The Ontology of Decision

Freedom, Faith, and the Meaning of Creation: A Room with Two Doors

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T HIS ESSAY ARGUES THAT CERTAIN moral choices, such as whether to carry a pregnancy to term or to end life support, cannot be resolved by empirical or ethical calculation alone. These decisions are rooted in the ontological structure of human freedom and point toward a metaphysical ground that invites theological reflection.

Imagine finding yourself locked in a room with two doors: one leads to light and life, the other to darkness and death. You have no memory of entering the room; you have simply always been there. The room is not comfortable—the air is thin, food and water are scarce, and the life inside is mind-numbingly dull. There is little to do except contemplate getting out.

Consider Jack, who finds himself in this strange room. While he might reflect on many things—the color of the floor, the ticking of the clock, the causes of the First World War, or even Cantor's Diagonal Argument[1]—his thoughts inevitably return to the two doors and the possibility of escape. After all, the question of which door leads to life and which to death is foundational to his existence in a way these other curiosities are not.

While Jack often wonders why he is in the room at all, a more urgent question compels him: how to get out? He must choose between Door I and Door II, and he doesn't know the basis on which to decide. Clearly, his life depends on choosing the right one, and he refuses simply to guess. So, he begins to ask: by what criterion might he decide? What considerations offer the best odds of choosing life over death?

Jack faces a question that is momentous. His choice will determine whether he lives or dies—and if he lives, what meaning his life might have. Moreover, the choice is unavoidable. The thin air and dwindling supplies will eventually force him to act. And in a sense, he already lives the question. It confronts him daily. He cannot escape it, for it is logically prior to all other questions. Even the significance of the Continuum Hypothesis depends on the prior question of whether anything can have meaning for him at all.[2]

Genuine Questions and Moral Choice

MOLLY IS CONSIDERING ENDING THE LITTLE life within her, and Bob must give instructions to the hospital staff about Dad. Both decisions are difficult, for Molly has seen ultrasound images of the fetus she carries, and Bob recalls the Biblical phrase that "only God numbers our days."[3] While each is dimly aware of the gravity of the moment, like Jack in his existential room, neither can remain in indecision forever.

The American philosopher William James, in his 1896 lecture, *The Will to Believe*, describes what makes a decision a *genuine option*.[4] Three conditions must be met:[5]

- The decision must be *live*—it is a real possibility the person could act upon; both alternatives must be psychologically plausible.[6]
- The decision is *forced*, i.e., not choosing is itself a decision. Accordingly, there is no third path of avoidance.[7]
- Finally, the decision is *momentous*; it is unique, significant and likely irreversible. It may alter the entire course of one's life.[8]

James argues that for questions which transcend experience, such as whether we are free or determined, we are permitted to decide based on non-intellectual grounds when the option is genuine. He writes:

> *Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds*....[9]

In such cases, when evidence underdetermines the choice, it is rationally permissible for trust, commitment, or passion to influence belief. Waiting for sufficient evidence may result in the loss of a significant opportunity to act, to commit, to be transformed.

Applying this to the question of freedom, James contends that the debate between freedom and determinism meets all three criteria. The question is *live*—freedom is embedded in our everyday experience through responsibility, regret, and resolve.[10] It is *forced*—there is no neutral stance between "I freely did X" and "I was determined to do X."[11] And it is *momentous*—upon the reality of freedom rests the possibility of dignity, morality, and transformation.[12]

Against the strict evidentialism of W. K. Clifford, who maintained that "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence,"[13] James affirms that some beliefs are justifiably held even when decisive evidence is lacking, precisely because what is at stake in the believing is so profound.[14]

Both Molly and Bob face *genuine options* in this Jamesian sense. Molly could terminate her pregnancy or carry it to term; Bob could authorize the removal of

life support or allow his father's condition to continue. Each choice is *live*, for both outcomes are psychologically real and morally defensible. Each is *forced*, for they cannot defer their decision indefinitely. And each is *momentous*: Molly's decision will shape her future irreversibly, and Bob's decision will end a life that can never be restored. Even if his father is near death, the act of ending life support closes the door on the unknown.

These are not hypothetical dilemmas but *ontic ethical alternatives*—real, live, moral crossroads.[15] They are evidence-transcending, not because they are irrational, but because no accumulation of empirical data can resolve what is fundamentally a *freedom-grounded* decision. Experience itself cannot decide that which transcends experience. Human freedom is displayed not merely in reflecting on options, but in choosing decisively and responsibly from among them.

Ontological Freedom and Existential Guilt

THE NATURE OF ONTIC ETHICAL ALTERNATIVES as lived, forced, and momentous is not accidental to human beings. We cannot evolve beyond such choice-making, nor can we delegate these decisions to AI systems, no matter how sophisticated. These ethical crossroads belong to the structure of human existence itself. While we are ontic agents who face particular decisions, the inescapability of these decisions has *ontological* roots. It was left to Heidegger and Sartre to lay bare this grounding in their analyses of freedom and the human condition.

Heidegger writes that "freedom is the ground of the ground."[16] By this, he means that freedom is not a property of the will, something we simply possess, but rather the very condition for understanding, reasoning, and meaning. Freedom enables the projection (*Entwurf*) of possibilities; it makes it possible to interpret ourselves and the world, even were we to interpret ourselves as lacking freedom.

Freedom, for Heidegger, is the "clearing" (*Lichtung*), the open region in which beings can appear meaningfully. This clearing is not chosen but discovered in our existence as *Dasein*. It is a kind of disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*), the openness in which Being itself becomes intelligible.

Heidegger deepens this account by tying freedom to *Gelassenheit* (letting-be): "Freedom to disclose an openness lets the particular being be the being that it is. Freedom now reveals itself as the *letting-be of beings*."[17] This form of freedom is not a mastery over beings but a fundamental *receptivity*, a responsiveness that discloses beings in their being.

Human beings are, as Heidegger says, *thrown* into existence (*Geworfenheit*): we find ourselves in a world not of our own choosing. Yet, in that thrownness, we

are attuned (*Befindlichkeit*) to the world in ways that open up meaningful possibilities. Our existential structure as being-toward-death (*Sein zum Tode*) presses us toward resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), the decision to own our existence (*Eigentlichkeit*) rather than dissolve into the anonymous they-self (*das Man*).[18]

For Heidegger, then, the ontological ground of our ethical decisions is a freedom structured by temporality, finitude, and openness to Being. Freedom is not optional—it is the very structure of our being. As such, the traditional debates about freedom versus determinism miss the point; *freedom is not a metaphysical hypothesis but the existential condition for having possibilities at all*.

In Jamesian terms, the question of existence itself is an *ontological genuine option*. It is *lived*, because our existence is always underway; it is *forced*, because we cannot not choose; and it is *momentous*, because everything meaningful turns on whether we run forward into possibility or shrink back from it.[19]

Heidegger insists that freedom is not something human beings have; rather, it is something that *has* human beings.[20] To choose or refuse our existence is always already a lived, forced, and momentous act. And this ontological freedom is what makes ontic ethical decisions—like Molly's or Bob's—so profoundly significant.

Molly is a being whose being is open to Being.[21] She cannot escape her freedom, nor can she hand over her decision to abort or not abort. Whether she owns her possibilities or flees from them, the structure of freedom remains. To evade responsibility is not to eliminate freedom but to distort it. We are freedom, phenomenologically, and it is this ontological ground that enables our ethical decisions to carry such weight.

Sartre radicalizes this structure. In *Being and Nothingness*, he insists that freedom is not only constitutive of being human, but it is inescapable as well. Heidegger's ontological openness becomes, for Sartre, *radical spontaneity*. Where Heidegger sees freedom as historically and existentially situated, Sartre sees it as *absolute*: "[M]an is nothing other than what he makes of himself… [Man] is condemned to be free."[22]

Freedom, for Sartre, flows from the *nothingness* at the heart of consciousness. We are not what we are and are what we are not. Because we are not determined by any fixed essence, we are wholly responsible for what we become. "Freedom is not a being; it is the being of man—that is, his nothingness of being."[23] Sartre declares: "The for-itself has appeared to us as a being which exists in so far as it is not what it is and is what it is not."[24] Even the attempt to deny this responsibility – to say we "had no choice" – is itself an act of freedom. This is "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*): "[I]n bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth."[25]

Bad faith is our effort to mask our freedom by interpreting it as necessity. To affirm "I had no choice" is to flee from the anguish of having had one. Bob may remove his

father's life support out of compassion. Molly may decide not to carry a child into a world filled with suffering. While these choices may be understandable, they are not, and cannot be, *passive*. As Sartre puts it: "I am responsible for my very desire of fleeing responsibilities. To make myself passive ... is still to choose myself…."[26]

We have moved from *ontic decisions* to the *ontological structure* that makes such decisions possible. Decisions about the beginning and end of life are *genuine questions* because they arise from the structure of being itself. It is Molly who must decide whether the life within her will live. It is Bob who must decide whether his father breathes another day. These are not algorithmic problems, but rather they are the burden of beings whose being is at issue for them. Heidegger writes: "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather, in its very being, that being is an *issue* for it."[27]

Because our being is always at issue, our choices cannot be fully put behind us. They are retrievable, revisitable, and re-saturable with meaning and anguish. We are the kinds of beings who remember our choosing, who stand again before the door through which we once walked.

When Molly chooses to abort, or Bob to unplug, they are not just making moral choices; they are making *ontological affirmations*. To be or not to be, in this way and in this moment, is the fundamental human question. Choosing A rather than ~A is not merely a logical act, it is the actualization of one's being. Moreover, in the retrieval of the choice, one returns again to the *angst of freedom* (Heidegger) and the *anguish of transcendence* (Sartre). All of this is clear, but what does it have to do with *creation* and the title of this essay?

We have traced the weight of ontic ethical decisions to their ontological root in human freedom. Heidegger and Sartre unveil this freedom not as a faculty we possess but as the condition of our being. We are constituted by possibility. And it is precisely because our being is an issue for us that our choices carry such irreversible weight.

But if this is true, if our freedom is not merely psychological but structural, then a deeper question presses upon us: *Why are we free at all?* What makes it possible that there are beings whose being is at stake, whose essence is nothing other than the project of becoming? What explains this strange creature who walks through momentous thresholds and looks back with remembrance and regret?

In short, the question of *freedom opens onto the question of origin*. If our lives are saturated with ethical gravity because of our ontological structure, then the question of creation becomes unavoidable, for to ask, "What ought I to do?" is to already stand in a world that permits such a question. But why should such a world exist? Why should there be a clearing in which beings appear? Why should there be anything like freedom at all?

With this question, we turn to the metaphysics of creation, not as a diversion from the existential, but as its deepening. For the question of freedom is not merely a human question; it is a *cosmic one*.

Creation, Contingency and the Metaphysics of Meaning

IF OUR ONTOLOGICAL STRUCTURE AS FREE BEINGS grounds the weight of our ethical decisions, a deeper mystery arises: How is it that we are free at all? What makes it possible for beings like us to exist—finite, conscious, burdened with responsibility, and yet open to meaning? The existential condition we have explored cannot explain itself. If human beings are marked by freedom, then if we are to be fully human, we must ask: *What makes freedom possible?*

This question leads beyond existential analysis into *metaphysical reflection*, towards the question of *creation*, for the clearing in which beings appear, the space in which possibilities open and decisions are made, is not itself self-explanatory, but stands in need of grounding. Why is there such a clearing at all? Why is there a world in which beings can be disclosed, a world in which questions can be live, forced, and momentous?

Classical theism answers this with the claim that the world, and the intelligibility of the world, depend on a reality beyond itself. The openness of being, the very possibility of *existential* freedom, is not *brute fact but gift*. We are not self-originating; we are created. Our freedom is real, but it is a *given* freedom, a participated openness grounded in a source beyond the totality of beings.

The metaphysics of creation is not a speculative add-on to existential philosophy, but rather a necessary deepening. Ultimately, to be free is not only to be responsible, but it is also to be *radically contingent*; it is to be dependent on a reality that makes such responsibility possible. Accordingly, to face the question of life, to walk through the door that leads to light or death, is to confront the mystery of being itself: *Why is there something rather than nothing? Why am I free rather than not?*

In the days before Christianity came to dominate the intellectual world, several options for understanding creation were current. For Plato in the *Timaeus*, creation occurs when the divine craftsman (*demiurge*) imposes order on pre-existent matter. He writes:

> For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion.[28]

For Plotinus, creation is the necessary emanation from the One.

> The One is all things and not a single one of them: it is the principle of all things, not all things, but all things have that other kind of transcendent existence….[29]

For the Stoics, creation happens through cycles of conflagration and rebirth. The universe is a material, rational organism shaped always by the *Logos*. Accordingly, all things come to be through Zeus' will, and nothing happens without it.[30] God is immanent, not transcendent, as with Plotinus, God is not separate from the cosmos.

The Genesis account of creation claims, "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep…" (Genesis 1:1-2). This suggests that God ordered a formless chaos, a view that Philo of Alexandria adjusted by declaring that God imposed the formed ideas of the Logos upon matter.[31]

Augustine, however, articulates a different view of creation.

> For you made heaven and earth, but not from your own self…. Apart from you there was nothing existing from which you could make these things, O Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity. Therefore you made heaven and earth from nothing….[32]

Augustine thus denies two alternatives. He argues that the universe is neither a transformation of Himself nor a mere ordering of uncreated matter. Instead, God wills into being both the potentiality of matter and the actuality of its forms. Accordingly, a sharp bifurcation forms between the uncreated and created orders. In the *City of God*, Augustine declares:

> God alone is the author of all natures, since He neither uses for His work any material which was not made by Him, nor any workmen who were not also made by Him.[33]

Moreover, that *what is* came from *what is not*.

> In the beginning God created heaven and earth—that is, all things contained in heaven and earth—out of nothing, by His Word.[34]

Finally, creation is rooted in divine will, not divine necessity.

> God created all things not out of any necessity, but in the freedom of His will.[35]

While there were earlier formulations of *creatio ex nihilo* in the tradition, Augustine's views stand as the paradigmatic.[36] His account claims the following:

> 1. God is uncreated and ontologically distinct from what is created. Both matter and time are created by God.

2. God's act of creation concerns both *form* and *matter*. There is nothing at all prior to divine creation.

3. God's act of creation is *free* and not somehow necessitated by God's nature.

4. Creation is ontologically dependent upon God, not God upon creation.

The question of *creatio ex nihilo* remains with us today as cosmologists consider the so-called fine-tuning of the universe and what could account for it. In the next sections, I argue that the *question of origination*—why is there something rather than nothing?—remains a *live*, *forced*, and *momentous* one. But why is this important?

We have already established that the ethical choices confronting Molly and Bob are genuine in the Jamesian sense. They are not grounded in uncontroversial fact, but rather in *ontological freedom*, and, as I have suggested, such ontological freedom ultimately points beyond itself towards a metaphysical ground, towards creation itself.

This means that Molly cannot retreat to some bedrock claim like "all is ultimately material" and make her decision on that basis, for *whether all is ultimately material is itself a genuine question*. Clearly, it is live, forced, momentous, and evidence-transcending. Likewise, the question of whether *God designs the universe* is not empirically verifiable, but it is perhaps the most important genuine question of all. Accordingly, Molly's answer to whether to protect the life within her is not merely a biological or moral judgment; it is a *metaphysical stance*. Is this world "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing"? Or is it the creation of One who speaks light into darkness? How does one address this genuine question without occupying metaphysical ground?

In the next section, I turn to Wittgenstein's famous example of the duck-rabbit figure. I shall argue there that our ability to see the universe as meaningful, or meaningless, is an act of *aspect-perception*, one that carries existential and moral consequences for Molly, Bob, and all of us.

Seeing the World Anew: Aspect-Perception and the Structure of Meaning

IN HIS *PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS*, Ludwig Wittgenstein introduces a subtle but powerful concept: *aspect-perception*. His famous example is a simple drawing—one viewer sees it as a rabbit, another as a duck. Crucially, nothing changes in the figure itself. What changes is the *way it is seen*.[37] Wittgenstein distinguishes this from ordinary recognition: saying "I see a rabbit" is a *seeing-that*, while saying "I now see this as a duck" is a *seeing-as*, an interpretive shift in perception.[38] Such

shifts are not the result of inference or deduction. They are not new beliefs but new *ways of seeing*: immediate, holistic, and context-dependent. Wittgenstein calls this "noticing an aspect." The object becomes intelligible *under a new aspect*, even though it remains perceptually the same.[39] It is a matter of *how one looks at things*. Wittgenstein writes:

> I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently: that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*.[40]

This phenomenon drives Wittgenstein to claim that perception is not simply the passive reception of already-meaningful stimuli, but an *active configuration of meaning*. "Seeing-as" is not reducible to psychological mechanisms or isolated mental states. It arises within a shared background of meaning, what Wittgenstein calls a *form of life* (*Lebensform*).[41] We see-as because we are shaped by practices, contexts, and histories that allow certain meanings to appear at all. Thus, to perceive x is not to observe it in isolation, but to see it as meaningful within a *horizon of intelligibility*. Understanding is thus not a state but a skill, an ability formed through participation in a form of life.

Our most fundamental metaphysical stances often function in just this way. We see the universe as a gift or as a brute fact; as suffused with meaning or as indifferent machinery; as creation or as accident. These are not empirically deduced positions, but following Wittgenstein, they are better understood as *aspectual orientations*, lived out as perceptions of the whole. Moreover, once we see the world one way, it can be deeply difficult or even impossible to see otherwise.[42]

This has real implications for moral and theological discernment. Whether Molly sees the life within her as "a clump of cells" or as "a child," as "a burden" or as "a sacred trust," does not depend on data alone, but on the *frame of meaning* that the world presents to her. "Is life holy?" "Is being good?" I am suggesting that such questions are not answered by calculation but by perception. They are *theological ways of seeing*. So we must ask: *What governs our aspect-seeing?* Can one be trained to see differently? Can the world, like the duck-rabbit, be seen anew depending on the *posture of the soul*?

Consider the claim of 2 Corinthians 5:19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (KJV). Following Wittgenstein, this is best understood not merely as a propositional report, but rather involves a *way of seeing the world*, a theological aspect. Accordingly, statements like "Jesus is Lord" or "God is in Christ" involve not just cognition but *conversion*. As Paul writes: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become

new" (2 Cor. 5:17; NRSV). Theological affirmations do not merely describe reality; they *transform how reality is seen*.

But some are unable to see in this way. Wittgenstein speaks of *aspect-blindness*—the inability to shift how one sees a figure.[43] He compares this to meaning-blindness: a failure to find in language what others perceive as obvious. For such persons, theological claims appear nonsensical not because they are false, but because the form of life needed to disclose their sense is missing.[44]

Notice that these insights parallel Heidegger's existential analysis. For Heidegger, we do not encounter beings as neutral objects, but always already within a *structure of significance*—the *worldhood of the world* (*Weltlichkeit der Welt*). Accordingly, to "see" (*Sehen*) is to be open to beings as meaningful, disclosed within our thrown existence (*Geworfenheit*). Heidegger calls this process *Entdecken*—the uncovering of beings within *being-in-the-world* (*In-der-Welt-sein*). In this openness, things are not just present but *intelligible*. Even tools, like a hammer, are not understood by their physical features alone, but by their place within a *network of meaning* (*Bedeutsamkeit*).

Just as Wittgenstein's "seeing-as" is shaped by language-games and forms of life, so too Heidegger's *understanding* (*Verstehen*) is structured by worldhood. In both, meaning does not arise from the object alone but from its participation in a *prior horizon of disclosure*. We must acknowledge this, even though there is a crucial difference. While for Wittgenstein, language-games structure meaning, for Heidegger, *hermeneutics is ontological*. This means that *Auslegung* (interpretation) is not simply something we do, but it is what we *are*. Dasein does not just interpret the world; it is the being whose being is interpretation. Nonetheless, for both thinkers, understanding is a form of seeing-as. Things are meaningful only within a world or a form of life. There is no "view from nowhere." The real question, then, is: *What kind of world discloses itself to us? And what kind of life makes it visible?*

We are now able to see the existential stakes. If Jack stands before two doors, and if Molly must decide whether to give birth, their choices are not just about outcomes but about *vision*. What aspect does the world present to them? What kind of meaning is disclosed in the clearing of being—or refused in its absence? These decisions likely turn not on argument, but on what they see, and what they see depends on how the world primarily appears to them. Is it a gift or a burden, an accident or a call?

Interpretive Frameworks and the Conditions of Meaning

We are now able to ask a more refined version of our central question: What conditions must obtain for the universe to be meaningful to beings like us? If human beings are the sorts of creatures for whom being is at issue, then the very possibility of meaning must rest on a structure that can support such existential openness.

Here we face a metaphysical fork: *Is the world best interpreted under a naturalistic framework or a theistic one?* This question, too, is a genuine option in James' sense, for it is live, forced, and momentous. And like other genuine options, it transcends the evidence available from experience alone. It cannot be settled deductively. The choice is not irrational, but rather pre-rational, a decision about what aspect the world shall present to us.

From one angle, naturalism appears sufficient. Perhaps there is no need for God or for creation. Perhaps the world simply is, and its intelligibility emerges from within through evolved cognition, social construction, or emergent complexity. On this reading, the universe is, at bottom, impersonal and unintended. While it might have some meaning, this meaning must be imposed by us, not disclosed to us.

From another angle, such a view seems inadequate. The structure of reality appears strangely fitted for intelligibility. The laws of physics are not merely orderly, but exquisitely tuned to support life, beauty, and rational inquiry. That beings like us—finite, free, and self-interpreting—should arise within such a cosmos seems, not merely unlikely, but almost uncanny. The world begins to look not like a brute fact, but like a gift.

This returns us to the concept of *aspect-seeing*. The metaphysical question, whether the universe is created or accidental, is not merely a matter of evidence but of perception shaped by orientation. The rabbit of brute contingency becomes the duck of divine design. The cosmos itself may appear as a veil or a window, depending on how one sees.

In this sense, the naturalist and the theist are not simply disagreeing over facts. They are interpreting the same facts under different aspects. Their disagreement is not about what is seen, but about how to see it.[45]

The theological tradition, however, offers something the naturalist cannot: an account of the origin of meaning itself. For if meaning is not merely something we project, but something we discover, then we must ask why the world is the kind of place that can bear meaning at all. This is the question that *creatio ex nihilo* addresses. The Christian claim is not that God merely set up the initial conditions, but that *being itself is gifted*, that *meaning is ontologically prior to meaning-making*. The world does not merely permit significance; it radiates it.

This does not settle the debate, but it repositions it. The issue is not whether one can live without God, but whether one can live abundantly and meaningfully within a world that has no source. The question is whether our freedom and longing for intelligibility are *accidental byproducts* of a blind system or *intentional invitations* to respond to a Creator.

To ask the question this way is not to provide an answer. It is to see the question for what it is: a decision under risk, one that must be lived as much as thought. And

so, we are brought back again, not to certainty, but to vision, to whether we see this universe as ordered or arbitrary, luminous or inert, called or uncalled. This seeing, as we have argued, is not merely cognitive. It is ontological; it is theological. Moreover, it may be ultimately the most important decision we ever make.

In the next section, we shall move from the question of the relationship between interpretive frameworks and fundamental meaning to the issue of the plausibility of these frameworks. We are interested in which framework—naturalistic or theistic—is more likely *true*.

Naturalism, Design and the Weight of Explanation

IF WE TAKE SERIOUSLY THE NOTION of a genuine option—live, forced, and momentous—then the question of whether the universe is a product of divine design or brute fact must itself be seen as a genuine and unavoidable decision. It cannot be deferred forever, and it shapes how we interpret not only the origin of the cosmos but the meaning of life within it.

As we saw in the previous section, naturalism offers one vision. It holds that the universe is a closed system of impersonal causes, its laws sufficient to explain all phenomena, including life, thought, and meaning. There is no need for God; nothing transcends the physical totality.

But naturalism faces a formidable challenge: the *apparent fine-tuning of the universe* for life. The physical constants and initial conditions of our cosmos fall within a narrow life-permitting range. Even slight variations would make complex structures, and with them life as we know it, impossible. Why should a universe capable of sustaining rational beings have the requisite fine-tuning such that we exist at all?

The most popular naturalistic response is the *multiverse hypothesis*. On this view, there exists a vast (perhaps infinite) ensemble of universes, each with its own physical parameters. Given enough trials, it becomes likely that at least one universe would be life-permitting, and ours just happens to be that one.

This response shifts the explanatory burden: instead of answering why this universe is fine-tuned, it posits a *probabilistic selection effect*. We could not observe any universe but a life-permitting one. The anthropic principle takes the place of design.[46]

But this move is not neutral. It multiplies entities dramatically, hypothesizing an entire ensemble of unobservable worlds, and relies on *mechanisms that themselves call for explanation*. Why should there be a multiverse? Why should it produce a universe capable of self-conscious observers?

By contrast, *theism offers a simpler, intentional explanation*. The universe is fine-tuned for life because it was designed to be so. Its order, rational transparency, and life-permitting balance are not random but willed, the product of an intelligence.

We can formalize this contrast using Bayesian reasoning. Suppose we let:

- T = the hypothesis that God exists.

- ~T = the hypothesis that God does not exist.

- E = the evidence that the universe is finely tuned for life.

Bayes' Theorem tells us that the posterior probability of T given E, written $P(T|E)$, is proportional to the product of the forward probability of T and the probability of E given T.

- $P(T|E) \propto [P(T) \times P(E|T)]$

Similarly:

- $P(\sim T|E) \propto P(\sim T) \times P(E|\sim T)$

Here, $P(E|T)$ is the probability that we would observe fine-tuning if God exists, and $P(E|\sim T)$ is the probability of fine-tuning under naturalism. If theism makes fine-tuning more likely than naturalism does—that is, if $P(E|T) > P(E|\sim T)$—then E *increases the probability of T relative to ~T*.[47]

In less formal terms: fine-tuning fits better with theism than with naturalism. It is not that theism predicts the exact details of cosmology, but that *fine-tuning is more expected* on the assumption of a designing mind than on blind chance or physical necessity. Naturalism must either postulate an immense multiverse (with no independent evidence) or admit staggering improbability.

This doesn't prove theism, but it *tilts the balance*. It shows that belief in God is not a capitulation to mystery but a *rational interpretation of order*, one that preserves the intelligibility of our deepest experiences: wonder, responsibility, moral insight, and longing for meaning.

Still, the naturalist may resist. He or she may say that human consciousness, ethical normativity, and existential urgency are emergent artifacts, real enough for practical use, but ontologically derivative. From this perspective, our sense that life is meaningful is itself an evolutionary adaptation, not a sign of deeper truth.

But this leads to an unavoidable question: *If all we cherish is the product of blind processes, can we continue to believe it has genuine value?* Can we hold fast to dignity, responsibility, and love, if they are built upon nothing but chance and chemistry?

Theism answers with a resounding yes—not because it can deduce these values from axioms, but because it sees the world under a different aspect. It sees the universe as *gift*, not accident; life as *calling*, not fluke. Accordingly, the choice between naturalism and theism is not merely a matter of abstract probability, but rather a matter of *existential vision*. It is about what kind of world we are willing to affirm, and what kind of beings we believe ourselves to be.

Like Jack before the two doors, we cannot escape this decision. To live as though the universe is meaningful, as though our decisions matter, is already to live in light of something like design. Theism does not impose that meaning; it simply names the source from which it flows.

Decision, Faith and the Weight of the World

THE QUESTION OF LIFE IS NOT ANSWERED by science, nor finally by metaphysics, but by *decision*—not arbitrary, but necessary; not irrational, but evidence-transcending; not provable, but nonetheless *binding*.

In the end, we do not live by deduction. We live by vision, by a way of seeing the world that orients our action and forms our commitments. The question is not whether we see the universe as meaningful, but whether we can avoid seeing it that way. To see the world as bearing significance, as morally weighty, as worth living in, presupposes a *field of meaning* that cannot be fully accounted for from within the world itself.

That is the function of *faith*. It is not blind assent, but trust in what cannot be proved yet must be lived. It is the trust that the universe is not indifferent, that our freedom is not futile, that our loves are not absurd. This is not a "God-of-the-gaps" argument, filling ignorance with theology. It is a well-informed theology, a profound claim about the *conditions for meaning*, about what must be true if our most basic moral and existential experiences are not lies.

We return, finally, to Jack, to Molly, to Bob. Each faces a decision not only about what to do, but about *what kind of world they live in*. Is the child within Molly a coincidence of biochemistry, or a life entrusted to her care? Is Bob's father merely the residue of synaptic activity, or a person whose dignity is never fully extinguished? These are not questions we can answer *from the outside*. They must be lived from within and are thus unavoidably theological.

William James taught us to look for the genuine option: *live*, *forced*, *momentous*. But perhaps we must add a fourth term: foundational. The question of whether life is a gift or an accident is not simply one option among others. It is the *ground upon which all other decisions rest*.

At the heart of Christian faith lies a startling claim: that the source of all being has entered into being, not as a deduction, but as a person. In Jesus of Nazareth, the Creator steps into the clearing, not to impose certainty but to call forth response. The voice in Deuteronomy says that God set before his people both life and death, blessing and curse. He says, "choose life."[48]

Jack stands before the two doors. He cannot remain undecided. The air is growing thin. The question is no longer whether he will choose, but what his choice will reveal about what he has already chosen to see. He reaches for the handle.

Molly and Bob are likewise faced with choices that transcend the safeguards of easy algorithmic ethical calculation. In the end, their decisions rest not on a faith derived from the structure of the world, but on a faith received—one that gives structure to the world and remains consonant with what the world most deeply suggests.

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Notes

1. Cantor's diagonal argument is a proof showing that there are different orders of infinity, that the set of real numbers, though infinite, cannot be put into one-to-one correspondence with the set of natural numbers, that the real numbers are not countable (denumerable) as are the natural numbers, and that the cardinality of the reals is "higher" than that of the natural numbers. The argument proceeds by attempting to list all the real numbers between [0,1] as decimal expansions. So, assume, for contradiction, that all real numbers in [0,1] can be listed in a sequence. Then, by constructing a new number that differs from the nth number in the list at the nth decimal digit, a new real number is formed that is not in the list. This contradicts the assumption that all such numbers were already listed. Therefore, the real numbers are *uncountable*. Furthermore, by Cantor's theorem, the power set of the reals (the set of all subsets of real numbers) has an even greater cardinality.

2. The continuum hypothesis is the conjecture that there is no cardinality between the cardinality of the real numbers and the cardinality of the continuum, i.e., that the next cardinality after the cardinality of the natural numbers is the cardinality of the continuum. While the diagonal argument proves that the cardinality of the continuum is greater than that of natural numbers, it neither proves nor disproves the continuum hypothesis. The continuum hypothesis is thus independent of the axioms of ZFC (Zemelo-Fraenkel set theory with the axiom of choice). Accordingly, the continuum hypothesis is *undecidable* in ZFC, and ZFC is accordingly *incomplete*.

3. There are many Biblical verses dealing with this theme, e.g., Job 14:5-6: "Since their days are determined, and the number of their months is known to you, and you have appointed the bounds that they cannot pass, look away from them, and desist, that they may enjoy, like labourers, their days" (NRSVA).

4. William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers, & Ignas K. Skrupskelis; Intro., Edward H. Madden (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1979), 1-31.

5. James, "The Will to Believe," 14: "Options may be of several kinds … and for our purposes we may call an option a *genuine* option when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind."

6. Ibid., "A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is pro-posed…. The maximum of liveness in an hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably."

7. Ibid., 15: "…If I say, 'Either accept this truth or go without it,' I put on you a forced op-tion, for there is no standing place outside of the alternative," and again, "Every dilemma based on a complete logical disjunction, with no possibility of not choosing, is an option of this forced kind."

8. Ibid.: "... if I were Dr. Nansen and proposed to you to join my North Pole expedition, your option would be momentous; for this would probably be your only similar opportunity...."

9. Ibid., 20; italics in text.

10. When you deliberate between staying in a job or leaving, forgiving or retaliating, you *feel* the weight of agency. The idea of freedom is not abstract; it is existential.

11. With respect to believing something, James writes: "*Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions ... for to say, under such circumstances, 'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional deci-sion—just like deciding yes or no—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth*" (James, "The Will to Believe," 20; italics in text).

12. If we are free, then moral responsibility and transformation is possible, but if we are not free, then we are neither responsible nor capable of change. Resignation and even nihilism seem to follow. James argues: 1) If determinism is true, we cannot genuinely regret or hope, because everything is inevitable. 2) But if indeterminism (freedom) is true, moral responsibility is meaningful, and the future is open to real change. Thus, *freedom is a "genuine option"*—choosing to believe in it is rationally permissible and ethically fruitful.

13. William Kingdon Clifford, *Essays and Lectures*, vol. 2, ed. Leslie Stephen & Frederick Pollock (London, UK: Macmillan & Company, 1879), 186.

14. James quotes Clifford on pp. 17-18 of "The Will to Believe." One might claim that James espouses a pragmatic voluntarism because of his willingness to accept that freedom is true despite there being no empirical evidence or any other "proof" of it obtaining.

15. The distinction between "ontic" and "ontological" is important in this essay. "Ontic" refers to what is, to beings, i.e., entities, properties, relations, events, and facts. Ontic investigations concern that which exists. "Ontological" refers to how beings are, i.e., to the conditions or structures by which beings have be-ing. Ontological investigations concern those struc-tures that make possible the appearance and meaning of being. Molly must make the ontic ethical decision to abort or not abort. The conditions of her decision, that is, her existential freedom, responsibility and guilt, display the ontological structure of human existence itself.

16. Martin Heidegger, "Von Wesen des Grundes" in *Wegmarken*, Gesamtausgabe 9:174). "Die Freiheit ist der Grund des Grundes. Das freilich nicht im Sinne einer formalen, endlosen Iteration…" [hereafter GA]. See also Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Ted Sadler (Continuum, 2002), p. 90.

17. See Martin Heidegger, "Von Wesen der Wahrheit," in *Wegmarken*, GA 9: p. 188: "Die Freiheit zum Offenbaren eines Offenen läßt das jeweilige Seiende das Seiende sein, das es ist. Freiheit enthüllt sich jetzt als das Seinlassen von Seiendem.

18. Human being is thrown into a world of possibilities and is free to project itself towards them. It is accordingly, a *Geworfenheit* having an *Entwurf*. Human being thus has *finite freedom*, a freedom within the structure it finds itself within.

19. Heidegger points out that the ontological ground for the will's autonomy in ontic decision-making is an attuned openness to Being in which one heeds the call of conscience back to oneself that allows an authentic projection into possibilities. Accordingly, one's freedom is tied to one's fundamental orientation towards the future. One can either await it passively (*Erwartung*) or one can run forward, leaping into possibilities (*Vorlaufen*). Ontological freedom thereby is situated at the foundation of existence itself, and thus it transcends the traditional ontic freedom/determinism issue. Accordingly, freedom is not optional but undergirds all the ontological structures that make Dasein who it is.

20. Heidegger, "Vom Wesen der Wahrheit," in *Wegmarken*, GA 9: 190: "Der Mensch »besitzt« die Freiheit nicht als Eigenschaft, sondern höchstens gilt das Umgekehrte: die Freiheit, das ek-sistente, entbergende Dasein besitzt den Menschen…"; Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY; Melbourne, AU: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 145: "The human being does not 'possess' freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: Freedom, ek-sistent, disclosive Da-sein, possesses the human being...."

21. More prosaically, she is an entity whose very be-ing as an entity is to have her be-ing as the entity she is at issue for her.

22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT; London, UK: Yale University Press, 2007), 22, 29.

23. Ibid., 29: "[T]here is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom." Sartre: "That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create him, yet nonetheless free, become once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (ibid.).

24. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984, 1992), 399.

25. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 89. Sartre writes, "[T]he one to whom the lie is told and the one who lies are one and the same person" (ibid.) and "Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here" (ibid.).

26. Ibid., 710.

27. *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), § 4, p. 32: "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it.… Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological." See GA 2:16: "Das Dasein ist ein Seiendes, das nicht nur unter anderem Seienden vorkommt. Es ist vielmehr dadurch ontisch ausgezeichnet, daß es diesem Seienden in seinem Sein

um dieses Sein selbst geht.… Die ontische Auszeichnung des Daseins liegt darin, daß es ontologisch ist."

28. *Timaeus. Critias. Cleitophon. Menexenus. Epistles.*, trans. R. G. Bury, vol. 234 in Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1929), 55 [hereafter LCL]. Accessed July 18, 2025.

29. Plotinus, *Enneads* V.2.1. LCL 444, p. 59. DOI:10.4159/DLCL.plotinus-enneas.1969. Accessed July 18, 2025.

30. This is the sentiment of Cleanthes hymn to Zeus. Edward Caird writes, "From the first, Stoicism was a religious philosophy, as is shown by the great hymn of Cleanthes, the successor of Zeno as head of the school—a hymn which is inspired by the consciousness that it is one spiritual power which penetrates and controls the universe and is the source of every work done under the sun, 'except what evil men endeavour in their folly.'" Edward Caird, *The Evolution of Philosophy in the Greek Philosophers*, vol. 2 (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1904), 76-77.

31. Philo declares, "So when [God] willed to create this visible world He first fully formed the intelligible world, in order that He might have the use of a pattern...." (See *De Opificio Mundi*, in LCL 226, p. 15, § 4, line 16). Accordingly, while God Himself is transcendent, God created by applying the Logos to pre-existing matter. Early Christians were struck by the reality that the world created by God was not as it seemingly should be. Various gnostic texts attempted to explain how an all-good God could have brought the deeply-flawed material world into being. The Gnostics assumed that somehow the All-good God begot beings with a mutilated pedigree issuing in the Demiurge who created the world as a corrupt imitation of the spiritual realm.

32. *Confessions* XII.7; Augustine, *Confessions: Books 9-13*, ed. & trans. Carolyn J.-B. Hammond, vol. 27 in Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA; London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2016), 269. LCL. DOI:10.4159/DLCL.augustine-confessions _2014.2014. Accessed July 18, 2025.

33. Augustine, *The City of God*, XII.25, trans. Marcus Dods; intro. Thomas Merton (New York: The Modern Library, 1993), 409.

34. Augustine. *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. Joseph Zycha. CSEL 28/1 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1894), Book I, Chapter 1: "In principio Deus creavit caelum et terram, id est—omnia quae continentur in caelo et in terra—ex nihilo, verbo suo." See also Augustine. *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. Translated and annotated by John Hammond Taylor, S.J. 2 vols. Ancient Christian Writers 41-42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 19.

35. *City of God* XI.24. LCL 27, p. 525: "Again in the statement: 'God saw that it was good,' it is made abundantly clear that it was not from any compulsion, nor from the least need of any personal advantage, that God made what was made, but solely from his goodness, that is, he made it because it is good. And it is so described after it was made, in order to show that the thing that was made corresponds exactly to the goodness that was the purpose of its creation." DOI:10.4159/DLCL.augustine-city_god_pagans.1957. Accessed July 18, 2025.

36. Theophilus of Antioch's work *Ad Autolycum* offers an apologetic defense of Christianity to a pagan. Directly engaging the earlier tradition, he wrote, "*God made* everything *out of what did not exist* (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων)" and "God is more power than man, so he is in his making and having made the existent out of the non-existent; he made whatever his wish in whatever way he wish." Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad Autolycum* in *Theophilus of*

Antioch: Ad Autolycum, *Text and Translation by Robert M. Grant* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1970), Book I.4 & Book II.4, 7, 27. While Irenaeus of Lyons and Tertullian affirmed that earlier forms of *creatio ex nihilo*, Augustine developed these earlier views by claiming that time itself is created by God.

37. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (*PI*), trans. by G.E.M. Anscombe, Part II, Section XI, 194^e.

38. *PI*, 194^{e}ff.

39. This is not to suggest that aspect-perception is relative; one cannot see anything one wants when looking at the rabbit-duck. Instead, aspect-perception is an invitation to reflect upon the very conditions of intelligibility.

40. *PI*, #144, 57^e.

41. *PI*, #241: "'So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?'—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life (*Lebensform*)."

42. Cf. Charles Taylor's discussion of closed takes and spins in his *The Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). While *takes* on the universe as denying transcendence can be argued against, this is not so of *spins*. Those occupying a naturalistic spin believe that anyone thinking otherwise is uniformed, ignorant, or irrational.

43. *PI*, II, xi, 214^e: "Aspect-blindness will be *akin* to the lack of a 'musical ear.' The importance of this concept lies in the connexion between the concepts of 'seeing an aspect' and 'experiencing the meaning of a word.'"

44. *PI*, Part II, xi. Charles Taylor famously explores in *The Secular Age* the question as to how it was that 500 years ago in the North Atlantic countries everybody believed in God, but now why is belief so difficult even for those professing it. His argument details the *social construction* of atheism that eventuates in the present firmly entrenched "closed spin" that there is nothing beyond the material, and that we must somehow manufacture any meaning we might have in life upon the basis of this already established fact. One might say that the *Lebensform* of the contemporary academic precludes the very possibility of there being genuine transcendence.

45. Just as the ontic concerns what is, and the ontological the meaning of what is, so too the naturalist and theist can agree on what our empirical observations and established scientific theories are, while still disagreeing upon the meaning of those observations and established scientific theories.

46. It is standard to distinguish the *weak anthropic principle* (WAP) from the *strong anthropic principle* (SAP). While both principles assume that it is necessary that observations of the universe are consistent with the conscious life observing it, the WAP differs from the SAP in claiming that the universe is the way it is because only within the observed conditions could there be observers like us. The apparent presence of fine-tuning is due to a *selection effect*. The SAP, on the other hand, claims that the existence of observers like us is a necessary condition of the universe, that the universe is so ordered as to produce conscious observers. Some versions claim that fine-tuning—that is, the observed fundamental physical laws and constants—are necessarily what they are so that life might emerge. Clearly, SAP is consonant with divine design in a way that the WAP is not.

47. The sign 'α' stands for 'proportional to'. It is important to grasp that Bayes' Theorem does not deal with proof, but with updating plausibility in the light of new evidence. Bayes'

Theorem is concerned with forward and conditional probabilities. Assume the *forward probability* $P(E|H)$, the probability of the observed evidence given a particular hypothesis, and the *conditional probability* $P(H|E)$, the probability of that hypothesis given the observed evidence. Bayes' theorem states that $P(H|E) = [P(E|H) \times P(H)]/P(E)$. Let H be 'God exists' and E the observed evidence of fine-tuning. Thus, $P(H|E)$ is the probability that God exists given the evidence, $P(E|H)$ the probability of observed fined-tuning if God exists, $P(H)$ the probability that God exists and $P(E)$ the total probability of fine-tuning under competing hypotheses. Now define H_{God} as God exists, and H_{chance} that only chance obtains. Assume that given E—the universe is fine-tuned for life—we have the forward probability of theism $P(E|H_{God})$ approaching 1 (100%), and the forward probability of chance $P(E|H_{chance})$ approaching 0 (0%). Now let's suppose that in these naturalistic times, we assume that $P(H_{God})$ is 0.01 (1%) and that $P(H_{chance})$ is 0.99 (99%). Let us further assume that $P(E|H_{God})$ is 1 (100%), and the $P(E|H_{chance})$ is 10^{-50}. Using Bayes' theorem, we have $P(H_{God})|E) = (1 \times 0.01)/[(1 \times 0.01) + (10^{-50} \times 0.99)] = .01/[0.01 + (9.9 \times 10^{-49})]$ which is still almost 1 (100%). Notice that we could make the forward probability of God's existence 10^{-25}, and since the conditional probability $P(E|H_{chance}) = 10^{-50}$, the chance of God's existence is still nearly 100%. Richard Swinburne famously employed the argument in Chapter 8 of his *Existence of God* and, more accessibly, in *Is There a God?* Richard Collins defends the argument rigorously in "The Teleological Argument: An Exploration of the Fine-Tuning of the Universe" in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (2009). William Craig has also sanctioned the argument in a number of his works.

48. See Deuteronomy 30:15-19.