they should go and catch the cat, pet the cat, experience the cat in many ways (sight, sound, touch, smell, etc.), and see if the cat is imaginary or not. But then after they do that they might realize that perhaps this whole cat thing is just a dream that one of them is having. Or maybe even they are imaginary, and are merely the thoughts of another person. Bill, Jed, and Sally now see that they are merely puppets in the mind of the person writing this paragraph. But what can they do? The writer could just change subjects and they would cease to exist. No more Billy, Sally, Jed, or imaginary cat.

How can we be sure of our own existence as created things? How can we be sure of anything? Let's return to our earlier statement that God experiences things differently than we do. Why is this so? It is because he *is* something different than us. He is existence. He *is*. We derive what existence we have from him, not only to be but to become. Rocks may become small pebbles or dust eventually, but they have no choice about becoming. We do. That is life; the ability to change ourselves and other things. We can choose to act. We can choose to think. We can choose to become. This is a great gift from the one who *is*. This is one difference between the merely material, and the living. Among living things we are special as well. We shine like stars in the vastness of space. Of all living things, we are able to affect other things, to change our selves in relation to God.

But how can we be sure that we even exist in the first place? Some say we are only thoughts in the mind of God, with no existence beyond that. However, if God is perfect (another main thesis of Christianity), this cannot be true. I realize that I am imperfect, as are you, my neighbor, my goldfish, the sky above me, and on and on. I don't always think right, or act right. I don't even always make sense. Not everything I write is good (as you can read for yourself), and you have not understood perfectly everything I have written in the

way I wish for you to understand it. These are only a few examples of my imperfection.

If God is perfect, then he has no imperfection. He is completely good and all-knowing. Nothing in him is bad. But I have just shown that I am bad (in the sense of imperfect). And you are bad (have you never done or thought anything wrong or imperfect in your entire life?). If we do not really exist, except as thoughts in the mind of God, then some of God's thoughts are bad and imperfect. A God who has imperfect and bad thoughts (i.e., us) is no God at all. He is either all perfect or imperfect. Either we and our world around us actually exist (not just as thoughts of God), or God is not God at all.

Yet Christians hold that in the beginning God made all things good. How can this be? (And does this mean that the first humans could not have known if they were real or not because they were still good, and they could not logically differentiate between themselves and God's thoughts?) No. Their existence was from God, and any good they had was from him. Before the fall, the created world was good. It was the way it was meant to be. It reflected the goodness of God. Couldn't such a great world be merely in the mind of God, and not actually have existed? How is it different than God, or even God's thoughts? And for that matter, what about the end of the world, when it is said that

God will make all things good again? Are those things going to actually exist?

These things, though good, are not perfect in themselves. Their intrinsic value is only such as God gives them (their intrinsic value derives from God's perfection). Their goodness is from God. God's thoughts and actions are perfect in themselves, because he is perfect in himself, but the things he creates and sustains and changes are made perfect because of him. They are distinct from God's thoughts in that they are not perfect in and of themselves, but require God to originate and sustain their goodness. Good things exist and are good because of God. They are not merely his thoughts, but are instead reflections of his goodness. Any part of them that lacks in goodness is from their choice, the choice of the living. And the choice they made for evil has affected the entire world since them. We are all under the curse now. The choices we make to be in the good and to exist with God in perfection affect other people and things outside of us. If we choose the bad, we bring death and separation from God's life. What a sad fate awaits those who know to do good and do evil instead. But really, we are all in that boat. We cannot choose or do good without goodness. The power of perfect goodness does not dwell within us naturally; by merely existing, we were *created* good—the goodness is a gift.

What is new?

If we and our world actually exist, and have existed, what is new? Are the shoes I am wearing new? Are the words I am writing new? Is the book you are holding new? In one sense, not really. The shoes have been around for a while. But they are new to me, right? Does that mean that if something is new to me, it is new? If you and I were to experience something, say a teddy bear, at different times, would that make the teddy bear new three times? Once when it was made, once when I saw it, and once when you saw it? Is it new each time? Does our seeing it (or owning it) somehow make it new, or is something in each case a little bit different? Maybe we should distinguish between new and completely new. But how can we?

A long time ago in a far off place the teddy bear's soft fur was sewn together, its fluff was stuffed, and its eyes were put on. Was it new at that moment of completion? Did something magical happen? Not really. The bear was not completely new at that moment. While it was not necessarily a teddy bear before it was put together, it nevertheless existed as parts. It existed as something else; a cotton-ball here, a polyester thread there, and a plastic eye somewhere else. And before it ever became these things, before the factories and the plants that brought those things into existence, it was merely molecules and atoms, the tiny building blocks of the physical world.

Now here is a hard question: if several different objects are brought together to build something, is that thing actually new, or is it just a reordering of existing material?

The words I am using right now have existed before. So can they really be new? What they are composed of (tiny verbal units called morphemes and phonemes) have probably existed since the creation of language. So they are not entirely new. But isn't it possible to use them in a new way, putting them together into something that has never existed before? Like this book: isn't it new? No one before me has written it. Or is that completely true? Haven't the ideas contained in this book been thought before, at least in part, and isn't this book merely a building I have built with bricks (ideas and words) that have existed before I ever began?

Obviously, completely new is something beyond us, outside of our power. For something to be completely new, it must have not been made from something else. Rather, it must have come from nothing. We may bring things together in a "new" way, a temporary building made of already existing bricks, but we cannot create something completely new. For that we must be able not only to reorganize many old things into one "new" thing, but we must also have within us the power to create something new from scratch (in this case, from no ingredients).

When a person cooks from scratch, they use ingredients, recipes, and tools. They put flour, salt, sugar, butter, baking soda, eggs, and a bunch of other stuff together in just the right way. Then they use mixing bowls, spoons, an oven, etc., to get their goal accomplished. But no one has ever gone into the kitchen and put nothing together with nothing, using nothing, in just the right way, to create a beautifully baked cake. If they used nothing, they would come out with nothing. So much for dessert! But at least we learned something here—a person doesn't truly cook from scratch, for if you start with nothing, you get nothing.

For something to be completely new, it would have to come from no existing thing. In other words, completely new things come from nothing. Sounds kind of crazy, but it's true.

Why can't we create something completely new from nothing? Perhaps because we ourselves are created new things. We cannot make new things because we were once new things ourselves. We are creatures. Not a Being, with the power of Being within us, but rather creatures, existing and continuing to exist only because of something else. Because the nature of our existence is dependent on an outside source of being, it seems that we have no power to create completely new existence. What does this mean? We had a beginning, and because of this, and our dependence on an outside being for

existence, we cannot create something or bring about a completely new beginning for anything. Because of who we are, we cannot create from nothing.

In order to create something completely new, we would need to have the power of Being within us. We lack the power to create in this great sense, because we lack the nature of Creator—a Being that is not dependent on anyone or anything else for existence, and who because of this nature, has the power to give being or existence to what is not. The Creator can create from nothing.

The Creator is not bound by his own nature to create: rather, he *wills* to create, and performs that action because he wants to, not because he is forced into it by his nature. His nature makes it possible for him to exist without creating, for he is not dependent on anything else, or on his own actions. This same nature also makes it possible for him to create completely new things, and this ability of his is to create new things from nothing, brought into existence by the power of his own Existence.

What we find then, is that a being like you or me does not have the ability to create or bring something into existence from nothing. Because of this inability, we have no chance of ever making anything completely new. We may bring already existing things together in a partially new way and make something not completely

new, but that is the best we can do as people who owe their existence to something else.

There was a time when none of us existed. Once upon a time *we* were completely new. Our bodies were put together from existing material in the wombs of our mothers, creating the partially new construction of our physical bodies. Our mother and father both provided the information (in the form of DNA and other systems that help develop us) and the actual physical stuff that we are made of (in the form of a sperm and an egg, and later many enzymes, proteins, and a lot of other great stuff that makes us grow).

But then, more than merely being made a partially new body, something else happened as well. *We* came into existence. We were never there before. Who I am was not at one time. But now, here I am! I exist! I think, and feel, and I experience and interact with the world around me. None of these things were possible for me before I was conceived.

A new thing and a new "I" was brought into existence. The same is true of you and everyone else. You were a new thing, a person, made not from existing stuff, the stuff of your parents, but rather from nothing physical. That is not to say that there was no cause for your existence. The partial cause of your physical body is your parents. But the cause of *your* existence must be attributed to something else. I am a completely new

person, not just a partially new reordering of humanity, because something brought *me* into existence out of nothing. My parents don't have the power to create something completely new out of nothing.

And I know that I am not just a reordering of existing material, but actually something really completely new because otherwise that would imply that I was at one time just a bunch of the parts of my whole *me*, just floating around, or I was here and there at the same time. If *I* existed before as many parts of *me*, whether in my parents or in the world in general, *I* could not be *me*. You see, I am one person. I cannot be *me* in both Chicago and New York at the same time and in the same sense. If I could be, then my identity as one person would be false. I would actually be two. Not two personalities or traits, but two separate persons. But I am one. I am Byron, not Byron and Rick.

Let's call this problem "the contradiction of the self," meaning that one person cannot be both one person and two persons at the same time in the same way. I either exist as one, or I do not exist, otherwise there is a contradiction. I cannot be one and two in the same way. My one self cannot be split in two and remain the same, and it cannot become one from many and be the same. Either I have existed as one person, or I do not exist. This is the only real answer to the problem.

Because I am one person, I either have always been one person, or I began to exist. So how do I know I

have not always existed? I think, I feel, I experience and interact with the world around me. It seems that I could not do these things before conception. Why? Because I did not exist before that. I have a beginning. I have a cause, or causes that brought me into this world.

How do I know that I needed a cause or causes to bring me here? Because if I needed no cause and had no beginning, I would be eternal, in the sense of having no beginning and no end. If I was eternal in this sense, I would be the master of myself; I would be the first thing in my life. But if I was *it* for me, what kind of *me* was it that has existed forever without cause? I was not a thinking, feeling, experiencing, and interacting being. I just was. But if there is no way to describe *what* I was, it is only because I was nothing. In other words, I didn't exist.

Maybe it will be helpful here to summarize a few things about what we have found. My parents cannot bring "me" into existence any more that I can bring something completely new into existence because:

1. They cannot create something new from nothing, because they were new once, and do not have the power of Being within them.
2. A reordering of existing material is not something new in the same way that I am something new.

I have not always existed because:

1. I could not have existed as parts of the whole me because this would lead to a "contradiction of the self."
2. I think, I feel, I experience and interact with the world around me now, but not before conception.

So how does all of this fit together or bring us to a deeper knowledge of reality? Let's see how these ideas affect our knowledge of a Creator. A Creator is supposed to have the power of Existence within. How can a Creator be eternal—in the sense of being without beginning and without end—if we can't? The Creator is eternal because of the power of Being (or life) that rests within. The Creator is not caused, was never new, but has always existed and always will exist by his own power of Being.

The Creator is a thinking, feeling, experiencing, interacting Being. I will return to this idea later, but for now, we will look at other ideas which bring us closer to finding what may be found. What we have found already, I think, is very precious and I hope the treasure hunt will continue getting more exciting for you as it is for me. Let's wander together further into what is. Perhaps we will find in the end that finding is not half as good as what is being found.

What is Worth Starting?

Is anything worth starting, or doing at all? If we were merely animals, would life be worth living? If we were merely machines, would there be anything special about doing anything? We would merely be performing mindless tasks endlessly, chasing after the wind. We might as well be farting rather than thinking, or sleeping rather than reading. Actually, if life is really truly meaningless, we might as well be doing nothing. Not eating, sleeping, finding a wife, doing drugs, seeking psychiatric help, talking to God, feeling happy, killing ourselves or others, singing, etc. We might as well not breathe or even exist. If life were completely meaningless, if our actions and thoughts did not affect or change anything or mean anything, nothing could be done—or anything that is possible to do could be done—by us, and there would be no reason to think that not existing or existing and doing things would have any more meaning than the other. True meaninglessness stinks. Why exist or not exist? All is meaningless!

But our world shows signs of meaning. It exists with order, with beauty. And we exist. And we question our world to discover its meaning. We search for meaning because we are driven by an end. We can start living precisely because there is meaning. We have reason to live and exist because there is a God, a Creator, a sustainer of all things. Purpose abounds in a universe that exists!

But what is worth starting? Life is worth starting. Even though we don't have the power of life within us, we have at least the gift of life. Thinking about and experiencing our world is worth starting. Even though we cannot perceive or even experience everything in the world because we do not have that power within us, we have the gift of being able to think about and experience parts of the whole and to act on that knowledge. Partial knowledge is a gift we are constantly receiving. Love is worth starting. Even though we cannot love perfectly and do not have the power of love within us, we have the gift of love given perfectly to us by God, and we may begin to love Him and others with what love we have.

In all these things we find meaning through finding someone within us affecting our being. Things are worth starting which have God as their base. If our "Great God" hypothesis unravels, so too does meaning.

3

The Mind

How the Mind Wanders

Our minds are tools of discovering meaning, but are they trustworthy? Like an ocean, covered in salty sea air, that breaks its waves on the shore, so too our thoughts find their ways upon the water. Too often they are lost at sea, drowned to the world. Those that crash upon this sandy shore are greeted by the passing gulls that fly overhead to judge the swelling of the morning tide. Some are dashed on rocky cliffs and find no home, no place to rest. But again and again they come, these thoughts, some lost or destroyed, some melted into others, some swollen, others shallow.

Of all things, our minds are wanderers. The night before last I had a dream. In it, I sat and listened to someone lecturing on a certain topic. I disagreed with the lecturer on a small point, and told them so. They argued their point, as did I, but to no avail, for as soon as we had reached the end of the argument we were no longer on the same topic with which we had

begun. Our words had slid themselves around and found somewhere else to travel. Why is that? The mind had wandered. Human minds often wander in and out, find some small point to depart, and leave immediately to somewhere else.

Like a runaway slave they swiftly disappear into some brighter land, a place of freedom and rest. It is almost as if they feel trapped and must find their way out of walls that are crashing in on them. Or like children, under their parent's supervision, they want to sneak away and find themselves somewhere with no rules, no apparent boundaries. Thoughts race with all their might, but often quit the race before finishing, and start another. Sometimes thoughts find their focus in the smallest detail, and treat it as if it were the whole world, while at the same time neglecting the bigger picture. Straining at a gnat, we swallow a camel.

In fact, the mind is such a wanderer, that I can't keep it to the task of writing for long. And hardest of all (it seems) is the great amount of focus and energy it takes me presently to think (and write) about the mind's wandering nature. My mind is too slippery. Where exactly am I going with all this vague and poetic nonsense? I want to convey the thought that human minds wander terribly, and are often not to be trusted with focusing on any one thing for any extended period of time. Many television commercials are good illustrations of the fact that humans get off track. Commercials

spend the majority of their purchased time being funny, emotional, or even splendidly artistic. Basically, they are entertainment. So much so that, at times, if they didn't actually show their product at the end of the advertisement, the viewer would have no idea of what the message really was. The fillers are funny when the product is boring.

Back to the topic at hand. Perhaps a story would convey the point best.…



In an immense forest filled to the brim with people and trees, flowers and thorns, deer and chipmunks, there lived a little boy known in all parts as the "Wanderer." The forest dwellers would often walk through the forest paths throughout the day, exploring, discovering, and finding new paths and alleys, always meandering along and as often as not getting lost. The forest dwellers would go from place to place, finding new roads with every turn. Any path was good enough. Every path was their future home. They often talked as they walked, and mingled in groups and separated into factions as they traveled. Some would get lost in the darkness of the forest, never to be heard of again. Many died terrible deaths, destroyed in the deep darkness of the trees. But some found their way here and there, on

the scattered paths that interconnected throughout the vast forest land.

The Wanderer was an especially curious little boy. He had met many men and women in this forest. He had traveled to many unknown spots, had discovered and explored vast regions, and was a true expert at forest craft (especially the art of finding previously undiscovered flowers). One day, as he was walking down a new path, to his delight he stumbled on a very great treasure. The little boy found a map of the forest—the entire forest.

No one had ever seen anything like it before. The wanderer showed it to many of his fellow forest dwellers. As the people studied it and compared it with what they knew of the forest, they found that it was an invaluable tool in understanding exactly where they were in the forest at any given time. It was a truthful map. But there was one difficulty. The map showed an unknown path directly in the middle of the forest, and this path was marked "path of the forest King." Some of the older forest dwellers had speculated that there was an ancient king who had planted their forest, but none had guessed that this King lived in the forest with them. So they decided to find his path and visit the King. Many of them (including the Wanderer) left immediately on their way to the King's path.

On their way, some wandered off to pick berries. Some stopped to sing songs. Some went home tired.

Others decided to throw rocks into the lake. All except the young boy went their separate ways, forgetting their purpose or losing their way. Even the boy eventually got lost himself. He had become more concerned about the flowers on the side of the path than his destination. He found himself lost in some thorny bushes, not knowing where in the forest he was. The next day he walked and wandered and finally found his way home. There he picked up the map (which no one had bothered to bring) and decided to make a second attempt.

This time he tried to focus on the map and his destination instead of the flowers he passed along the way, but soon he found himself stuck. There were thick shrubs blocking his path, and he couldn't seem to find any way around them. After some time, a little girl named Grace found him wandering about, and asked him what he was doing in those parts of the woods. The sky was getting dark and the boy couldn't see the map through the haze of forest darkness. The little girl offered to help him in his quest, and they went to her home (which was nearby) and found her lantern. With the light of the lantern, they were able to read the map, and with the aid of the map the wanderer and his new companion soon found their way through the dark paths.

After several hours of walking, they came to a small gate at the head of the King's path (the only gate, according to the map). Above the gate stood an old

wooden sign with writing on it that said: "Come to me all who want to live, but only the pure will be allowed to pass and enter here." (So much for their attempt at visiting the path of the King, or catching a glimpse of the King himself. The boy and girl weren't pure at all, and they knew it. They would never see the King now.) A rustling was heard, and a man opened the small gate and looked out at them. A grim yet friendly light shone from his eyes. The children stood there afraid as he told them: "I am the gatekeeper. All who desire to live with the King may enter here if they are clean." The boy and girl looked at each others' filthy skin and clothes and realized that they had come unprepared.

The map they held seemed to glow just then, and as they looked at it, they saw inscribed on the bottom in black and red a short message, barely legible. It read: "There are no clean rivers, streams, creeks, pools, lakes, or any other water sources in the forest except where marked with a *t*." In the middle of the map, through the center of the King's path, flowed a river with a *t* marked upon it (the only water source with a *t* that could be found on the map). They wondered if they could gain access to the river just beyond the gate in order to clean themselves there. But there was only one gate, and no uncleanness was to pass it.

The thought went unspoken, but the gatekeeper saw their distress, and offered to cleanse them in the river beyond the gate. The children were exuberant at the

chance to walk the path of the King. The gatekeeper looked at them, and closed the barred gate and walked toward the stream, some thirty yards away. The children waited outside the gate within sight of the river, wondering how the gatekeeper would cleanse them without admitting them past the gate. The gatekeeper turned at the bank of the river, and over his shoulder said to them: "You cannot wash in this river or it will kill you, because you are unclean, and the cleanness of the river would overwhelm you." The gatekeeper looked down at the swiftly flowing river and continued, "I will pay the price for your uncleanness," and although he was already clean, he lowered himself into the water.

The gatekeeper began to sink and become overwhelmed, till finally he had drowned. The children, much afraid and astonished at the sight, cried as they watched their new companion drown in the waves. As their tears fell to the ground, they noticed something different about each other. Each was spotlessly clean, wearing shining white garments. Their skin was purer than a newborn baby's. As they stood by the gate, they heard a voice from beneath the water of the river tell them, "Go to the King, I have covered you with my cleanness." The gate swung open.

The two children entered the gate and it shut behind them. They decided to follow the river and the King's path as they wove slowly through the forest toward their source, the planter of the great forest. When they

arrived at the end of their course, they came to a bright clearing. There before them stood a humble cottage, small and unadorned, with a garden to the north of it surrounded by a small rock wall. As they drew near to the door of the cottage, it swung open with great force. To their astonishment there stood before them, with a smile on his face, the keeper of the gate, now revealed as the King of the forest, wearing a beautiful white garment with silver trees embroidered on the sleeves and a golden crown on his noble head. The children's eyes were opened and they saw the house for what it truly was: glorious and shiningly beautiful, large enough for all of the forest dwellers to live in. And behind the gatekeeper-King there came from the house thousands and thousands of fellow forest dwellers, all welcoming the newcomers and congratulating the King for a job well done.

❁ ❁ ❁

It's not much of a story. And I suppose not much of an illustration either. As I was developing it, I tried to make it more interesting and meaningful, and I found that the plot was no longer centering on wandering. It was instead filled with purpose. I suppose that I had wandered in my thoughts and writing from a story that focused on a wandering mind to a story about humanity being reconciled to its purposeful Creator. When

thinking about the mind's wandering powers, I thought about it purposefully. I ended up with purposeful and structured results, and I conveyed those results in a structured purposeful way. The slippery subject of a wandering mind had suddenly vanished, and in its place was purpose. Is it even possible to think or talk about the wandering mind in a completely wandering way? It doesn't seem to be. Eventually the mind wanders to a meaningful path and wants to stick to its newfound purposes. Thinking about nothing in particular seems to degenerate into thinking about something.

Though our mind floats freely on the breeze, its flittering heart will find calm waters once again.… There I go again, from the concrete to the abstract. "The more the words, the less the meaning," as the saying goes. My thoughts never were very clear on the subject of wandering thoughts, but now after contemplating and "chewing the cud" for a while, I find myself in nearly the same place I started. There is purpose in these pages, and the words convey meaning, even as they wander. But continuing on in that purpose for an extended period of time can be very difficult. This much is clear: over time thoughts wander, calm down, and wander again. My will begs me to stay true to my primary path, but my thoughts are soon distracted and master me. This is my lot as a created living being under the weight of a fallen self. To change, to become, to struggle for clarity of purpose and action. Isn't there any way

that we can control our thoughts? We cannot expect an imperfect child to be perfect, but we can hope that they will listen to us when we discipline them. Our thoughts, like children, must be shown the right way, and disciplined when they go astray.

How the Mind Finds

How does the mind work, and how does it find? The mind is not the brain, or neural chemistry, but humans seem to use their brains when their minds are at work (or sometimes not at all). We take huge amounts of little bits of information and store them for years in our brains, until the time comes when one of them is needed. We try to summon it back up, but often, at least for me, it is not that easy. Sometimes I have to take a nap or think about something unrelated just to get to the piece of information I need. It's encoded in there somewhere, it seems, but it is inaccessible. Often, concentrating on the subject at hand only gets a person a tiny bit closer to that lost bit. Other encoded thoughts seem to block the way, like a sentence with too many words and phrases. Stressing at it or over-focusing mental powers is practically useless. Often, the person must forget the problem for the moment, lose sight of the topic, and then you will find what you are searching for.

Unfortunately, what you remember is probably not exactly what it was when you encoded it in your brain

for the first time—especially if it was years ago. Time has a way of changing things in our world. Decay affects even our brains. Things degenerate, unless acted on by some outside source. Information encoded physically becomes more and more useless. Order turns to disorder. Very useful energy changes to less useful energy. The overall nature of change is bad, if the change is not brought about by an outside source for its good. (This is something like the second law of thermodynamics, which is a fancy way of saying entropy, which is a fancy word for the process of decay, disorder, and the general running down of our universe.) This is sad, but it seems to happen everywhere in our physical universe, and we cannot permanently and universally halt its movement.

But what if we were to force ourselves to keep our information straight and orderly by constantly bringing back into our minds every experience we had ever had, or at least the ones we wanted to remember? We could try that, but would it really work? What if while we were thinking about one object in our minds, the others were being slightly changed, thus potentially losing their truthfulness? What if we only had two thoughts encoded in our brain, one of a ball, the other of a bat, and we were thinking about the bat in order to refresh our memory of it: what if our physically encoded memory of the ball changed while we were thinking of the bat? If it did, how would we even know the change had happened? How could we remember what the true

ball looked like unless we went back to our source, the ball, and looked at it again (in our mind's eye)? Or maybe we could just ask someone else who had experienced the ball before, and compare our memory of the ball with theirs. Or we could look at a drawing or picture of the ball. At any rate, the only way we could objectively verify what the ball actually looked like is by some outside source, someone or something outside of ourselves to compare our thoughts with.

Our physically encoded memory could be faulty, but is it that bad? Hopefully we remember what a chair is every time we think of it. But don't we remember what it is and how it looks because of how often we come into contact with it? I don't remember what the word "irrupt" means, probably because I don't think it or use it or hear it all that often. We remember better when we can strengthen our memory through use. By constant contact with the object of our thoughts, we may retain our thoughts in an orderly fashion. But what if I had not seen my favorite blue chair for thirty years? Could my mind still piece it together exactly, to think it as it had been thirty years ago? Or perhaps the physical encoding in my brain has changed or thoughts I have about it have changed in my mind. It may still resemble my lovely chair I miss so much, but is that picture in my mind as fresh and clear and exact as it was? Of course not! That is the nature of this world we live in.

Even the current experiences we have of our world may fall into doubt. I may say of my chair as I look at it: "Wow, my chair is a lovely blue color," or "Look how nicely built it is." But in the past I have been known to think that an item was blue, when in fact it was really blue-green, lavender, aqua, or some other color I am not able to identify. Many people I know are more adept than I am at telling a thing's color, but even amongst themselves there are disputes. What is color anyway? Is it just a certain wavelength of light bouncing into my eye, and being translated to my brain as this or that?

What if I was born in a land without the color pink? Not that it didn't exist, but instead no one had ever thought of it as pink, but rather as light red, or reddish white. Maybe no one ever even thought of it as a different color than red. If you were to come to my land and point at a pink carnation and ask me what color it was, I might respond: "It's red." And you might say: "What? Anyone can see that it is a different color than red: it's pink. As surely as one is different from two, this flower's pink color is different than red." Who is right? Obviously, we see the same flower. Maybe we both even see it the same way, in the same light, etc. But our categories of color are different. Our minds have different filing systems. While yours has a file for red and for pink, mine has one only for red. And perhaps someone somewhere else can see 8,000

different colors where you see only two. Are there really that many colors?

We call colors *different* if it is useful to do so. If we have no need for many names, we simplify our system of thoughts and put many different shades together. In a way, we are stereotyping colors. Trying to deal with every single shade between the colors in the rainbow from red to violet is too much for our little heads. So we put our colors in neat little boxes in order to more easily communicate to others what we mean, and in order to understand them ourselves. We simplify, many times unknowingly, in order to make our experiences of the world useful, both to ourselves and to others.

Many qualities are simplified in this way. My chair may be warm and cozy to me, but cold and hard to you. The difference is not with the chair, but within us. There is an absolute cold and an absolute heat, but in between we put our own numbers. Likewise a thing can only be so hard or so soft, and in between we attach our own concepts of softness or hardness. These systems (temperature and hardness) are finite; they have two ends, like a shoestring, but in between the two ends we have written numbers so that we can talk about where on the shoestring we are. Everyone has similar shoestrings, but different marks with different numbers. When two people put their shoestrings side by side, they may, if they choose to, change their numbers so that the numbers match. They make an artificial

standard in order to understand each other when they speak about the shoestring. People do this all the time in order to understand each other. Unfortunately, this process is taken for granted and is often overlooked. When we travel to a new place and meet people of different backgrounds, we may find that our numbers do not match. We must learn to listen and seek to understand their standards (their worldview) in order to understand their words and their ways more clearly.

Let's return to my beautiful blue chair: I think it's very well built. What I mean is that I think it is a good chair because it was made well. My chair does what every good chair ought to do; namely, hold me up off the ground in a pleasant way. It does not matter if it has legs, a back, or cushions; what matters is that I sit on it. It could be a bean-bag or a rocking recliner, and it would not matter. It fulfills my concept of a chair—a really good chair. It is useful for what it was intended to do and to be.

I may go to someone else's house and sit on a table, mistaking it for a chair, and say: "This is so weird! This chair is taller than my chair at home, and flatter too, but it works just as well." At this, the host might turn to me and say: "That's not a chair, it's a table! It was never intended to be sat on! Get off, or leave!" What an awkward situation I have gotten myself into this time! I mistook the identity of their table, and now I am in big trouble. My host is right, though. He correctly told

me that the maker of the table, the carpenter, probably never intended his creation to be sat upon. At the very least, the carpenter never created the table with the main purpose of being sat upon.

Likewise, when I stand on my chair, I am likely not using it as the creator of the chair purposed. What a naughty boy I am! If I fall off of it, it's my own fault! Now things don't necessarily have to have only one purpose. For instance, beds are meant to lie down on, and that is their main purpose. But a secondary purpose is that it is a place to sit down. I can think of many things with more than one purpose, but it is difficult to think of a thing that has more than one primary or main purpose, one central thing that it was created to do, generally speaking.

We may mistake a created thing's identity or purpose and use it in other ways, but the real question is not what we think it is for, but what it is actually for. When I say the sentence: "Wow! What a cool window," and you hear or read me saying this, what is it that I am really saying? You may think: "This guy is pretty strange, so maybe he is talking about eyes. After all, they say that the eyes are the windows to the soul. And by 'cool' he means 'cold in temperature.' By 'wow' he probably means 'I am so surprised this happened to me!' So all together his sentence 'Wow! What a cool window' could be interpreted as meaning 'I am so

surprised that this is happening to me! I am seeing an eye that is cold in temperature.'"

I hope you don't think that's what I really meant. If you did think I meant that, either I'm not speaking clearly enough, or you are not hearing clearly enough, because you're using my words in a way I didn't intend them to be used. Misunderstandings happen all the time. Clear communication is an art.

Mistaken identity, or using something as it was not intended, is a problem. This problem affects our views of reality. When we find something outside of ourselves, we either start thinking about it or we pass it by. If it does catch our attention, we may grasp its original intent, or we may misunderstand what it is or how it is used. When we think about it later, we either think clearly and often about it or we let it degenerate into a faulty memory. When we put it in our brain we either assign some value or name to it (or one of its qualities) and store it away in our neat little compartments, or we just let it float around for a while up there in our head, until it finds a way out. There are so many ways for us to screw up this process once it has begun, because we are a part of a decaying universe.

Our minds wander. Our memories fade and become distorted. We make mistakes, and miscommunicate. Original purposes become distorted or lost completely. And at times (or for some of us, many times every day) our minds become convoluted messes. Yet, despite all

of the problems we face when we find things, we continue to seek and find and retain and communicate. We must continue on, but the way is so full of obstacles and imperfections that it's difficult to even see the path. We must live with what light we have, and seek more along the way.

How the Mind Seeks

What a gift it is for us to be able to seek the truth about the world all around us and within us. This process of seeking is amazing. Within our hearts there is a seed that dwells, and grows into a plant. This plant needs food to live and grow and continue to interact with the world as a living organism. It breathes and follows a path of life as we continue to grow with it. What does it feed on and use for the fuel of life? Information gained through experiences. Our experiences are varied. We experience things in the physical world through our senses, and our brains translate them into usable data. We experience the thoughts and ideas of those around us through these same instruments (our senses and our brains). The *we* who experience are not our senses or our brains, but our selves. We also come to experience such things as our own thoughts, feelings, and worldviews, not through our senses, but firsthand from within ourselves. These things are just as real as the carpet I am laying on, only they are immaterial.

How can we experience our thoughts, feelings, or worldviews? They are part of us. Or rather they are a direct manifestation of who we are. They are a representation of our being. And they are the inward part that directs our interactions with the world around us. They are the judges of our experiences, and a pilot of our physical bodies. We may experience them by using them. We may think about our thoughts. We may feel our feelings. We may analyze our worldview through our worldview. But all of these ways of experiencing are flawed. A person cannot fully think about all of their thoughts, because while they are thinking about "all" of their thoughts, the thought of thinking about "all" of their thoughts is not being thought about.

It is as if a man were swimming in the ocean and wanted to be dry and not wet, to be out of the water and in the air above it. Luckily, he is a very strong man: he can lift 300 pounds. He knows this, and he also knows that he is carrying a heavy backpack. The combined weight of his pack, all of its contents, and his wet clothes is approximately 100 pounds. He weighs only 195 pounds, meaning that he and his stuff weigh only 295 pounds. So he decides that since he is so strong and so light, he should not have to swim another stroke. He'll pick himself up out of the water and deposit himself on dry land. So he grabs himself by the hair and pulls. He pulls and pulls and pulls. For all his pulling, he actually

ends up going the other way, deeper and deeper into the ocean. While he uses nearly all of his strength in his attempt at picking himself up, he has barely any strength left to swim. And so our hero drowns.

By attempting to think about all of our thoughts at once, we end up making more thoughts to think about and drown in an endless ocean of thoughts. So much for getting dry, or for getting outside of ourselves in order to gain a complete knowledge of our own thoughts and feelings and worldviews. "Man know thyself," goes the old saying. I say in response: "I'm trying, but I'm drowning here, can't anyone help me?"

This is the seed that grows within us: knowledge of the world around us and even of ourselves. It grows as a plant grows, gaining new knowledge through experiences. And it is always hungry. It seeks something to fill the void in its stomach, like a poor man begging for bread. It seeks the completion of knowledge. It wants perfection. Many small bits of knowledge will not do. They only make it bigger and hungrier. This plant wants all knowledge, the food of infinite knowledge, being, and interaction. In short, this plant within us wants God. Nothing else, no matter how great, will do. God knows all, and even knows us, completely and in a way that we don't know ourselves. In our seeking we must acknowledge in the end that here and now we cannot know all things, or think all things at once. Even about ourselves.

Only close communion with one who knows all things at once can satisfy our inner desires. This seeking, this incredible hunger, is a gift from the only one capable of satisfying it. Do you recognize this in your own heart and life, your own imperfections screaming out for perfection, your search for a savior?

4

Found

What We Have Found

Why do we have it within us to want to know more? What is the cause of this hunger, and what is its purpose? We have seen that in seeking, we find that what is sought in the end is God. Communion with the perfect all-knowing eternal God is our thirst's goal. Can something be described as having a purpose or a goal to which it is drawn without it having been made to do that very thing? What in the world am I saying?

If a watch is found on the ground, as we discussed earlier, and someone picks it up and realizes that it has a purpose and design, an original intent, we should come to the conclusion that the watch was made by someone who gave it purpose and design. The watch didn't just happen.

In the same way, our realization that God is the only satisfier of our seeking hungry heart and mind should bring us to the further realization that it was

God who put that hunger in us in the first place. That seed of the quest for knowledge and truth which is in each and every one of us was put there intentionally to draw us to the very one who put it there. For, indeed, God is the only one who could have put it there. After all, we have it from birth. It is not possible to learn anything without already possessing the very ability to learn. We didn't learn how to learn only from watching our parents: we had to have had that ability already in order to even begin to learn how to learn.

Like a plant without photosynthesis (part of their fancy digestive system), so is a human without the inborn ability to learn. Without a mechanism that processes incoming energy or data into something useful to the organism, which it can then store, retrieve, clump together, and use in growth, neither a plant nor a human mind is alive. Neither can grow or do any of the other things necessary for life, and so they are both dead. A truly mind-dead person would be a person who could never learn, because they have no system for learning to begin with. While a person can be pronounced "brain dead," there is no such thing as a *mind dead* person.

The great news is that because you are able to read this, and I am able to write it, neither of us is completely mind-dead. We were both given this marvelous gift of the ability to learn and feel and purposefully interact with other things.

Our parents had this ability, as will our children (if we choose to have any). And before them, long before them, our ancient first parents were given this ability (because humans are not without beginning, and cannot be, we had to have had "first parents" at one point who were the beginning of our kind); this system of learning and acquiring knowledge was from something outside of themselves. Only a being capable of deep thought and design could make us and this ability to grow in knowledge, and to seek more, for a being cannot give what they do not possess. A non-thinking being cannot bring a being into existence and cause it to think any more than a completely non-loving being can bring a being into existence and cause it to love. Otherwise, it would be the case that this imperfect creator was not truly the creator at all. This creator would not have been the cause for the thinking or the loving. In order to cause something to have a certain existence, you must first possess that certain existence, or you cannot give it away. You can't give what you don't have. And because what we seek after in our growth of knowledge is ultimately God—the one who has perfect knowledge—we find that the only one who could have put this ability within us in the first place is that same person—God.

God made us to seek after himself. He shows us himself everywhere, even inside of us. He is here, the object of our desire, and he is the one who put that

desire within us. God shows us that it has been his will from the beginning for us to seek after him and by any means to find him, in order to commune with him and have relationship with him. What a great God we have found!

He not only helps us find the treasure, which is himself, by giving us the directions in order to make a treasure map, but he also gives us the very ability to make the treasure map itself! He really desires us to find what is to be found!

Himself.

The Discovery That We Are Discovered

What we find then is not that we are lonely in our discovery. Not only are there innumerable people who have at least partly discovered these things before us, but there is also a being who is "discovering" us. This being is finding us, and he is the one who began our own search for him. Our Creator put it within us to search for our Creator, and to seek him out above all else. Eternity is in our hearts only because the eternal put it there.

The discovery that we were made to discover our maker should put us in a thoughtful mood. Think of this: God made us to seek him, find him, know him, and commune with him. Not only that, but he seeks after us, finds us, knows us, and communes with us. What a fantastic thing to think about. Here we are on

this planet, seeking to discover, so that we may think and act in ways that more closely correspond to reality, and we find in this process that God began the search, and put it within us to seek him seeking us. God's ways are far above our ways, don't you think? In the end we have nothing to boast about. Our finding God is only made possible by his first finding us, and by his indwelling in us the search for truth, direction, perfection, and the infinite. All this time we have known that we had lost something precious, and now we discover that we were the ones that were lost.

What It Means to Be Discovered

In light of all of this, we have a duty. A duty to continue seeking, knocking, and asking. A duty to wake up and see God. What we have found reveals to us that God is seeking us and calling to us through our experiences. Our experiences show us what we are in our finiteness. We are not complete without the one for whom we exist. What is he seeking us for? Why has he found us? Here is the real shocker—it is because he loves us! You see, we are his children made in his own image. In the image of God he created us. He made man from the dust of the earth, and he breathed the breath of life into him. From man he made woman. And from man and woman, together the image of God, came all of humankind. What a story! But that is just the beginning of it.

God put man and woman in an environment that would sustain them if they worked the land and acted according to his good plan. He told them not to do something (eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), and created them to do good. He did not tempt them with the bad by placing it before them, for there was nothing wrong with the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in itself—he had created it and called it good. God's plan was for them to do the good thing. To obey him and to submit to their Creator in humility, knowing that the good they possessed came from him. But humans fell, through disobedience, through willfully choosing to go against the Creator and Father of us all. The sin was not merely in the action, but in the willful thinking process leading up to the action and in man and woman's turning their hearts from God. And so the world was brought under a curse, by the will of humans, and still we walk in darkness, stumbling. That relationship, the perfect relationship that existed between humans and God, was broken. The judgment for breaking the relationship between God and humans was death. And it continues on into our day.

But not without hope. Our hope is in the truth: seeking it, finding it, knowing it, believing it, following it.

5

True Seeking

Finding the Truth

What is truth? Will we ever get to the bottom of this? Is there no end to the search for truth? Truth is that which corresponds with reality. Let's look at an example. There is cheese in my refrigerator. It is a bit old. Perhaps it is even moldy, but I hope not. I want to have a grilled cheese sandwich tomorrow for lunch. But I would rather it not be a blue cheese sandwich. So I'll just go and check the cheese and make sure it isn't moldy yet.

The cheese exists. I know this because I have experienced it and interacted with it. But is it moldy? I don't know yet. I haven't checked it recently. What is the truth about the cheese? It exists. It is cheesy. I presently own it. I will probably eat it tomorrow for lunch. But is it moldy?

If I imagine it is moldy, does that mean that it is moldy? No. What that does mean is that the cheese I am imagining is molding. That doesn't mean that the cheese in my refrigerator in the physical world is moldy.

Just because I think that something is true, does not mean it is true. Sometimes we hear the saying: "What's true for you may not be true for me." This saying about the relativity of truth is only relatively true. I may think the cheese is moldy. My wife may think it is not. Both of us think differently, but in this case, either one of us is completely right, or both of us are partly right. Both of us cannot be completely right or completely wrong about the same thing if we both hold truly opposite views. Here are the possibilities: (1) I am completely right, and the cheese is completely moldy, which would make my wife wrong; (2) My wife Grace is completely right (which is usually the case) and the cheese has no mold, making me completely wrong; and (3) My wife and I are both right, but only partly so, because this cheese has spots of mold all over it. But there would never appear a third possibility; that the piece of cheese in question is completely moldy and yet has no mold on it at all. Either it is or it isn't, it can't be both completely moldy and completely not moldy at the same time and in the same way.

So this much we know: the cheese is either completely moldy or completely not moldy, or is just partially moldy. What is the truth about the cheese? We must discover the truth. Only then will our eyes be opened to reality as it exists outside of us. And only then will I know if I should make a grilled cheese

sandwich tomorrow. It doesn't matter what we think the truth is about the cheese in my refrigerator; what matters is whether or not it actually is moldy. I don't want to eat the imaginary cheese in my head for lunch tomorrow. It may not be moldy, but it also won't fill me up. It's not physical. But that cheese in my refrigerator exists in the physical world, and can fill my physical belly. The truth is out there. We just need to open the refrigerator and see what it is.

But something else is also necessary. When I open the door to the refrigerator, I see with my eyes that the cheese has no mold on it. Great! Now I can eat it for lunch tomorrow! But I hate being wrong about things. And I just argued with my wife about the cheese. I thought it was going to be completely moldy by now. So I come up with a brilliant plan. If I just tell her that it is moldy, and throw away the evidence, I can remain right, and she will be wrong about the cheese. But is that honest? No … let me rethink this.

Maybe I could just spend hours and hours looking over the cheese and tasting it and testing it in other ways to see if it really is moldy or not. I really want it to be moldy! If it's not, then my wife was right, and I was wrong. The truth was on her side. So I look and taste and test the cheese for ten whole hours, and find no mold. What if I continued to do so until the end of time? That way I wouldn't have to admit to my wife

that I was wrong. Is that honest? No … it's good to suspend judgment until a matter has been thoroughly investigated, but never coming to grips with reality is dishonest. We should continue to seek the truth, but we must eventually act on what we already know.

Then I get another idea: if I just leave the cheese out of the refrigerator until tomorrow, then show my wife, she will think it was moldy when we were arguing about it and I will be proved right! Or will I? It may be moldy tomorrow, but it is not moldy right now, which is what we were arguing about. Is that honest? No … I would have been wrong about the cheese and dishonest with my wife. I have twisted the truth to fit my desires.

But what if I perceived the cheese as moldy in the first place? What if the lightbulb in the refrigerator was tinted blue, and I smelled something rotten near the cheese, so I came to the conclusion that I was right about the cheese all along. I tell my wife it is moldy, so she checks it out as well. She takes it out of the refrigerator, and looks at it, tastes it, smells it and does a thorough mold-test on it. But she comes to the conclusion that it is not moldy. So I tell her that it was when I looked at it. Is that honest? This is a more difficult case than the ones before, because both my wife and I experienced the cheese this time, but we came out of our experiences with different and contradictory conclusions.

Honesty

Was I honest with her? Isn't my perception of the cheese that it is moldy? Yes. So I was honest in that I told her what I believed to be the truth, but I was honestly wrong: I didn't pass the truth on to her, only my false perception of the truth. I thought it was moldy, so I told her it was. But doesn't all or at least most of our knowledge come from our own perceptions of reality? So does that mean that everything we know to be true might actually turn out to be false when investigated more thoroughly? And wouldn't that also mean that because we as humans cannot know the whole truth about anything, including even our selves or our own thoughts and actions, because of this we can never speak the truth completely (a high, pure, perfect honesty which comes from complete knowledge of the truth of reality) about anything to anyone? We cannot realize or tell the whole truth in a completely truthful manner. We might not know the whole truth about anything, so we can't tell it to anyone. So much for telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

But as we found earlier in our journey, it is not necessary to possess all truth or all knowledge in order to act properly. We must act properly on what we do know. I know the cheese is moldy. It looked blue, and it smelled rotten. But my wife tested it too, and found that it was not moldy. I must acknowledge her view,

and seek to understand it and test it. If it turns out that the evidence is pointing towards my wife being right, I must act accordingly, and concede that she may be right. I should open my mind and heart to the evidence all around me, and seek to understand truth as it exists. I should desire the truth with my heart, and find the truth with my mind. And then I must act on this knowledge. That is when my knowledge becomes useful, when I step up to the plate and eat my grilled cheese sandwich. Maybe I will find that the cheese really was moldy after all, and that I had been right all along. But I must act on what I see as true.

So now that we have traveled along the road of honesty for awhile, let's turn down the footpath of intellectual honesty. Intellectual honesty is not easily defined. But we'll try it out anyways. When I perceive something to be true, and I deal with it as I perceive it (as truth), I am fulfilling my responsibility. Along with knowledge comes responsibility. I must treat it in my mind as true, I must think it is true, I must tell others that it is true, and I must seek to more fully comprehend its truth. You and I have a deep duty to deal faithfully with the world that we experience and interact with. We cannot close our eyes to the evidence around us and in us. We have a responsibility to call it like it is. We do not have all truth, but we must be honest with ourselves and others when we perceive a

part of the truth. Let's now turn our truth lenses on something more important than cheese.

A Theory of the Flow of Information in the Mind

Let's talk about a theory of how truth is found, from an information perspective. Any theory must be clear, and it must testable: it should be able to be proved wrong. Any theory of the flow of information in the mind (even if it deals with non-physical things) should likewise be clear and at least partially testable and falsifiable. Let's try to understand the flow of information in the mind by breaking the process down into digestible parts. First, the terms: *data* are the given about reality—statements about data are called *facts*; *information* is meaningfully structured data—statements about information that fit with reality are called *true* statements; *truth* is a thought or statement that corresponds with reality, or is the reality itself; a *mind* is that thing we think with. Information is for and in minds, and can be externalized, and encoded into physical reality or decoded from physical reality (think of writing and reading). It may seem odd to think about thinking, but you the reader are doing even more than that. You are thinking about my thinking about thinking. Anyway, let's get on with our theory.

We'll do our thought experiment on an imaginary person named Herbert.

First, things exist outside of Herbert, and Herbert exists inside of himself. There is a distinction between everything else in the universe and Herbert, even though Herbert exists in the universe. Herbert is different (you and I are different too). Herbert is not just a body. He is a *living* body. Not just a moving body (like a Zombie or something), but a real live person. Herbert is not just his body, he is his living body. When Herbert's body dies, Herbert lives on. When Herbert's body is alive, lots of outside data and information bombard him from moment to moment. Whether he sleeps or is awake, Herbert's mind and body are busy filtering the data and information. Data and information (that the sky is blue, the oven is hot, the shoe is small, the air is humid, etc.) come from outside of Herbert, meaning that Herbert doesn't create all of the data and information in the world—lots of it would be true even if Herbert didn't exist.

Second, Herbert knows certain things and is used to certain things. This is only possible because Herbert has a mind. Herbert's mind is created to understand, to absorb, to figure out, to follow, to construct new thoughts, to decode information, and to meaningfully structure data as new information. Herbert was built to find things. Herbert was born ready to think, act, choose, and love.

Third, Herbert receives data and information from outside of himself and creates it inside of himself, from

his senses, memories, and thoughts; and uses this information to think, act, decide, and relate. Herbert's mind "passively" acquires and gives data and information throughout the day. This passivity is not total passivity. If Herbert's body and mind were totally passive, nothing would happen within it. But Herbert often does things without Herbert's consent or consciously active participation (like involuntary muscle reactions in the body).

Fourth, Herbert uses his body and mind to bring what is outside of himself to the inside and what is inside of himself to the outside. He talks, walks, reacts, and voices his inward decisions. The inside comes out because Herbert allows it. Herbert actively acquires and gives information throughout the day. Herbert's life can be shared with another person by willingly receiving and giving true information.

Fifth, information can get jumbled. It can get distorted outside or inside of Herbert. Herbert's mind sometimes receives distorted messages, sometimes it distorts messages, and sometimes its messages get distorted. Herbert's brain and sense organs can also go wrong in various ways, causing distortions in the data or information.

Sixth, Herbert can perceive data or fail to perceive them. Herbert might not take note of something because it isn't interesting or useful or isn't part of

his worldview. Herbert can also conceive information (sometimes after decoding it).

Seventh, if Herbert perceives or conceives something, he makes connections (networks) in his body (his brain) that will either be reinforced (by experiencing or thinking about the same or similar things again), or it might be corrupted and eventually disappear from within Herbert.

Eighth, Herbert's mind will build structures from thoughts and perceptions and will incorporate new thoughts and perceptions into existing thought structures. Herbert may also destroy old structures through disuse, or through reallocation (using parts of the old structures to build new structures or add on to previously built structures). This is the process of creating, growing, changing, and destroying information (that is, meaningfully structuring the data of his thoughts). Herbert understands, judges, believes, knows, computes, meditates, desires, worships, loves.

Ninth, Herbert uses these thought structures to react to the outside world and to reveal his own thoughts, perceptions, feelings, etc. to the outside world.



To sum up what we have talked about so far:

1. Herbert is a living person who is different than everything outside of himself.
2. Herbert has a mind.
3. Herbert's body and mind passively give and receive data and information.
4. Herbert's body and mind actively give and acquire data and information.
5. Data and information can be distorted or can be undistorted.
6. Herbert can perceive or not perceive data and can conceive information.
7. Herbert's body develops small connections or networks to deal with data and information.
8. Herbert's mind builds structures from old and new data and information and perceptions.
9. Herbert's thought structures may be used by his mind to reveal Herbert to the outside world through his body.

Figure 1 below illustrates the nine parts of the flow of information in the mind according to our theory.

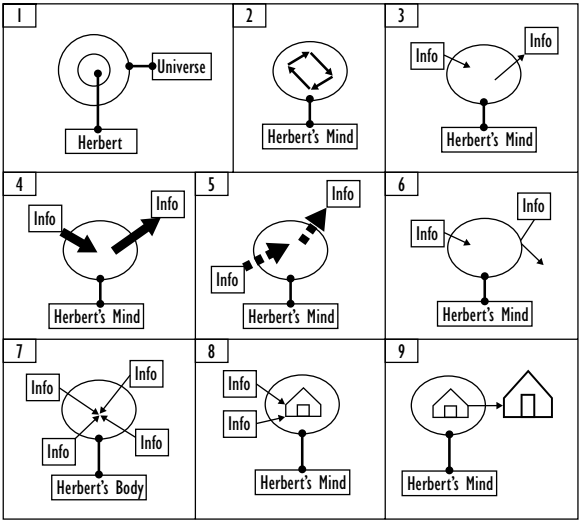


Figure 1. The flow of information in the mind.

Testing the Theory

Herbert, our friend, is alive and exists as something that is different than everything else. We know this because he can make choices. He has a unique physical and mental makeup. If Herbert was not alive or was the same as the universe, he could walk into a speeding train and nothing significant would happen. He wouldn't die, because he would not have been alive, and his collision with the train would mean nothing, because he is the same as what the train is. If you are alive and believe you are different than a speeding train (and will try

to avoid collisions with massive fast-moving objects) then let's move on.

Herbert has a mind. And so do you. The proof is that you read this sentence and thought about it.

Herbert's mind can receive and give information. If he could not receive information, he could not read this sentence, and if he argued with me that his mind does not receive or give information, I would point out that he received my message and that he was giving one himself.

Herbert uses his mind to argue against my theory and thus proves that his mind exists and can be used.

Herbert may misunderstand me or I may write what I do not mean to write, or something else might happen to distort my message to Herbert.

No matter how attentive Herbert may be, he will not be able to gather all the data or information he comes across in his life. Most of it will be lost forever. After all, do you know any human who can describe every single conscious or unconscious experience or thought they have ever had in their entire lives? Herbert is no exception.

If Herbert tries to disprove that his own body (brain) makes connections, I will explain that in making his argument he is using a series of connections in his body that are a result of perceptions and conceptions he has had. Herbert must use several words to argue with me. Herbert's capacity to connect several words or ideas

together using his body and express them intelligibly in an argument proves my point.

If Herbert thinks that meaningful structures are not built up or destroyed in his mind, I would point him to the structured organization of his own argument. Matter without mind is not meaningful.

Finally, if Herbert tries to convince me that he does not use these structures to relate to the outside world, I will ask him why his walking or talking or breathing seems so structured and seems to be based on structured mental activity, an indication of a living and active mind.

Discovery

The flow of information in the mind is complex, and would require much deeper analysis and testing. Herbert is not just a physical body. His mental life is not identical with his brain activity. But neither are the mental and the physical worlds wholly separate. The soul or spirit is the life of the body. It could be that the soul expresses and nurtures itself by the mind's activity. Our theory attempts to understand the nature of this interaction between the non-physical self and the physical world through the mind. This is the process of finding.

Communication and sharing with the outside world may lead to discovery and the growth of the spirit. It may also lead to self-destruction. The outcome depends

upon the motive, the manner, and the proper malleability of the soul. The motive must be to discover and to grow and to relate properly with oneself, others, the world, and God. A self-serving motive will lead only to dissatisfaction and brokenness. The manner must be honest and open. A mind that is closed to discovery will only sabotage the journey. The proper malleability includes a willingness to change thoughts and actions according to what is found. A stubborn mind that resists truth changes only for the worse.

6

Finding Perfection

The Imperfect Life

Our world is messed up. Seriously messed up. We have ruined it. From the time of the first broken relationship with God, relationships have shattered and been twisted to disorder and confusion and towards uselessness. Why is meaninglessness the end of the pursuits of humankind? Because evil spreads toward the degradation of creation. It is corrupting the cosmos, changing its beauty and perfect order into meaninglessness. Why is it meaningless? One reason for calling it meaningless, destined for dust, is that the created order is sinking into worthless non-meaningful, useless cold. As events happen, time goes on, and the rope of the universe unravels. Without an external source of new energy (or matter) pumping life and restoration into the universe, the future holds no hope, no distinction from cold darkness. In a dark, cold, disordered world, where no biological life can exist, where things are not seen, heard, smelled, felt, or tasted, where physical events do

not happen, the heat has stolen away into the night, separating good from good: this is a falling world's imperfect momentum.

Why is there murder? Why is there starvation? Why do people die and seem not to come back? Why do we even exist to ask these questions? Is this world a joke? A torture chamber? No, rather, it is a disjointed, broken mayhem which we have helped to create. Earlier we talked about how humans have choices to affect and interact with their universe and with God. When these two perfect relationships were broken, disorder, pain, bad relationships with God and nature became the path we willfully walked along.

But the good Creator so sustains his creation in mercy, that he does not completely destroy it, or take its existence back. He allows it to decline and to make up its mind which way it will travel—towards perfection or away from it. And on a final day he will judge the creation he has made for all that has transpired willfully against perfection, and against his loving intimate relationship. That which can pass away will, whether it is physical matter, complex systems, or mortality and the effects of decline and disorder (evil) in the universe.

A new world will become the home of humanity and God and beast and tree, and life will consist again of positive, meaningful, loving, right relationships between God's creation and himself. It will be positive because it will be a painless, evil-less, good world for those

made good in it. The relationships will be meaningful because they will fulfill what creation was intended for, intimate relationship with God. Those who are there will love God and others without being compelled to do so, with a full heart of thanksgiving and willful obedience, owing as their Savior the one who bought them with his own life—the God among them, Jesus. These everlasting relationships will be good and right and in order, with respect for God the GOOD and his creation as it shines his good abroad.

But the road humans travel at present in history is dark and evil. We cannot remember much of the past, and what we can remember is distorted from our position as imperfect observers in the universe. We have imperfect views of events or relationships within our universe (see Figure 3 in chapter 8 below). We cannot experience our world in the present, for the world takes its time in affecting and acting upon us: we experience the world of the past. The speed of light is not infinitely fast, and so everything we see and experience of our world has already happened, whether milliseconds or thousands of years ago. Even our own brains which operate in this physical world do not receive data or react instantaneously. So we do not even experience our own physical bodies in the present. And the future is out of bounds. We may guess, but cannot know, because everything in the universe has a chance of affecting the event or thing which we seek to

understand, and in order to understand even one tiny thing completely, or know its future, we would have to know the history of every other thing in the universe that could have affected it (not to mention free will which can act on the environment against probabilities and choose willfully its own courses of action).

So much for knowing our world (or even small bits of it) in the past, present, or future. The past is corrupted in our memory, in our senses, and in our points of view, the present is not interacted with, and the future can be affected, but we cannot know what it holds or even how we will affect it. It sounds like in this state of humanity we are hopelessly lost and lacking true interaction (in the past/present/future). What can we do?

Humans are not alone: all creatures share this strange world. From bees to bacteria, from mountain lions to rainbow trout, apart from God we all must tread the path which is never known, looking backwards through a mist, never to our feet, or to the forward path that leads us to our physical end.

The Preacher, in the book of Ecclesiastes, cries: "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity!" A chasing after the wind. Even the search for meaning seems destined for dust. Do we have a sufficient cause for hopelessness? Let us look again at relationships.

New Life in the Perfect

There are many types of relationships in our world. There are relationships between people, relationships between living beings, relationships between things, relationships between people and other living beings, relationships between people and things, and relationships between living beings and things. At any rate, there are such things as personal and impersonal (non-personal) relationships.

For example, the letters and words and meanings in the sentence "I love you" are related to an author, and potentially a reader, and with each of the other parts of the sentence, and the English language as a whole, and western culture, etc. (these are impersonal relationships). These relationships may reflect the relationship between the author and the reader, which is personal. Impersonal relationships can reveal good, bad, or neutral personal relationships, but they cannot take their place. If I told you: "I love you," my words would be impersonal symbols of our personal relationship. A rift in the relationships (both personal and impersonal) has occurred in our world. The message has been reordered and distorted.

God is always present everywhere, every time, in death and life, before and after our present world system. The spiritual world of humans will be in good or bad relationship towards God depending upon each

person's reactions toward God. God is ever-present, even to the condemned and oppressed, the tortured, and the evil. God is still there. How is this? His goodness requires justice, fairness, love and mercy, as well as punishment and perfection. All of these are within his goodness. They are revelations of God's GOOD nature. God's closeness can be counted on for all eternity. But the relationship each of us has with him and the relationships we have distorted willfully or unknowingly must be brought to account before a perfect God. He requires perfection (that is, goodness of relationship with him as he exists in the Trinity). Our willful imperfections of relationships both personal and impersonal have reordered that which was completely new and perfect, and has brought about (secondarily new) changes in the fabric of the universe, though not to the extent that the particular relationships are erased completely. This evil is a state of being and purpose in which the former perfection is broken, disordered.

As we travel through time and space, we interact with all kinds of things and creatures and people. Our relationships with things may affect our relationships with people (or vice versa). If I sit on the ground in the middle of the railroad tracks, and an engineer comes by in his train, I may have put myself in a bad relationship towards his train, the tracks, and the engineer. My relationships with these things that I interact with may bring me harm, so perhaps the engineer will get angry

and yell at me as he screeches to a halt in his massive train in order to avoid smashing me flat. Or maybe the engineer thinks I somehow deserve to be killed (maybe I'm an enemy soldier in a war) so he speeds the train up. Or maybe he doesn't even see me at all, but continues to drive his train straight towards me while he reads a magazine. Or maybe he feels deeply for me (maybe his son was killed by a train) and he would hate to see a person get killed by his train, and he does all he can do to yell at me and blow his whistle for me to get off the tracks. Maybe he even yells at someone nearby me to push me off the tracks or help me to understand my danger.

How I respond to this engineer will make a world of difference to me. I might lose a leg or even my life. Or I might be saved by a caring individual who helps me to come to grips with the reality of the speeding locomotive. My relationship with the train and the tracks is intimately tied together with my relationship with the engineer. The engineer may love or hate or not even know me, he may be happy, sad, afraid, or moved to action for me. If the tracks were not connected to an active railroad system, and there were no train or engineer, or any person related to the tracks, I would be just fine sitting there on the metal tracks. I could do as I please. But in the real world there is always a person around that is affected, no matter how minutely, by my decisions.

If we were to understand the former perfection of the early creation more completely, it would aid us in our quest for knowledge of the present perfect life. In the next chapter we will search out the issues of God, the perfect, the GOOD, the seat of being, the revealer, the thinker, the guide of life. For now, let's content ourselves with a discovery of the exemplary perfect life.

It is said that Jesus the Messiah lived a completely perfect life. He was born to a poor family. He was mistreated and misunderstood by all. He was often alone or in agony of spirit over his fellow Jews. What state is this that we should call perfection? Can a man so suffer the ills of our fallen imperfection and yet be perfect? Can a man, who changes positions in time and space and thought be considered perfect? If the union of Christ's two natures is to be maintained (following his own witness of full divinity and full humanity) we must come to terms with this perfection abiding in the imperfect world.

Was Jesus a mere sojourner in our imperfect world, untouched by our evil personal and impersonal relationships or was he truly one of us? It is recorded that the devil tempted him. If he can be tempted, he can be touched with our imperfection. In fact, the imperfections of all of creation were borne by Jesus on his death-cross. In gentleness and humility, in the form of a servant, Jesus took the punishment for sin and the curse of fallen creation. Evil was put upon his

shoulders. The ultimate injustice was perpetrated. The imperfect creation killed the perfect Creator. By the blind eyes of Romans, the giver of sight had his own lights put out. In darkness he overcame. The perfect life that was in him was extinguished, but God raised him to perfection. The Christ bore our evil. He took our sins. Did he undergo so much suffering on our behalf to make everything (including us) perfect? Is Jesus' perfection attainable, and what is his perfection? Shouldn't everything be perfect now that Jesus took away the imperfect?

To discover these things, we must get on with our quest for the person of God. Our knowledge of God brings us to find that our finding is his seeking. Our quest for the honest truth brings us to the brink of ourselves into the habitation of one who requires no habitation, but who draws us sacrificially in an effort of love.

7

Good & Evil

The Essence of Good & Evil

What is good, and what is evil? Is evil just the antithesis of good? (And what in the world is an antithesis anyways?) Good is a relationship. It is an ordering of things. There is a GOOD, and there are particular good things. The good things are only good as they are in a right order and relationship with each other and the ultimate GOOD. Is this vague enough for you? Let's look at how this relationship works.

God is good. No, rather, he is GOOD. Perfect. Orderly. Complete in every way. As he should be. He is in right relationship. How can this be? If there is only one God, and he created everything, then what relationship could he have had before the world began? After all, if good is a relationship, then how could God have been good before he created anyone or anything to be in a relationship with? Good questions, but we will have to deal with them later. For now let's just see what good is.

Evil is a distortion of good relationships, good order, perfection. It is not the opposite of GOOD, just as Satan is not the opposite of God. God is GOOD. It seems Satan was created perfectly by God to be good, that is, to be in a right relationship with God. Satan is not like God, in that he had a beginning and he is not eternal; he is a created being. He is finite (he has limits; he is not everywhere all the time like God). Satan is not perfect EVIL. There is no such thing as perfect EVIL, only good that is twisted to evil, and made imperfect. Satan was good when he was created by God the GOOD. Somehow or other, the angel fell, and sadly corrupted the good that God had made in him. Satan did not create evil. He is not able to bring completely new things into existence because he himself is a created new thing. God didn't create evil either. So who did it? No one. Evil doesn't exist as a completely new thing, or a being. It exists much like good exists (notice I said good, not GOOD).

Some would say that good is like an umbrella. An umbrella has a purpose (to keep rain off of your head) and is whole and complete as it does its job faithfully. These people would say that evil is like a hole in the umbrella. A hole does not actually exist of any thing, but rather exists as a lack of something (in this case, umbrella material). Like a hole in an umbrella, evil is where good is missing.

But if evil is just a lack of good, then does it exist at all? Apparently not, according to their thinking. Evil is just a lack of good. It is a nothing. Briefly said, evil doesn't exist. "What?" you say; "If evil doesn't exist then why do we see it everywhere we look? Why do people kill other people, why is there famine, why do we get old and die? This is all evil, and it sure seems to be real and to exist." The people who say that evil is just a lack of good are perhaps not quite on the right track.

There is even more that is wrong with this conception of evil as being a lack of good. If it is nothing, then how can we talk about it, feel it, experience it? Ask yourself this: "Have I ever experienced nothing, or even a lack of something?" The answer is: "No!" A person can't experience nothing. You have to experience something in order for you to call it an experience. A person can't talk about nothing (although many politicians try), because there would be nothing to talk about. It wouldn't just be a boring conversation; it would be no conversation at all. Does nothing even exist? No! That's stupid, of course not! The very definition of nothing is nonexistence.

You may say: "Wait a minute! I've experienced a lack of something before! I've been hungry. There was a lack of food. I felt it as clear as day!" Actually, what you felt was not a lack of something, but rather the presence of something—the organs and cells in your

body telling you to respond to their needs. But isn't a need itself a lack of something? A need is not the nonexistence of something. Just because you don't have food in your stomach does not mean that food doesn't exist. The food is just not in the right place. But who is to say where the right place for the food is anyways? God. He is the only GOOD, and everything is good as it is in right relationship with him and with other things. God created you to eat. It was part of his good creation and plan. He wanted us to put food in our bellies. We come to know the good in this world as we learn to know the GOOD, and we come to know the GOOD through the good things in this world that he has created.

Evil does exist. It is not a lack of good, but rather a distortion, reordering, imperfection of good. Evil is not a force that can affect things. It is not a being. Evil is twisted good. It is good things and people in wrong relationship with God. Like the sentence "I Love You." This is a good sentence. It speaks of my relationship to you. It tells you that I love you. But if it is changed to "Evol IY ou," the meaning is lost and the goodness of the original message is changed. Not one letter is different in each message, but the relationship of the letters within the sentence has been changed and distorted so that the good is now not completely good, not perfect, not in right relationship with the author (who wants to communicate his love). That is like evil.

Evil is the word we use to talk about things that are imperfect, incomplete and in bad relationship with God, the GOOD, and with other things.

Within the wider concepts of good and evil, we encounter an important distinction. There is both a teleological (design or purpose) and an ontological (being or existence) basis of good and evil. The teleological basis consists of the purpose or design for which the thing exists. It's like a blueprint that says what the good or evil action or relationship is for. Every purposeful evil action or relationship has a good counterpart. For example, taking another person's life (murder) is a distortion of giving one's life for another (self-sacrifice). Lying is a distortion of truth-telling. Idolatry is a distortion of Godly worship, and focuses on the creation rather than the Creator. There is a predetermined purpose or design inherent in these actions and relationships. Murder's purpose is to destroy, to hurt, and to take life; giving one's life for another person shows the purpose of setting others above one's self and of acting in selfless humility and servanthood. Many actions or relationships do not have a purpose or design in them toward evil (not all evil is moral evil—some things are bad but not wicked: for example, a rock is in my shoe).

Good is always purposeful and designed, because goodness consists of meaningful information and designed relationship, while evil consists of distorted data or information and is sometimes purposeless.

However, although many evil actions and relationships are without intended purpose or design, they still exist because of previous premeditated evil actions and relationships. (If you don't understand this, don't give up when things seem murky, the clouds may soon part!) This leads us to our second distinct basis.

The ontological (being or existence) basis of good and evil is our second major distinction. Every evil action or relationship is composed of good parts in distorted relationships. Evil is a distortion, and as such it brings many good actions and relationships (such as pulling a trigger, pointing a gun, a bullet flying through the air, all of which are inherently good and not evil) and twists them to make them evil relationships and evil actions (such as hatred and murder by shooting a rifle at your brother, or thinking of doing this). The existence of good and evil are dependent on the purposes (without being designed for a purpose they would not exist), and the purposes of good and evil presuppose their existence (good and evil must exist for them to have any purpose). Both the purpose and the existence of good and evil center around relationships, as in Figure 2.

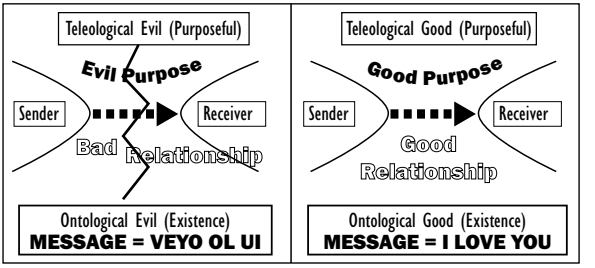


Figure 2. The purpose and existence of good and evil, and the centrality of relationships.

Problems with Good & Evil

Many people have written before on the problem of evil, but who has ever heard of the problem of good? The problem of evil is usually stated like this: "If there is a God, then he is good. If he is good, then he can only create and do good. Evil exists in the world. If God is really God (with all power) then he can (and should) destroy evil, or even create a world in which evil does not exist. And if God is all good, he would want to destroy evil or create a world without evil. But evil is in our world, therefore God is not. God is either: (1) not completely good because he created a world where evil is allowed to come into existence, and he allows it to remain; or (2) he is not completely powerful because he cannot destroy evil or even create an evil-less world. Either way God is not fully God, as long as there is evil

in the world. Because evil exists, there is no supreme GOOD, and God cannot exist." These are the problems that are usually addressed when people talk about the problem of evil.

But let's talk about the problem of good. First of all, when we say good, or even GOOD, what do we mean? Earlier we said that perhaps good might be a relationship of things with each other, themselves, and with God. They are perfect in their order and relationship to the GOOD, like the letters in the message "I Love You" are perfectly complete in their relationship to me the author of them, so that they say what I want them to say. They fulfill my plan and purpose in the way I want them to. But what makes that good? Or for that matter, what makes God GOOD?

Do you remember that when we were talking about God being GOOD, we said that GOOD was a relationship? And then we asked how a relationship could exist before God created anything? And then I said we would talk about that issue later? Well, now is later, so let's get to it!

Before the creation of the world, before time or space existed, before any created thing was made, God exists. Notice I didn't say that he existed. True, he was in the past and he will be in the future, but at all times and in all places his *is* God. And so before space and time (or more properly, outside of space and time) God *is*. Time and space are created, and God is not limited by them.

When we say that God is eternal, or present everywhere, we don't mean that he is fat enough to fill all of space and time. And we don't mean that he is zillions of different Gods all in a different spot, listening to prayers over here, and doing miracles over there. And he is not just a being in a place called heaven who orders everything around, and takes all of our history in with a single glance *just* because it is small and insignificant. Rather, it is as if we live on a space/time line. Space and time began. Space and time run on and on and on.

Along this line are many dots. A dot is an event. Once an event happens, it can never happen again. It is over. You can't go back and see the actual creation of the world, and you can't re-experience exactly what you did just yesterday. It's over. The river has changed. Time and space have moved on, and you have moved on with them. You are traveling along this space/time line towards "foreverland."

But God sees things differently. He sees time and space together from the outside, not like a line, but like a single speck. Instead of a one dimensional line, it is as if he sees a zero dimensional dot. You were born, you lived your life, you loved him, you chose to fall from his grace, you asked him to forgive you and you lived your life, you loved him, and you died. There it is. Your life on a line. The period at the end of this sentence is what your life might look like to God. Don't worry! All of the information and events from the first sentence

are in that one dot (so you don't have to worry about God not being able to read it and missing your love for him). In fact, all of time and space is in that one dot. Abraham is there, and Noah's flood is there, even the sandwich I ate for lunch is there. All of space and time and everything in it is in that one dot. My street, your car, your hand, 10:00 pm, October 31, 2002. All of the events in the entire space/time creation are in that single dot. He sees it all at once, with clarity and precision. He is not blind to the actual distinctions of all that happens in our world, and he is not merely a higher dimensional being capable of interaction with lesser dimensional beings. God is outside of dimensions. He sees and understands everything as a whole, complete. He sees things from beginning to end because he created them and he sustains them. He always sees them. They have always been as they are now to him. God is above us, beyond us. Is he even reachable? He reached.

We could not reach him because we had dropped out of communication and good relationship with him. How? At the beginning all was good. Things were created in good order, completeness, the way they should be. Why? Because that is who created them. The one loving God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the Godhead had good relationship with each other in perfection, goodness, order, unity, obedience,

love. God sees all things in creation (including us) as a love relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Apart from this love relationship people are under wrath, left to the cold and darkness of a desolate, distorted world. Any emphasis on good apart from God is a result of this fallenness. Only God is GOOD, perfectly and in every way complete and wonderful. God is all in all. Every goodness that exists comes from him, from the word of God springing forth something from nothing and blessing it with his character. Everything he created was in good relationship with him and with everything else and itself. The GOOD had made all things very good.

Something has marred and distorted this beauty, this perfection of things with God. Who has broken this goodness? We have.

God's song was and still is "I love you." "I love you" is his call to us. In perfection he calls us. From our imperfect ear we are fallen and nearly deaf to this greatest of all songs. What have we done? We have closed our own ears.

At the beginning, when God made all things very good (including the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), man and woman worked in the garden, and spent their lives with God in deep communication with the one who breathed life into them and who knew what future they would ultimately choose. He made man and

woman in his image; in the image of God he created them. They were in good relationship with the one who was above them, the GOOD. Then they willfully chose to fall, to turn their backs from the GOOD, the perfect, the love of God, their creator and sustainer of life. And we fell, and we fall still into sin and darkness and out of light and into distortion and flames and wrath. Oh, what a fall. I want to cry when I think about it. What a dismal pit we are running into! How could we? Let's take a closer look at the fall of humanity.

Adam and Eve looked at the fruit. Eve was deceived, and Adam was willful. Both took part in an event that changed the universe. The serpent told Eve, "You won't die if you eat this fruit," which was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; "You will be like God if you eat it." Why was the tree in the garden in the first place? Couldn't God have created a world without a tree for our ancestors to ignore? Couldn't he have left it out? God said it was a good tree, and it was right where it needed to be.

Wasn't God arbitrary? No. He didn't do it without a purpose. He didn't just say on one of the days of creation, "Hey, let's create a tree that will bear fruit that will kill humans and destroy the good order of the universe, and let's put it in the garden. It will give the people a test so that they will choose the good and not the evil. That would be an interesting thing to see!" No! That is not God's nature.

We said earlier that God is GOOD and perfect, and he is in right relationship with himself through the persons of the Godhead (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). The Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Spirit, and the Spirit loves the Father, and they are all one: that is what their relationship is like. And love flows from the being of God so that "God is Love." God loves us. He saw the impact of that tree of the knowledge of good and evil from his vantage point outside of space and time. He knew what would transpire. But he created it and let it happen. He did not force it to happen, but it did not thwart his plan for our world either. God gave Adam and Eve the power to change things in their world, to reorder the good, and even distort it to evil. Before that happened, he had already allowed Satan to willfully twist good to evil (Satan himself and other angels, and the craftiness of the snake at the very least were already twisted before the fall of humankind). Was this a Father allowing his children to play with fire, knowing that in the end they would be burned to death? Is this the picture of a loving God?

The problem of evil is not really the problem of evil, but is really actually the problem of GOOD. If evil is a distortion, an incompleteness, a twisting of the good, and a wrong relationship with the GOOD, then what is GOOD that it could allow this? Is it really GOOD at all?

What a sticky problem our fingers are into now. We don't have eternal eyes to see what God sees and understand everything from his vantage point. We are left helplessly groping.

But before we ever existed, before the world and all of its problems, God was, and he saw. And he spoke. And he created the sun, moon, and stars, the earth in its place, all of life and every creature, and he called them good. And he remedied our problem before it ever was. How? He made two trees, one to give life, one to take it. The tree of life he set before humans and he let them see its fruit. For the life of God was in that fruit.

In the course of human history there was born a man from Bethlehem. The events of his life, death, and resurrection from the dead are unique in all of human history; for this man was God.

God had "finally" reached out and grasped the hand of humanity that had fallen thousands of years before those events. God had not just created everything, sustained everything, and given everything goodness, he had now brought himself into history to become one of us, and live as a human with us. And by his perfect life and death and resurrection we believe and are saved. When did this happen?

In a way, before time began. Before our universe was, Christ had revealed God's love to us, and some have accepted it, and some have turned away from it. From God's vantage point, he saw the cross from the

foundations of the world, and planted the tree that bore our sins in Eden. The tree of life was there. That was the people's choice. Heaven or Hell. From the beginning it has gone on the same way, and yet so many follow our first parents and choose to wrong God, choose not to obey, choose not to believe and love the God who loved them. Adam and Eve had the same choice you and I have constantly: life or death, Heaven or Hell, Christ (who is our life), or something else (which is our death). This is the solution to the problem. Jesus came to take away our sin, and to bring us into right relationship with the God who loves us and created us for good. There were two trees in the garden, not for divine entertainment, but for relationship.

How was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil good? It was from God's GOOD that the tree stood, as a symbol of setting anything above God, as a part of who he is to humankind—love. It was love that died for us and rose from the grave for us to give us life in that garden thousands of years ago. He underwent the penalty of the breaking of his own love-pact, death. And in conquering death he led us to life in him. It breaks God's heart, but he still loves and relates. And from his view, when he created everything we were there in heaven relating with and loving him, and many were in everlasting fire under God's wrath forever. God's GOOD relationship within the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit brought about something

that he sees as finished, with his Son's payment of evil and those who chose to accept or reject his offer of love. Evil is paid for. The problem of evil is solved in the persons of the Trinity.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought humanity a conscience, and an inner knowledge of the particular relationships between God and things in the world. They had known GOOD, but perhaps good had never been known like this. Adam and Eve saw things in the world before as merely glasses through which God shone. But now they would know particular good and evil things and see them as they related to a distortion of good (as opposed to GOOD itself). Suddenly their bodies were naked! They weren't clothed before, but before they didn't see their bodies as good things, distinct from their relationship with God, only God's GOOD image in each other and in themselves. (Not that they looked like God, for God is a Spirit, but their physical bodies bore God's image, order, tenderness, beauty, lovely relationship, etc.) Now suddenly their bodies were exposed and they were ashamed. There they were with bodies that were good! They hadn't seen them as good before. And they had never before sensed in themselves the knowledge of being good or being evil. Now they knew the distinction. They had chosen death. They started seeing things in a whole new light, not from a friend-of-God view, but from a broken and twisted view, and evil brought them death. The

relationship to God was cut. They had chosen, and for every cause in this world there is an effect. God did not leave them hopeless in this new state, however. From his view, he sees them, and sends his Son to conquer death and cover their nakedness, and bring those fallen ones to restoration through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The GOOD is not a problem. The solution to the problem of evil is Jesus Christ, and the solution to the greater problem of GOOD is GOOD itself. GOOD is personal. GOOD is God.

When we question GOOD, we question God, and his answer is Jesus. No, that is not an easy answer to give. It's hard. It meant giving up his special Son to death. His love was so grieved and hurt, that he died for us, and the power of his love (his relational GOOD love of Father for Son, Son for Spirit, Spirit for Father, etc.) raised Jesus from the grave and brought him and us to God again, to always enjoy the GOODness of God. But you must believe the evidence all around you to receive this gift, and act by faith in the trustworthy evidence, by grabbing hold of the author of the tree of life, and never letting go.

8

Laws of Nature

The Essence of the Laws

How is the nature of the GOOD related to the good that God has created in the physical world, and specifically to the laws that seem to govern nature? What are the laws of nature? Are they outside looking in, or are they an "inside job?" Do they actually exist, or are they just constructions of the human mind that help us to better understand our physical world? The laws of nature are generally thought of as principles or rules that govern the orderly working of the physical universe. For instance, if you hold a ball in your hand, and let go, the ball falls to the ground. Is the law of gravity (as formulated by Galileo, Newton, and Einstein) what causes the ball to fall down? Or is it the ball's relation to the earth and the space around the earth (following Einstein's theory that space is warped around massive objects)?

When we talk about a law (for instance, concerning the speed limit) we often think of an actual implied or

written code of conduct. If we want to speed and drive one hundred miles per hour on the highway, we can (providing that the vehicle can actually go that fast).

The laws of a state exist to prescribe the way things should be, not necessarily how they are; the laws of nature describe the way things are, not necessarily how they should be. You should go the speed limit, but if you don't, you are breaking the law. The laws themselves are prescriptions of how a society should be (in all its relevant relationships). Laws can be particular or general. They can be so specific that they pertain only to special cases (so the speed limit does not apply to pedestrians, only vehicles). Some laws are very general and attempt to encompass all of the cases in a particular area, such as the rights of due process, or with reference to the laws of nature, the "Theory of Everything" (which is a scientific attempt to understand the physical principles that underlie all elementary physical phenomena in the universe).

Does the world run on general or specific laws, or both? Does it even run on laws at all?

It seems that the physical world can best be understood as being orderly and lawful. Certain general laws seem to apply to nearly everything physical, while some specific laws only apply to a very small amount of things and relationships. We don't know if the specific laws are merely a result of the working out of the general laws or vice versa. The question becomes deeper if we ask

about the existence of laws in the first place. Is there a "universal law book" somewhere that specifies exactly how things should go in our universe? Or is every particle and physical relationship within the universe a part of the "universal law book?" Can the universe explain itself?

Purposeful Laws

If the world runs the way it does simply because it is the way it is, we must ask why the world is the way it is in the first place. Why is our universe so fit for life (specifically on the earth)? The earth is the right size, the right distance from the moon and sun and stars, has the right kinds of elements and atmosphere and orbit and spin, and has balanced tectonic plate movement. The earth's configuration within the solar system, galaxy, and universe is unique. It is near (but not too near) a star that is just the right size, age, and intensity; it is just the right distance from the center of our galaxy; and the universe has just the right amount of certain elements and force strengths needed for the existence of our planet and life. All of these factors (among many other parameters) are necessary for the life support of carbon-based organisms making the earth unlikely to be replicated anywhere else in the cosmos. Our earth presents a compelling case for intentional design.

The fact of our universe's fine-tuning points to the existence of a rational Creator. Did God wind up the

physical universe and let it go on its own, or does he act in it sometimes to fulfill his great purposes, or is he in control of every single particle, interaction, and relationship in the entire universe? Surely a God who can create a complex universe such as ours can also act in it if he so chooses. And surely a God who is powerful enough to create the cosmos, and who is caring enough to act in history, is also able to know and even control every physical thing in our universe. But if God directly controls everything in our universe, what would be the status of our own free will (can we control anything physical, even our own bodies)? Anything that happens would be a direct result of God's action in the universe.

Actually, it goes further than that. If God has any present contact or actions in the universe that he has created, it would seem that if there were seemingly bad things that happened (such as disease or sin) they would be actually good (for otherwise God would act to keep them from happening if he exists and is all-loving). Further than this, if God created the world and left it to work itself out, we would expect that everything that happened in it would be a result of a pre-established law of God (again getting rid of our own free will).

The laws of the universe do not seem to exist in any place. The laws of physics are not themselves physical, and the universe is not its own law. Laws are rational and prescribe how things should be as well as describing how they are. The universe does not describe itself and

it does not prescribe how things should go in itself. That kind of thing would require a mind. The question is, are we that mind? Did humans actually invent the laws of the physical universe, or did we merely discover them? Humans did not create the universe, and perhaps the universe ran more smoothly without us. The laws seem to describe how things really are. They have a direct relation to the actual physical universe (like my words "I love you" have a direct relation to me). Are the laws a message? Are they an encoded note to us from some other mind?

Messenger Laws

If God created the universe, perhaps they are his message. Perhaps God encoded his creation with laws about how things should be and how they should relate and react to one another. Perhaps these laws were intended for us not just to enjoy the results (for instance, we do not fly off the earth every time we jump into the air as a result of the law of gravity) but also to tell us something. Much of the language is written in math (and though I often despised the study of math in school, I do think it is beautiful now). The sizes of atoms, the energy of electrons, the speed of light, the force of gravity—all of these things are specific examples of God's fine tuning of the universe he created.

We are on the other end of this letter from God. Even the parts that make up our own bodies testify

to the fact that God is rational, powerful, ingenious, and that he wishes to relate to us (and communicate with us), not to control us like robots. It is no mistake that every culture has some form of religion. People everywhere recognize that God is talking to them, that the world exists and is complex and amazing. If you hear the voice of God in nature, respond. It is not nature that is calling, but the Creator of nature and the sender of the message.

The laws of the universe are not merely rule books. They are more like a system of related messages. The information in the laws came from the mind of God, but are not merely thoughts of God. The systems and relationships in the universe exist not only in a mind. We discover them through reason, hypothesis, experiment, and analysis. We can discover and formulate "laws" based on these understood messages. These messages are rational, elegant, and precise. They establish relationships between things and other things. But more importantly, these messages speak of the relationships we are to have with God (physical and spiritual obedience to God's laws).

For instance, we probably shouldn't jump off a cliff because that puts us in a wrong relationship with the earth, with other humans, and with God. God didn't design things for that purpose. You may not break any physical laws (you probably won't just fly away) but you

will distort God's message. By jumping, you tell God that the body he gave you is not worth having, the world he created is not worth living in, and the relationship he offers you is not worth having. Your impersonal relationship with the universe affects your personal relationship with others and, most importantly, with God. Likewise, we probably shouldn't give up on our quest for meaning or for God. This puts us in wrong relationship with others, the world, and with God. Rather, we should seek to understand God's purposes in the universe, and to live according to what we find. The laws of nature seem to be designed relationships in the physical universe that speak of God's love for us. God created and sustains nature purposefully. He does not control our free wills, but does actively seek to draw us to himself through his creation.

Events

According to most modern cosmological and physical theories, we live in a space/time universe. What is meant by this is that the three dimensions of space (relatively speaking, this would be up and down, side to side, and backwards and forwards), and the one dimension of time are inseparably linked in a continuum known as the space/time continuum. Some have hypothesized ten or even eleven dimensions, tightly woven into the fabric of the universe, but these extra six or seven dimensions,

whether they exist or not, seem in their hypotheses to have no bearing on our present discussion, so they will be ignored and only four dimensions will be assumed.

Let's begin our discussion of events in space-time with a few simple examples. Let's pretend that a donut is flying towards my mouth (that's always the best place to begin). You have thrown it, and I am hoping to catch it in my open mouth and eat it. If this works out right, I will be a happy man. But I don't want to wait too long, so I decide that you should time this throw. You throw the glazed donut, I catch it, it takes only three seconds on your watch, and I am happy. But I wonder to myself, "What if we put an edible watch on the donut, to see how long it takes to get to my mouth from the donut's perspective. Well, my friend, you are a fast donut-thrower, and you time the donut with your own wristwatch again and it still takes three seconds to get from your hand to my mouth. But the watch on the donut says that it took only 2.9 seconds! What! How could that be? You were standing "still" while the donut was going through so much space that it had very little energy left to go through time.

Let's pretend that you live in a small apartment in the middle of a large city. When you give directions to your apartment for a dinner date, you describe all four dimensions without even blinking an eye. You'd probably tell them your north-south street address, your east-west street address, what floor you live on,

and when you want to meet your guests for dinner. This pinpoints where in the three dimensions of space and the one dimension of time the dinner will take place. But the world is always turning on its axis, hurtling around the sun, spiraling in an arm of the Milky Way galaxy, flying through space and time with other galaxy clusters. So much for that "pinpoint" accuracy! And the same thing that happened to the donut happens to us. When I drive around all day, and you sit at home and read books, I stay younger than you (though not noticeably, because of how slow I drive) because I am going through more space than you, and less time. You are going through more time than me, but through much less space. If I could fly close to the speed of light (which is apparently the speed limit in our physical universe) for several years, I could visit your house fifty years from now and have only aged a little in comparison to you.

These ideas show that space and time are relative to where you are standing (or sitting). This is known as special relativity, a theory developed in large part by Albert Einstein at the beginning of the 20th century. Einstein saw that no human possessed the correct or standard time. Many people began to realize after Einstein that nothing within the physical universe can totally comprehend anything else within the physical universe, e.g. no event can be completely comprehended from within the system and framework of space/time.

All things in the physical universe (even the smallest sub-atomic particles) may be affected by all other things in the universe, and so any time we attempt to measure completely and comprehensively any event or thing from within this physical universe, we must first know the past state of all other things in the universe (for they can affect our subject and be affected by our subject). All things and any things in the physical world are subject to this incapability of complete comprehensibility of any other thing in the universe. Knowledge of this kind cannot be discovered by experience or experiment, but is in its wholeness incomprehensible. We may know some things about some things, but we cannot know, or ever hope to discover all things about all things through experience with our physical world.

In Figure 3 below, we have condensed the three space dimensions to one horizontal dimension, and the time dimension is presented as a vertical arrow. All things in the universe can effect all other things in the physical universe given enough time, but as the figure shows, things can only effect each other within a certain range, known as an event horizon, which is a word borrowed from the terminology used with reference to black holes. Like an hourglass, the event horizon is where every possible cause of the event is actually enacted. For instance, I can take my wife's picture right now as she sleeps in our bed peacefully. But I can't take a picture of her if I am here beside the

bed and she is in New York City seeing the sights. She has to be right here right now for me to take a picture of her right here and right now (seems pretty simple, don't you think?).

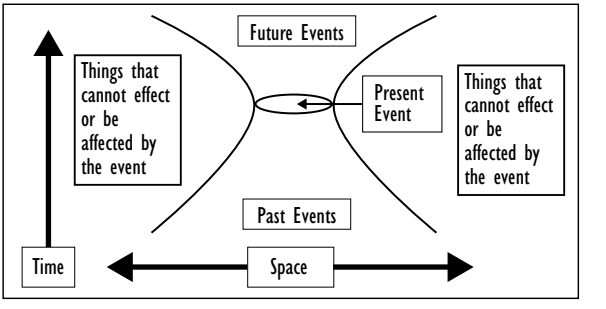


Figure 3. The present event can only be affected by past events that are within its event horizon (the hourglass), and can only affect future events that are within its event horizon.

A pebble falls into a lake. Circular waves form around the point of impact and grow outwards from it. I sit on the shore and wait. Why do the waves take so long to get to me at the bank of the lake? Maybe it's because I need to be more patient. I have to give the waves enough time to get here; they won't arrive immediately. In the same way, an event or thing can cause things to happen in the universe which will take a while to get to right here and right now.

Figure 3, though based on theories used widely by modern physicists and cosmologists, is usually not seen

in its true light: if everything we observe in our universe has a potentially causal relationship with every other thing in our universe, and every physical event needs previous other physical events to bring it into being, then the "big bang" hypothesis which is devoid of a transcendent Creator lacks meaning. It cannot answer the question of where the first event came from in the first place. In their estimation it had to come from *outside* of the first event's "event horizon," which would be impossible according to their own theories of the space/time continuum (the origin of the universe as a single point in space/time could not be affected by any physical causes outside of itself because *it is all that exists physically*, and there is nothing that exists outside of its event horizon to affect it). So what caused the first event? Nothing? But as the old saying goes "out of nothing, nothing comes." Instead of reading their own evidence of a Creator God, they break their own logic and turn from the truth that is in them. They twist their minds toward Godlessness.

The only way to know everything about any one thing in the physical universe would be for a person to be all-present both in space and in time. Only then can the event be seen as a whole, with all of its causes and effects (which can all potentially cause and be affected by all other things in the physical universe within their event horizons). That is the only way to

pinpoint a thing in space and time. But what we find is that this perfect knowledge of the past, present, and future is transcendent, which means that it is above and beyond our space/time dimensions.

The only way to have this perfect knowledge would be to exist in all time, in all space, outside of time and outside of space. Such a being would be beyond the physical universe, yet within it, in the very air we breathe. This person would have to experience the world as a single event or now-space/time, yet be within the universe experiencing it as normal space/time from a beyond-space/time vantage point. This sounds like a relationship, of transcendence (beyondness) and imminence (nearness), intricately interwoven so that God (for such a being would be God) would see all of the four dimensions, the hourglass event horizons, causes and effects, everything everywhere, and would experience them in a current yet never changing complete state.

This is a good time to remember the incarnation (God-indwelling) of Jesus Christ, who claimed to be God, lived a perfect life, foretold the future, had all power over nature, and who rose from the dead to eternal glory at the right hand of God. This is the God-man, indwelling, reaching out, culminating in the greatest event of all of space/time, seen and experienced by God from the foundations of the earth to the destruction of the universe in fiery judgment, from the beginning to the end, ever present, right here, right now.

This loving Redeemer (one who buys back) of creation gives all things their very existence, supporting and uplifting the existence of all things with the power of his word (even those things which he knows are twisting good to evil relationships). He is above and beyond them, giving them existence for his glory in the always present.

This gives us cause for thought. In theological circles, people argue over the human and divine elements of salvation, the will of man and the power of God, and the steadfastness of salvation. Both sides have many convincing arguments, and texts from scriptures to back them up. But in light of our understanding of the physical creation of God, as a causal relationship space/time continuum experienced by God in an eternal here and now, we begin to see that God sees and interacts with things from a different perspective than us. His interaction is here and now and eternal, in history and beyond history. Extremes in the different theological positions can be seen as misunderstandings of the interaction of God in history. God is the author of existence. All things exist because of him and in him. Single events and interactions in this physical universe are seen from an imminent/transcendent standpoint, making us unable to completely grasp his dealings with us specifically or with his people generally, or even with those who willfully ignore him and his revelation of himself.

God reveals. We respond. God responds. We are crucified with Christ. We rise and the life we live from then on is in Christ. We sin. We fall. God reveals and reaches out to us. We respond. God responds, etc., etc., etc. Are Christians resaved and resaved? In the reckoning of time, we are. But to God, beyond time, we are as we have always been. He saves us and we are his children from a perfect, set apart, wholly eternal standpoint. This is our heart's anchor—God's faithfulness. He never changes in this, and even as we see him interact in history's space/time continuum, he has revealed to us in what he has created and through his word that he presently interacts with us from the foundations of the world to its destruction, to the everlasting ages of his blessed new heaven and earth. All is ever-present to him. This is our hope; not in the empty wishes of our minds, but in the fact that the eternal one has set in our hearts and minds the evidence of who he is.

9

The Finder

The Essence of God

How can God possibly be found, and how can we know who and what he is? What if what we discover barely scratches the surface of who God is and what he does? What if we take a wrong turn somewhere and end up lost, full of questions and empty of answers? I have put off writing this chapter about God for two years. It's an insurmountable obstacle to our voyage. Can we go on? We have to try. We have to know. The journey is too important to never take simply because of the difficulties and personal shortcomings along the way. Unless we can know something about our marvelous Creator, we are hopeless and lost in a world of relativity, with hearts of driftwood and minds of sinking stone in an ocean of limitless oblivion.

But let us begin or we will never get there. If we merely get an inkling of who or what God is, that is enough to continue our quest. Any true knowledge

about God (even a little) will translate up to a knowledge of God as he exists because a true knowledge of a little bit of even one of his attributes is a knowledge of who he is (because it seems that all of his attributes are infinite). We desire all knowledge, but we must act on what we have available to us. How can we be assured that we are not finding a divinity of our own making? Can the Father of us all be the child of our imaginations?

Because we observe that something exists, we can gather that something created (or molded) it. This primal (first) something had to be eternal, uncaused. This divinity caused something completely new, outside of itself. Not just matter, but personal existence.

Humans are not just a jumble of particles, or even well designed machines. But what we are is hard to discover. What if we have a part of us that can reach out and be reached by this first creator being?

There is a part of us that is non-physical. The nature of this inside stuff is relational. It seeks to be free, to love, to belong, to converse, to be found and admired for what it is. It may grow dark or be lighted. All of its functions seem to center on relationships. Each heart sees another and longs to be with it (unless perchance it is clouded with murky selfishness and pride). What does this tell us about God's existence? He is out there. He cares. He is relational. A skeptic might say that

you cannot draw analogies between God and humans because you may end up with a God that is too human and not divine. That is confusing the Creator with his creation. While God cannot fail as we can (because he is GOOD) he is our predecessor, our progenitor. If we began, we had our beginning from his hand in the world. The Creator is not wholly different from the creation: we bear his image.

God is a triune person. He relates with himself and loves and honors himself (each member the other). There can only be one totally powerful all-wise God. If all of God's attributes were contained in another person, we would call that person God. But how would we tell the difference between them? There would be not two Gods but one. If it smells like a flower, feels like a flower, tastes like a flower, and in all other respects seems to be a flower, one must conclude that it is indeed a flower. If two beings were all-powerful, all-wise, everywhere present, eternal, etc., they would in fact be one. God is one.

But God is one (similar to our unity) and three (similar to our complexity). God has been made flesh in the person of the Jewish Messiah Jesus. God is revealed, obedient, and creative. God is a Spirit, empowering and equipping his servants, relating to the world he has created, and drawing the spirits of humans and changing them to restored goodness and clarity. God

is a Father, the authority, the giver, the relater, and the lover of humanity. All three (Father, Spirit, and Son) are one. How can this be? How can we know? The truth is to be found where God has breathed, inspired his heart and words into a message. The book tells of God's great love for his created things and especially his created persons. How do we know these writings are true? Even if they contain accurate historical accounts, what about their tales concerning God and his actions in the world?

Knowing God?

Let's do a thought walk. We'll begin by taking several steps toward God and see if his existence means anything for us and if he can be known.

We'll begin when we were children. The world is huge. Everything happening is important. Small details have great significance (for instance, the smell of my Dad's sweaty T-shirt meant that my Dad was finally home from work, which was my favorite part of the day). In this wider world of childhood almost everything is wild and unexplored. Our experiences are as big as our imaginations. When I thought of what God was (if he existed) I thought he must be very big (if he created the universe, as I was told he had) and he must be so big that he stretched across the universe and across even time. I experienced a God who was real and personal

and close to me. I learned to quote a verse from the Bible (John 3:16) that told me about how God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son so that whoever believed in him could be saved and live forever instead of "perishing." There God was in an eternity that I could not fathom, more impossible to understand than a world I barely knew, and yet he was as close as his love for me, I felt, because he had actually offered me something. The word "love" meant something very real to me. Something had been given up on my behalf. I was an egocentric child, and when I closed my eyes, no one else existed but me (I thought). The world seemed to be my world, meant specifically and only for me. Suddenly, tearing into my "me" world of discovery and imagination and all that goes with childhood, was a person who I realized existed outside of my wanting (or acknowledging) him to exist. God was just there, whether I felt like I experienced him or not.

When I closed my eyes I knew that God still saw me, he still thought about everything else in the world. In fact, he had sent his Son to die to pay for my shortcomings and failures and wickednesses. God sent his Son before I was born. How's that for timing? It makes you feel small and large at the same time. God had sent his Son not just for me. He loved all of his created ones. They were his children. I was a speck of sand in the hourglass of humanity. But the point was also true

that in light of God's love, I was a person capable of relationship with God. All I had to do was believe and ask him to find me.

Forget about finding yourself, the first step is being found.

Apparently God doesn't just want us to know everything. We may not be capable of such a thing. Does that mean we should give up? If we are unable in ourselves (collectively or individually) to know everything, is there any point in our journey into the deep unknown? Is the unknown the unknowable?

Let's take another step in our lives. When I was dating my wife-to-be I thought I knew her pretty well. Her thoughts, her desires, her words, her personality, it was all pretty plain to me. But I was wrong about what I knew. After several years of marriage, so many new facets of my wife's wonderful personality and love and character have been opened to me that I look back on those days before marriage as I look back on childhood. I know my wife-to-be was a complex person, as I know the world was larger than what I had experienced in youth, yet I felt I knew it all. But my wife has never stopped surprising me.

In a college library I once discovered a book entitled something like "Everything Men Know about Women." On the back cover were enthusiastic comments concerning this book's contents, praising it as a triumph,

the culmination of thousands of years of thought and experience with women. Man had finally figured everything out about the opposite sex. Why they do what they do, what they think about, what their conversations mean, etc. When I opened the front cover, to my surprise (no kidding) there was only a blank page. So I turned it, and met with another blank page. Two or three hundred blank pages later I realized that this book was going nowhere (literally).

Marriage (and life) is like that. All relationships are. The more you think you know, the more there is to know. But do you know something? I know more than nothing about women. And today my knowledge is a little clearer and fuller than four years ago. Why? Because I enjoy an intimate relationship with a woman. It is as if I were writing my own book on "Everything Men Know about Women," word by word. And I have a female editor who reads my work and sometimes tells me what is wrong with my picture. Sometimes she provides me with ideas. Sometimes she corrects my thoughts or gives me better words. The point is that we are not writing this book alone. We broaden our horizons when we listen.

When Columbus sailed off into the sunset he helped unleash new horizons for him and his men. They didn't fall off of the earth; they found that there was more of it than they had originally understood.

Our ears, eyes, tongues, noses, and skins are very valuable. Without them we are unable to use our voice. No input, no output. Take the time to listen to your five senses. Not only that, listen with that part of you that can relate to other persons and to God. Don't speak so loud that your ears go deaf (there is an equal danger in remaining mute to the world).

Before we made our steps to know our world and to know God, God stepped toward us. This is known as God's grace. How will you respond?

10

To Be Found

Our Own Existence in Him

In my excitement to finish our quest, I know I have neglected many important areas of inquiry that would have been interesting and would perhaps have brought us further along. But we must start believing sometime. We cannot search forever for what we have already found. What I mean is that the small amount of light we have been shown should not be wasted. We should walk in the light while we have the light. We have discovered several things about ourselves, our world, and God, and have become new people in our discovery. New worlds (waiting to be revealed) have opened to our sight. It was God who found us, not the other way around. He made us to seek. We have been seeking (with all our hearts) and he has found us. He has always been there. That's the funny thing about truth. It is true whether we know it or not. Whether we acknowledge it or not. Whether we recognize it or not. Whether we live

appropriately in relation to it or not. Reality is reality, and truth should be dealt with truthfully.

If we are truthful with ourselves, others, and God, we will acknowledge that we do not know everything (because we are finite created beings), and God does not expect us to know everything. While we do not know everything, we do know something. We should seek to come to a more perfect understanding of our world, but not at the expense of living in our world. Knowing a glass door is in my way is not helpful if I still try to walk through the doorway as if the door were open. A sore nose will prove my point. Let's not have sore noses. And let's not lose our knowledge by forgetting what we've learned. It is important to practice what we believe.

Making sense of information is very difficult in our world, but some attempt must be made. We must search out the truth, and deal with it honestly. Alone we cannot finish (or even begin) this quest. But God, the finder, has given us tools to help us on our path. He has given humans the ability to think through their previous thoughts, to compare their experiences and memories and contemplations with others and with reality. God has also given humanity a code for truth within (the Bible, Christ, the Holy Spirit, one's own conscience, reason, and experiences) that has been given to us from outside of ourselves. Our search has led us

to the center of our world, but if we are to continue on this road, we must ask for help. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God: we must acknowledge our own sin and weakness, obey God, accept his love. Have you found the King's path?

Our Community's Existence Under Him

Our life is not lived in isolation. We are not islands. All around us we can find other people with similar experiences, thoughts, and aspirations. We can read the books that others have written, talk to experts and friends, and give ourselves to the building up of the entire community of which we are a part. We each are members of several communities. We are citizens of our countries, states, and towns. We are members of the human race. We are members of our families and our group of friends. We are also members of certain intellectual and spiritual communities. We find close ties with others who are like us, whose minds are open, whose hearts are searching.

We are of the same family with those who have been touched by God's reaching hand. This spiritual community is usually referred to as the church. It is God's will to build up the church and to make it perfect. It is also God's will that we bring others to share with us in this fellowship of truth. If we have found something precious, we have a responsibility to share it with others, to reach out like God first reached out to us.

Our communities exist under God. If we are disobedient, stubborn, and prideful in our dealings within the community, we will end up distorting God's message to humanity (as our first parents did so long ago). The result will be death, destruction, and the disfigurement of relationships. But if we offer our lives and the life of the community to God in obedience, openness, and sacrificial love, we may expect God to fulfill his promises through us. His promises are life, truth, and the way to God.

Why We Live

Why do we live? To find? To be found? To reach out and give? To receive? Yes, to all of the above. We are to find out what exists, where it exists, how it exists, when it exists, and why it exists. We are to be found by God and his many messages for us in the world. We are to reach out and give to others, as we ourselves receive God's own grace and good relationship. We must act on our knowledge: that is true living.

We live not only for this world, and all it has to offer. Beyond, we wait for another—a perfect world. Of restored relationships with God, others, and the world around us. We can never be perfectly satisfied with this world, for this world has been tainted by evil, and will only get worse as it draws to an end. But in the age after, when all is said and done in our world, we will receive the promised future world. We can taste this

next world in our dreams, our thoughts, our enjoyment in life, love, beauty, and relationships, but not fully. There is yet more than we can imagine that awaits us. Our desires are put there by God, and (although they are distorted in this present evil world) they will be made perfect and will find their satisfaction.

We were made new at one time. And we experience a new birth in Jesus by our belief in him. We are brought into God's realm. And in this realm we see visions of that future peace. We cannot get there by our own efforts, or by the efforts of our community. We can only be brought to God's throne by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our shortcomings and for our willful disobedience to God.

If you do not believe in God, I ask you to believe. For if you believe and live for God, you will receive from him what he sees in you already. Don't you want to spend your life, for all of time, with the God who sought you, who brought you back from the grave, and who gave you newness of life and relationship? May we all find with gratitude the words "I found you" on the lips of God on that final day.

About the Author

Rollie Byron is a philosopher and the author of *Philosophical Notes: On Knowledge & Being* (forthcoming) and the philosophical science fiction novel *Mind* (2026).