

A surreal landscape featuring a large, textured celestial body (like a moon or planet) dominating the upper half of the sky. The sky is filled with stars, a crescent moon, and a spiral galaxy. Below the celestial body, a person stands on a dark rock in the foreground, looking out over a body of water. The background shows mountains and a sunset or sunrise with a large sun low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the scene. The overall atmosphere is dreamlike and contemplative.

Dreaming Worlds

Essays on belief, reality, mindsets,
and the edges of experience

Ton Haarmans

<https://wideopenwindows.be>

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About this book

What we call “reality” is not simply there. It takes shape. It organizes itself into selves and worlds, into problems and meanings, into structures that hold long enough to be lived inside.

Dreaming Worlds gathers essays written alongside the books *This Is It*, *Mindsets*, and *Origins*. Together they explore how such worlds form, stabilize, and begin to loosen.

Moving between belief, science, spirituality, typology, cosmology, enlightenment, irony, and darkness, the essays do not seek final answers. They track the activity by which experience turns itself into a world.

Not to escape that activity.

But to see it.

Because what is most easily overlooked is not what the world is made of, but how effortlessly it keeps making itself real.

Colophon

Dreaming Worlds, Essays on belief, reality, mindsets, and the edges of experience

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Typesetting, image preparation, and layout created in Affinity Studio 3.

This book gathers essays originally published on **Wide Open Windows, A philosophical laboratory**: <https://wideopenwindows.be>

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First digital edition, 2026.

Contemporary text-assistance tools were used during the writing process, as part of the exploratory and editorial workflow.

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Prologue

This book is not a new work.

It is a gathering.

The essays collected here were written over time, alongside the development of *This Is It*, *Mindsets*, and *Origins*. They appeared first on the website Wide Open Windows, not as chapters of a book, but as independent investigations. Each of them began from a specific tension, question, or curiosity. Each followed experience where it seemed to lead, without knowing in advance what it was supposed to produce.

What unites them is not a doctrine, a position, or a conclusion.

They share a way of looking.

Again and again, these essays return to how a world takes shape. How certainty forms. How explanation stabilizes experience. How belief enters unnoticed. How interpretation becomes environment. How even the most radical perspectives quietly turn into new grounds. And how those grounds, sooner or later, begin to loosen.

Some of the essays are personal. Others are analytical. Some move close to philosophy, science, or spirituality. Others move away from them. They do not build a system. They do not progress toward a final view. They circle a field of questions that cannot be settled, only approached from different angles.

Taken together, they trace a terrain rather than an argument.

They show a movement of inquiry rather than a line of thought.

This book exists because essays invite a different kind of reading than websites. On a page, texts begin to resonate with one another. Themes echo. Tensions repeat. Unexpected connections

appear. What was written years apart starts to feel as if it belongs to a single conversation.

Not because it was planned that way, but because experience keeps asking similar questions of itself.

This collection is offered as a free edition. It is not positioned as a new beginning, nor as a conclusion. It is a snapshot of an ongoing exploration. A record of how certain questions have taken shape so far.

Nothing here asks to be believed.

If these essays work, they work by sharpening attention. By making familiar certainties slightly less solid. By letting what seems obvious become visible again.

Not in order to replace one worldview with another.

But to look, once more, at how any world becomes a world at all.

Stabilisation

Belief

Belief as world-making, and what remains when it loosens

Abstract image suggesting uncertainty and openness

Belief rarely announces itself as belief. It usually appears as obviousness. This essay explores belief as an activity that stabilizes experience into a world, and what becomes visible when that stability loosens.

Belief as an activity

For a long time I thought belief was something you either had or did not have. You were religious or not. Spiritual or not. An atheist, an agnostic, a seeker, a skeptic. Positions. Labels. Worldviews.

Only much later did it become clear to me that belief is not primarily a doctrine. It is an activity.

Belief is what quietly organizes experience into a world.

It does this so effectively that it becomes almost invisible. It does not feel like an idea we hold, but like the way things are. A self here. A world there. Time passing. Causes producing effects. Choices being made. Meaning either present or absent. A future that matters. A past that explains.

Belief stabilizes.

The first belief: a someone

Without it, experience does not automatically arrange itself into something inhabitable. There is sound, color, sensation, thought, memory, impulse. But no obvious center. No clear author. No built-in meaning. Belief gathers this into something coherent. It introduces identities, objects, narratives. It turns open appearing into a navigable landscape.

The most fundamental belief is not belief in God or in an afterlife. It is the belief that there is someone here to whom all this is happening.

That belief forms very early. Through mirrors. Through language. Through being addressed. Through learning a name. Gradually, experience becomes organized around a presumed center. Thoughts appear to belong to someone. Feelings seem to happen inside someone. Perceptions are interpreted as arriving from a world “out there.”

This feels so basic that it is almost never questioned. It feels like fact, not belief.

Secondary beliefs and livability

On this foundation, countless secondary beliefs grow. If there is a self, it must have a history and a future. If there is a world, it must consist of stable things. If there are actions, there must be agency. If there is suffering, it must have a reason. If there is death, it must be compensated.

Belief in free will, in meaning, in progress, in transcendence all unfold almost automatically once the basic structure is in place.

These beliefs take different cultural forms. Gods, heavens, rebirth, cosmic consciousness, human destiny, technological salvation, awakening, simulation theories. But psychologically they function in remarkably similar ways. They orient. They console. They protect the narrative center from dissolving into indeterminacy.

Belief is not mainly about truth. It is about livability.

Where knowledge ends

It steps in where knowledge ends, but not neutrally. It enters charged with need. Fear of disappearance. Fear of chaos. Fear of insignificance. Fear of groundlessness. Belief does not solve ultimate questions. It closes them.

Where did we come from? Why is there something rather than nothing? What happens when we die? Does life have meaning? Who am I?

Beliefs anesthetize these questions. They transform them into positions.

Religion and atheism

This is why the opposition between religion and atheism always felt superficial to me. Both usually preserve the same underlying architecture. Remove God, and the central subject remains. The objective world remains. The narrative of progress remains. The belief in explanation as ultimate access remains. The belief that meaning must either be secured or denied remains.

Science as closure

Even science, when unconsciously absolutized, easily becomes another belief system. Not science as method, which is one of the most powerful tools ever developed for producing reliable, limited knowledge, but science as metaphysical closure. As the conviction that reality is fundamentally exhaustible by explanation. That subjectivity will be reduced. That what cannot be objectified will eventually become negligible.

Here too, belief fills the gap where evidence cannot go.

Magical thinking

Magical thinking is simply belief with its emotional logic exposed. The idea that intention bends reality. That moral alignment attracts reward. That history moves somewhere. That humanity is evolving toward a higher state. That personal optimization leads to existential fulfillment.

The belief in awakening

Spiritual culture often refines this even further. The belief in awakening. In a final shift after which the basic problem of existence is resolved. The self dissolves. Fear ends. Life aligns. Suffering is transcended.

This belief often presents itself as anti-belief. As direct seeing. As radical truth. Yet it easily reproduces the same structure: a deficient present, a privileged future, a path, authorities, validations, identities organized around proximity to an imagined resolution.

The search for enlightenment often turns out to be the last refuge of the need for a ground.

Belief as contraction

What slowly became unavoidable for me is this: belief is not an error inside experience. It is a movement inside experience. A contraction. A way of stabilizing appearance by turning it into a world. A way of producing inhabitable reality by generating structure, identity, and meaning.

The question then is no longer which beliefs are true.

The question becomes: what is belief doing?

And what happens when it weakens.

When belief loosens

When belief loosens, the first thing that usually appears is not clarity, but disorientation. Explanations stop consoling. Identities stop fitting. Narratives lose their authority. The sense of standing somewhere erodes.

This is usually interpreted as a problem. A crisis. A loss of meaning. Something to be repaired with a better story.

But it can also be seen differently. As exposure.

Exposure to the fact that experience never depended on belief in order to occur. That sound, color, sensation, and thought were always happening before they were organized. That there is seeing before a seer. Feeling before a self. Change before a world.

Without belief, experience does not vanish. It de-coagulates.

What dissolves is not reality, but the scaffolding that made it interpretable as a world inhabited by a someone.

This does not answer the old questions. It removes their footing.

Where did we come from? What happens when we die? Does life have meaning? Who am I?

Without belief, these questions no longer point anywhere. Not because they are solved, but because the position from which they were asked no longer holds.

What remains

What remains is not knowledge. And not a new metaphysics.

What remains is simply this: whatever is appearing, as it is appearing. This sound. This sensation. This thought. This movement. This fading. This arising.

Not as something happening to someone. Not as evidence of something else. Not as a step on a path. But simply as what is occurring.

This is not an achievement. It is not a state. It offers no authority and no promise. It cannot be maintained, cultivated, or applied. It does not solve the problem of existence.

It reveals that the problem was a belief-structure.

Seeing belief as belief

Belief will return. It always does. Language requires it. Function requires it. Social life is impossible without it. Science depends on it. Memory depends on it. Identity depends on it.

The point is not to eliminate belief, but to see it *as* belief.

To notice the moment when open appearance contracts into a world. When fluidity crystallizes into things. When immediacy is translated into explanation. When experience is quietly annexed by a position.

In that noticing, belief loses its invisibility. It becomes a phenomenon rather than a foundation.

And something else becomes available. Not certainty. Not freedom. Not meaning.

But a strange, quiet honesty.

The honesty of not knowing what this is.

The honesty of not standing anywhere.

The honesty of letting appearance appear without asking it to justify itself.

Not as a conclusion.

But as what remains when belief stops pretending to be the ground.

Scientific Knowledge

A personal approach to science, knowing, and their limits

My fascination with science began early.

When I was eight, I spent my Saturdays reading a small weekly science column in the Utrechts Nieuwsblad. I cut it out and kept it, just as I did with the science comic that appeared every Friday and Saturday ("De Rusteloze Aarde"). I was drawn to anything that promised access to how the world actually worked. I strongly felt a sense of awe and wonder, which has never left me. I still do not understand how somebody cannot fall silent when looking at the night sky.

I immersed myself in archaeology and astronomy. Later, particle physics and cosmology entered the picture. I followed the space

programs of NASA and the Soviet Union with almost ritual devotion. At home, in the garage in Heemstede, I built a small chemical laboratory. Bottles, powders, improvised instruments. The feeling was always the same: somewhere, beneath appearances, there was an order waiting to be understood.

At the same time, my curiosity drifted naturally toward the edges. Parapsychology, UFOs, anomalous phenomena. Not as belief systems, but as question marks. They led me to the fringe zones of science, where established models begin to fray and explanation becomes uncertain. Without realizing it, I was already circling the limits: where evidence thins out, where hypotheses multiply, where fascination quietly turns into epistemology.

Science did not represent cold rationality to me. It represented depth. A promise that the surface of things was not all there was, that beneath everyday experience lay structures, forces, and patterns that could be uncovered. To understand the world was to move closer to something real.

What I did not yet see was that every understanding also establishes a frame. That every explanation functions inside conditions it cannot itself explain. That no matter how refined our instruments become, knowledge always arises within experience, never outside it.

Much later, this would shift the centre of gravity of my questions. Away from what the world is made of, and toward how anything like a world appears at all.

What follows grew out of that shift.

Immediate knowing

The only thing I can truly claim to know is this experience, right now. Not what it means. Not where it comes from. Only that it is.

This does not make knowledge impossible. If it did, ordinary life would be unworkable and science would collapse immediately. Perception, reasoning, and scientific inquiry clearly produce results. They allow us to orient ourselves, to build technologies,

to cure diseases, to navigate the world with remarkable precision. Within their domain, they are not only useful but indispensable.

But they do not operate in the same register as experience itself.

Experience does not need to be justified. It is not concluded. It is not inferred. It is simply present. Knowledge, by contrast, always arrives mediated. It rests on memory, on learned structures, on internalized procedures. It requires reference. Even when it feels immediate, it is not.

If I say that five plus three equals eight, the answer appears instantly. Yet it is not known in the same way this moment is known. Somewhere, however briefly, a system is consulted. A rule is applied. A past learning is activated. The knowing is real, but it is indirect.

Most of what we call knowledge lives in this implicit form. It settles into the body. It becomes habit, competence, orientation. Once, arithmetic required effort. Once, cycling required

attention. Once, swimming was impossible. Over time, procedures sediment into fluency. The body “knows.” Thought withdraws. The mediation becomes invisible.

This invisibility is what gives knowledge its peculiar authority. It feels like presence. It is not.

What makes knowledge reliable

If imagination can generate anything, what distinguishes a reliable claim from a seductive one? What separates knowledge from fiction, or insight from illusion?

Not certainty, but evidence.

A claim becomes trustworthy when there is sufficient ground to rely on it. “Sufficient” never means absolute. It means: enough to act on, enough to orient by, enough to make a difference in practice.

Sometimes perception itself is enough. I see a cup on the table. I pick it up. I drink from it. Under ordinary circumstances, the

perception is its own evidence. Of course, mistakes are possible. Hallucination, illusion, misrecognition. Between seeing and naming, interpretation always intervenes. Memory is consulted. Patterns are matched. Errors occur. A rope is taken for a snake. A shadow for a figure.

But radical doubt is unlivable. If something appears as an apple and nothing suggests deception, eating it is not a philosophical problem.

Sometimes evidence is logical. Certain conclusions follow necessarily from given premises. If infrared radiation lies outside the visible spectrum, and a lamp emits infrared radiation, and such radiation is felt as heat, then sitting close to the lamp will produce warmth. Within its frame, the reasoning closes.

Formal logic already shows us something important: proof is not the same as truth. Proof operates inside systems. Truth requires interpretation. And no formal system can ever fully ground

itself. There will always be statements that cannot be proven within it, even if they are true.

Sometimes evidence is scientific. Here knowledge is not delivered, but produced. Observation. Hypothesis. Experiment. Measurement. Revision. Repetition. Science advances not by certainty, but by organized exposure to error. Its strength lies precisely here.

Evolutionary theory and the Standard Model of particle physics are not “theories” in the casual sense. They are extraordinarily well-supported frameworks, interlocked with vast bodies of evidence and predictive success. They deserve to be called knowledge. And yet both are known to be incomplete. Their reliability does not grant them finality.

This is not a weakness. It is the signature of science.

Knowledge as a process

Scientific knowledge is always provisional. Not because “anything goes,” but because every claim remains open to

revision in light of new evidence. Even peer-reviewed, established results can turn out to be wrong. Not as scandal, but as function.

Science is not a storehouse of truths. It is a disciplined way of remaining corrigible.

As long as our questions remain practical, this works remarkably well. We ask what enables prediction, explanation, intervention. We build bridges. We treat illnesses. We send probes into space. There is rarely a problem.

The difficulty begins when we keep asking.

Every answer opens the possibility of another question. Why does this law hold? Why these constants? Why these conditions? Why anything at all? Step by step, explanation ascends or descends toward a limit. A point where evidence no longer reaches. Where proof no longer operates. Where our methods fall silent.

Here knowledge ends.

Not experience. Not presence. But explanation.

The edge of proof

Beyond this boundary, no answer can be established. Whatever is said here will necessarily be hypothesis, metaphor, or belief. Some will find such questions the most important of all. Others will shrug. Both reactions belong to temperament, not to evidence.

Belief, unlike knowledge, has no intrinsic limits. It can extend indefinitely, unconstrained by proof. Entire cosmologies can be erected beyond the edge of evidence. They can be beautiful, profound, consoling. They can also be illusory.

The moment definitive answers to ultimate questions are accepted, knowledge disappears and belief takes its place. What presents itself as final explanation is no longer supported. It is adopted.

In this sense, answers to ultimate questions, when believed, are not the culmination of knowledge, but its disappearance.

Reality

really?

| *“I dreamt I was a butterfly... Now I do not know whether I was a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming I am a man.”*

Zhuangzi

This morning I woke up and the familiar world assembled itself again. The dark room. Clothes on a chair. My body. A dog shifting in her bench, asking to be let out. Daylight slipping in under the blinds. A rooster somewhere in the distance. Routine, continuity, orientation. It all felt obvious. This is reality. This is real.

But “real” is a strange word. It does not only describe what is there. It also describes what holds. What resists doubt. What

keeps returning. In that sense, reality is not just a set of objects. It is a stabilized world.

| *“Spacetime is your virtual reality... The objects you see are your own invention.”*

Donald D. Hoffman, The Case Against Reality

In his provocative way, Donald Hoffman suggests that what we call space, time, and objects might function like a user interface. Not a truthful picture of whatever is “out there”, but a workable display shaped by survival. The point is not that nothing exists. The point is that what appears as reality may be optimized for navigation, not for truth.

Evolution, nervous systems, and culture do not hand us a neutral world. They shape what can be noticed, what can be ignored, and what counts as a thing. A world is not given as a finished product. It is assembled.

Language then hardens the flow. It names. It separates. It turns continuity into “items”. And once the naming has taken hold, it starts to feel as if the named things were there first, waiting to be discovered.

| “*We are not only spectators. We are participators.*”

John Wheeler

This does not mean that reality is “imaginary”. It means that whatever reality is, it is never encountered without conditions. Measurement, perception, and interpretation are not later additions. They belong to the way a world becomes describable at all.

Some non-dual voices push this further and say: what you call reality is a world of appearances, and every claim about what lies behind it is also an appearance. I agree with the restraint in that move, even if the metaphysical certainty sometimes smuggles itself back in through the back door.

| *“All there is, is this world of appearances... and even ‘truth’ is an appearance.”*

Miranda Warren (paraphrased)

So what can we say without turning it into yet another doctrine?

We can say this: we cannot step outside experience in order to validate experience from the outside. Any model of reality, whether scientific, spiritual, or philosophical, appears within the very field it tries to explain. That does not make models useless. It makes them situated.

This is where the temptation toward “final answers” becomes suspicious. Kurt Gödel showed that sufficiently powerful formal systems contain truths that cannot be proven within the system itself. That is a result about mathematics, not a theorem about the universe. Still, it is a useful warning: closure has limits. Total justification is not always available from within.

And that includes the statements being made here.

| *“There is no outside to the dream... This is it, whatever it looks and feels like.”*

Nancy Neithercut, This Is It, Coyote

Reality, then, is not a final object we can confirm. It is what holds together as a world, here, under these conditions, in this life. Real enough to bruise your shin. Real enough to feed the dog. Real enough to keep returning.

Construction

Dreaming Worlds

Mindsets and the Reality of Worlds

Last night, there was a place.

Not an image, not a thought, not a story I was telling myself. There was a place I was in. It had space. It had others. It had a mood, a gravity, a sense of direction. Things mattered there. Something was at stake. I moved through it without hesitation, without distance, without interpretation. I did not believe in that world. I lived in it.

Only later, from here, do I call it a dream.

While it was happening, it was simply the world.

The world that appears at night

The striking fact about dreams is not their strangeness. It is their normality.

A dream does not usually announce itself as a dream. It presents itself as reality. With continuity, coherence, and affective weight. There is fear, urgency, expectation, disappointment. There are objects that resist, others that invite, situations that demand response. Within the dream, there is no external standpoint from which its status could be questioned. There is only the world, doing what worlds do: organizing experience into a livable form.

In a dream, there is a body. Not necessarily this body, not reliably this shape, not always obeying familiar physics. But there is a center of orientation. A somewhere from which seeing happens, from which movement is initiated, to which sensations seem to belong. There is up and down, near and far, before and after. There is a here that is not chosen.

With that body comes a world that fits it. Distances feel right. Objects have scale. Events have consequence. A gesture can

console, a sound can threaten, a face can shift an entire atmosphere. The world is not assembled piece by piece. It arrives already organized.

This organization is not primarily visual. It is affective, pragmatic, existential. Things are not first neutral and then interpreted. They are immediately inviting, obstructing, promising, disappointing. Meaning is not added. It is built into the way the world shows up.

Waking up is not an argument

Then, sometimes, there is a break.

Not an argument. Not a refutation. Not an insight. A break.

The dream-world does not dissolve because it has been judged false. It vanishes because another world takes over. The field reorganizes. The body is suddenly here. The room asserts itself. Memory rearranges. The sense of self snaps into a different position. What a moment ago was unquestionable becomes thin, distant, almost absurd.

It is tempting to say: the dream was unreal, this is real.

But that is not what the experience itself shows.

What it shows is a shift of worlds. A shift of the entire configuration within which reality appears.

From within the dream, the dream was not less real. It was simply real. Its reality did not depend on correspondence, verification, or external confirmation. It depended on functioning. On coherence. On the fact that it held.

Only from within the next world does the previous one become a dream.

Mindsets as world-formats

This is where the dream becomes more than a curiosity. It becomes a minimal laboratory.

It shows that a world does not need to be grounded in an external reality in order to function as reality. It only needs to

organize experience in a way that sustains orientation, involvement, and response.

In other words, it only needs to operate.

What I call a mindset can be approached in exactly this way. Not as a set of beliefs inside a world, but as the formatting of a world. A mindset determines, prior to reflection, what counts as an object, what counts as a self, what can appear as a problem, what can register as evidence, what can even be noticed at all.

A mindset is not a view on reality. It is a way reality takes shape.

This also explains why no world can step outside itself by argument alone. A dream is not exited by reasoning. It is exited by reconfiguration. Doubt itself unfolds inside a configuration that grants it meaning and limits. Even skepticism is formatted.

The durability of the waking world

The waking world feels different, of course. It is more stable. More continuous. More densely intersubjective. It resists us. It

remembers itself. It pushes back. It is supported by instruments, institutions, recordings, and agreements that outlive any individual perspective.

But these are differences of degree, not of principle.

They describe how a world is maintained, not what a world is.

Here too there is a body that is not chosen, a center of orientation that is simply found. Here too there is a field already organized into relevance and irrelevance, sense and nonsense, possibility and impossibility. Here too meaning is not added after the fact, but embedded in how things solicit us, concern us, or fade into the background.

We do not wake up into raw reality. We wake up into another world. One that has learned to hold.

This durability has existential consequences. A stable world does not merely offer continuity. It produces identity. It allows a biography to form. It lets commitments accumulate,

responsibilities bind, losses sediment. It makes projects possible. It gives fear a future and hope a timeline.

Dreams rarely support this. Their selves are thin. Their histories shallow. Their deaths reversible. Their stakes intense but short-lived. They burn bright and vanish.

The waking world, by contrast, keeps accounts. It preserves traces. It returns what we try to leave behind. It confronts us with a past we did not choose and a future that will not wait.

That is why it feels not only more real, but more serious.

And yet, its seriousness is not proof of a metaphysical status. It is an effect of structure. Of the way this world loops consequences, bodies, and narratives into a dense, self-reinforcing web.

What we call the real world is not the absence of world-making. It is the most durable world-making we have learned to inhabit. Durable enough to build on. Durable enough to forget.

No final awakening

Sometimes the shift is abrupt. We call it waking up.

Sometimes it is softer. A dream loosens without fully collapsing. Lucidity flickers. Something does not fit, but nothing has yet fallen apart. The world continues, but with a hairline fracture running through it.

These moments are easily romanticized. As awakenings, insights, breakthroughs. But phenomenologically, they are simpler and more unsettling. What weakens is not a belief. What weakens is the world's grip.

Objects still appear. Situations still unfold. A self is still here. But their necessity thins. Their obviousness falters. The field no longer fully convinces itself.

This can happen in dreams. It can also happen in waking life. Not as a mystical event, but as a structural one: the partial suspension of a configuration's authority. The feeling is not that reality disappears, but that its way of being real becomes visible.

The dream teaches something precise. Not that reality is fragile, but that reality is active.

A world is not something we stand in front of. It is something that is continually taking place. Something that assembles body, memory, relevance, and sense into a workable whole. Something that convinces itself.

This is why the question “is this real?” always arrives too late. By the time it can be asked, a world is already operative.

There is no experiential outside from which reality could be inspected.

There are only passages. From one coherence to another. From one way of holding to another way of holding. Even the most radical insight does not end this movement. It becomes part of a new stabilization.

In this sense, awakening is not an escape from dreaming, but a change of dream.

Not from illusion to truth, but from one world to another.

Some worlds are brief. Others are heavy with history. Some collapse each night. Others survive us, and will continue without us. But none of them reveal a final ground behind appearing. None of them step outside the activity by which worlds happen.

The dream does not relativize reality. It exposes its structure.

It shows that being real is something a world does.

Mindsets

all the way down

Remarks by preacher Joseph Frederick Berg, addressed to Joseph Barker:

“My opponent's reasoning reminds me of the heathen, who, being asked on what the world stood, replied, ‘On a tortoise.’ But on what does the tortoise stand? ‘On another tortoise.’ With Mr. Barker, too, there are tortoises all the way down.”

It sounds absurd, of course, to imagine the world resting on an infinite stack of tortoises. But the punchline is not really about tortoises. It is about explanation. About what happens when you keep asking what supports what.

My version is simpler: it is *mindsets* all the way down.

By “mindset” I do not mean a motivational slogan or a personality trait. I mean something quieter and more basic: a configuration of assumptions that makes a world show up as the kind of world it is. A mindset is not only an opinion you hold. It is a way reality becomes intelligible, actionable, and familiar.

Everything we know, everything we interpret, everything we recognize as “real”, arrives through such configurations. Not as a single filter, but as layers. Sensation and memory. Language and culture. Habit and expectation. Fear and desire. Education and ideology. Even the sense of being “me” in here while the world is “out there” is part of the configuration.

This does not mean there is no world. It means we never encounter a world without conditions. We never touch reality in the abstract. We meet it as a formed field of relevance: this matters, that does not; this is danger, that is safe; this is mine, that is yours; this is a chair, that is a shadow.

Some layers are explicit. You can switch them, at least a bit. You can adopt a political framework, drop a religious one, learn a scientific one, unlearn a superstition. These are the visible lenses.

Other layers are half-invisible. Identity is one. Not just the story of who you are, but the felt geometry of self and other: where “I” begin, where “world” begins, what counts as threat, what counts as meaning. Much of what we call thinking is the maintenance of that geometry.

Deeper still are embodied patterns that do not look like ideas at all: attraction, territoriality, shame, dominance, bonding, flight. These are not “beliefs”, yet they structure experience powerfully. They decide what gets attention before any story is told.

And at the deepest level are the assumptions that feel like reality itself: objecthood, space, time, causality, continuity, separation, inside and outside. These are not conclusions. They are the stage on which conclusions become possible.

The more unconscious a mindset is, the more it feels like plain fact. We no longer notice the lens. We simply see through it. That is why arguments about truth so often go nowhere. Two people can be perfectly rational inside two different configurations.

So what is truth?

If truth means an absolute view from nowhere, it is not available to us. Not because we are stupid, but because we cannot step outside the conditions by which a world appears at all. But if truth means coherence, usefulness, predictive power, ethical clarity, or the capacity to reduce unnecessary suffering, then some mindsets are plainly better than others. “No absolute truth” does not mean “everything is equal.”

A mindset can loosen. It can harden. It can merge with another. It can become fanatical. It can become invisible. It can even collapse, briefly, leaving experience oddly unframed. And then another configuration grows back in, because living requires stabilization.

There is no escape.

Laws of form

drawing the line

Before we speak, we distinguish. And before we distinguish, we draw a line. A mark. A form. That is what G. Spencer Brown quietly proposes in his compact, cryptic, and in some circles legendary work: **Laws of Form**.

The book begins with a whisper that undoes the universe:

| *“We take as given the idea of distinction and the idea of indication,
and that the two are inseparable.”*

This is not a book about logic as it is usually taught. It is about the gesture of drawing a boundary. The first move in appearance. The minimal act through which “this” can stand out from “that”. The fabric of experience is stitched together by

distinctions, not by things. Before “a tree”, there must be a not-tree. Before identity, a cut.

From the perspective of This Is It, this is already enough. The world is not given first and then described. It arises as soon as a difference is drawn. A distinction does not merely divide an already existing field. It brings a field into relief. It allows something like “appearance” to happen at all.

Brown’s insight is radical in its simplicity: logic does not begin with propositions, but with the act of marking. And that act is not neutral. It produces an inside and an outside, a here and a there, a this and a not-this. Every world begins as a line.

Alan Watts, who recognized in Brown’s work a deep resonance with Taoist and non-dual traditions, remarked:

“*The Laws of Form reveals that logic is not dry and analytic, but something poetic, alive, and fundamentally mysterious.*”

We are not reading logic here. We are watching logic awaken to itself. Brown calls us not to observe the world, but to observe observation. The observer is not outside the system. There is no outside. The one who draws the line appears together with the line.

The formal system in *Laws of Form* is deliberately minimal. A single mark is enough to generate a calculus. But what matters philosophically is not the calculus. It is what the calculus makes visible: how any system capable of referring to something must first separate itself from something.

This is where the book quietly touches what *Origins* is concerned with. A distinction is not a cause. It is a condition. It does not explain why something exists. It makes it possible for something to appear as something. The question is no longer “what produced the world?”, but “what has to be in place for there to be a world at all?”

Brown introduces operations that allow the mark to turn back on itself. Re-entry. Self-reference. The form appears inside the form.

The observer becomes an object in its own field. These are not technical curiosities. They are structural gestures that echo everywhere: in consciousness, in language, in paradox, in reflection.

Whenever a system begins to refer to its own distinctions, a new kind of world takes shape. Stable patterns arise. Positions solidify. A “this side” and a “that side” can now be remembered, repeated, defended. What began as a simple cut can condense into an entire universe of identities, values, and explanations.

In that sense, Laws of Form can be read as a microscopic study of worlding. How a minimal gesture proliferates into structures. How form stabilizes. How distinctions become realities. And how those realities then hide their own origin in a cut.

Watts again:

“All that we see is a construct of distinctions. But the Tao is that which has no name, no distinction. The world arises in the dance between the mark and the unmarked space.”

The unmarked space is not a mystical elsewhere. It is simply what any distinction leaves out in order to function. It is not absent. It is structurally necessary. Every form depends on what it cannot contain.

In this way, Laws of Form becomes a mirror. It does not tell us what the world is. It shows how a world becomes possible. It reveals that our most solid realities rest on gestures so subtle that they normally go unnoticed.

Perhaps there is a quiet freedom in seeing this. Not the freedom of escaping form, but the freedom of recognizing it. Of seeing that we are not only the contents of distinctions, but also the activity that draws them. That the line is not a prison, but a movement. And that every world, no matter how convincing, remains a configuration of appearance.

Cosmology

the universe is not a tidy equation

For a long time, mainstream physics and cosmology have worked as if the Laws of Nature exist independently of the universe in which we live, as if they precede it and govern it from some timeless outside. Within that framing, the laws look like external principles that set the universe in motion and shape it from the beginning. The ultimate hope has been to express these laws in a single, unifying formula - a theory so complete that even the so-called initial conditions would follow from it.

In *This Is It* I describe what appears. In *Mindsets* I describe how it appears. And in *Origins* I ask under what conditions anything like a world can appear at all. Cosmology enters this inquiry not as an answer-machine, but as a pressure test: it shows how

quickly "the universe" turns into a model shaped by standpoint, measurement, and selection.

And this matters because an "origin" is not simply something that happened first. It is whatever makes a story of firstness possible and intelligible in the first place.

This traditional "bottom-up" approach, however, seems to have reached a dead end. Physicists Stephen Hawking and Thomas Hertog turned this logic on its head in what they called "top-down cosmology." According to them:

"The top-down approach we have described leads to a very different view of cosmology, and of the relationship between cause and effect. Top-down cosmology is a framework in which one essentially follows histories backward, from a spatial surface in the present age. The no-boundary histories of the universe thus depend on what is observed, as opposed to the usual idea that the universe has a unique history independent of the observer."

S. W. Hawking & Thomas Hertog, "Populating the Landscape: A Top-Down Approach"

This view draws on quantum theory and its strange logic: a quantum state acquires a definite value only when it is measured - that is, when it is observed. Before observation, all potential values coexist in a kind of suspended simultaneity, a superposition of possibilities.

Seen in that light, the early universe - the so-called singularity from which space and time emerge - can be treated as a quantum system containing all possible configurations of matter, energy, and geometry at once. Yet only within a particular observational framework do specific “histories” become meaningful.

In other words, the beginning of the universe is not a single fixed event long ago, but a web of potential beginnings whose significance depends on the observational conditions we impose now.

In that sense, the Big Bang still happens now: not as a literal explosion unfolding in this moment, but as the ongoing actualization of the universe’s possible histories through our participation in it.

It follows that the way the universe appears to us is inseparable from the context in which we observe it. "Observation," here, need not mean human consciousness alone; it refers to the physical conditions that define a particular viewpoint within the whole. Whether one speaks of us as humanity, as biological organisms, or as consciousness itself remains an open question - but what is clear is that there is no purely external vantage point from which to describe reality "as it is."

Another implication is that the so-called Laws of Nature are not immutable decrees living in a Platonic heaven. They may have evolved along with the universe, stabilizing through a kind of cosmic selection until they took the forms we now observe. This also means that the so-called "universal constants" might not always have been the same, and this raises a further possibility: some anomalies might reflect limits of our current frameworks rather than new ingredients in reality. Some recent proposals even argue for alternative explanations that aim to reduce or reinterpret the need for dark matter and dark energy.

(see: Rajendra P. Gupta, <https://doi.org/10.3390/galaxies13050108>).

“Understanding the order of the universe and understanding its meaning are not identical, but they are not very far apart. ... In our theory the universe is a grand synthesis. It is not one thing happening after another after another. It is a totality which includes us and in which what happens now gives reality to what happened in the past. Most people think that the world exists out there, independent of us. However, our theory shows that isn't the way the world works. We have taken a step back from the cold Copernican worldview that has dominated physics for several centuries and put mankind back in the centre”

Stephen Hawking, 2015

This doesn't mean that Hawking supports a literally anthropocentric universe.

Still, most physicists - Hawking and Hertog included - continue to seek a unified theory in which the quantum forces and gravity

merge, and where the laws of nature themselves arise from the theory. Yet I suspect this hope will remain unfulfilled.

It is impossible to step outside the universe to see it whole, for there is no outside - not for us. We are part of this same unfolding, part of the very system we attempt to understand.

Like a hammer that cannot strike itself, the universe can never render itself entirely transparent. There will always be irregularities, paradoxes, and edges that do not fit the frame.

The universe is not a tidy equation, nor a tidy place.

It is a moving boundary between what can be framed and what cannot.

Positioning

Hierarchism

be aware of Important Words In Capital Letters

The philosopher Michel Foucault saw it: look at the architecture of factories, hospitals, schools, churches and prisons. It has a central space from which the rest of the facility can be governed: a panopticon, the architecture of authority, of disciplinary power. The command structure comes from the top or from the center and has access to everything that happens. Disciplinary power need not always be exercised because much of the authority is (re)internalized. But force will be used if the central leadership deems it necessary. Even in a modern, democratic country, you can, for instance, try not to pay your taxes and not give up, and eventually you will encounter violence. "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun." (Mao Zedong)

Violence is at the heart of hierarchism as an intensity of world-making. Hierarchism is a mode of thinking that is clearly being forced upon reality, upon ourselves and upon the universe, upon life itself.

Seen through the lens of Mindsets and Origins, hierarchism is not only a political structure. It is a way a world stabilizes. It takes the open field of experience and compresses it into a readable order: a top, a center, a principle, a command. In that move, uncertainty becomes manageable, but the cost is obvious: what does not fit the structure must be corrected, excluded, or controlled.

Hierarchism is also called "arborescent thinking" and this concept has its origin in the works of the French poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It is described as follows:

"[arborescent thinking] refers to the shape and structure of a tree. It is used to characterize a certain type of thinking, exemplified by the western scientific model, where knowledge emanates from a single

stem and ends in predetermined 'fruits'. The concept suggests a linear progress towards the truth, which they [Deleuze and Guattari] condemned as both unrealistic and stultifying to the imagination. It is contrasted with 'rhizomatic' thinking, which is open ended, has no central structure, and is constantly changing."

Another way of saying this is by the term "Unification", used by the theoretical physicist **Marcelo Gleiser** in his book 'A Tear At The Edge Of Creation'. Once a "Unifier" himself, Gleiser started to doubt the search for universal truth, for a "Theory of Everything", along the paths of symmetry and perfection, realizing that it is asymmetry and imperfection that is in fact fundamental for the existence of life and consciousness.

"If we can never know all there is to know, we will always have an element of uncertainty about the natural world. There is no final unification to be attained. [...] The uncertainty of knowledge is as permanent as quantum uncertainty."

Hard as this may be to accept, it is a fundamental limitation of human understanding. Only our intellectual vanity precludes us from

| *seeing this clearly and moving on. Science will not be diminished in its grandiose task of explaining Nature if it doesn't have a unified dream to pursue."*

Marcelo Gleiser, 'A Tear At The Edge Of Creation'

In hierarchism, everything is ultimately reduced to One, the Fundamental Principle, the thoroughly authoritarian precept that is the Basis and at the same time the Top. It is Reason, the Family Tree and the Root. It is God, the State, the Crown, The Truth, the Theory of Everything, it is I, the Absolute Mind, Universal Consciousness, Brahman, Supreme Enlightenment, the Top of the Pyramid, the Root Race. The One Ring to Rule Them All.

It tends toward fascism.

The One splits itself into Two, a duality of opposites. The duality finally brings forth the "ten thousand things". But the trail can always be traced back to the Root, to the Holy Center. But only in thought, nowhere else.

Hierarchism is found everywhere. In science, mathematics, art and spirituality. It is also present in the mind/brain as the idea of 'I'. There we have internalized central authority and identify with it as being me. We have a dictator in our heads, a little general, which we call "I". "I" have the idea that I am in charge. "I" do all my actions. "I" am the decision maker. "I" get frustrated and angry when "I" don't get what "I" want. It is this authoritarian structure that is the origin of centralized authority in society. It has been projected and successively (re)internalized since the beginning of human civilization. Hierarchism has literally built this civilization. In fact, we need this structure now in order to function as social beings in this society. It is inevitable and inescapable. Losing it means the madness of depersonalization.

But this doesn't mean we have to believe this orientation, or any orientation, as being objectively true!

Hierarchism is not only a way of (magical) thinking, a type of bias, it is also a motivational desire. It is like we want and need this type of order. Without it we feel out of control. Without the

illusion of hierarchism, the universe, our life, appears as chaos, as anarchy, without any meaning. Hierarchism protects us from the wild and sometimes harsh reality of life.

And we all long for unity and symmetry. It feels attractive, beautiful and peaceful, especially in art.

But there is danger in this longing. It stultifies the mind, leading to a sort of tunnel vision. Life is not always pretty, it doesn't always obey our desire of nice and neat structures. There is imperfection and symmetries are broken. They need to be broken, otherwise nothing happens. Nothing would even exist without imbalance and mutation, without crime and war.

Spirituality

qu'est-ce que c'est?

Just like “love”, “consciousness”, and so many other words, the term “spirituality” means different things to different people. For some it is synonymous with religion. For others it evokes incense and meditation cushions. Personally, the word often gives me the creeps. It makes me think of new-age bliss ninnies with “healing crystals”, or of solemn Catholic types. It can even feel elitist: a label that separates people into the spiritual and the non-spiritual.

But perhaps it can mean something else. Something simple. Something shared by all sentient beings. For me, spirituality is nothing more (and nothing less) than my relationship with reality, and anything that clarifies or deepens that relationship.

Of course this definition immediately raises questions. What is “reality”? Who is the “me” in this relationship? What does it mean to relate to reality? Spirituality, as I use the word here, is not a domain alongside others. It is not about special experiences, beliefs, or elevated states. It points to a sensitivity for how reality shows up at all, and for how quickly what is immediate hardens into ideas, identities, and explanations.

Rather than trying to answer the questions directly, let me say what spirituality, for me, is not. It is not everything we have learned or been told about what is real or true. It is not the layers of beliefs, concepts, or dogmas, even (or especially) the ones we call “spiritual”. Those layers often get in the way. They cloud our sense of what is immediate and alive.

So spirituality becomes a kind of unlearning. A stripping away of assumptions. A return into what is, before we name it. That return does not need a long path. It can happen at any moment. Certain places or experiences can make the learned responses loosen. Silence can do that. So can beauty. The vastness of a

starry night. The horizon of the sea. The stillness of an empty chapel.

“When we recognize our place in the immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility joined, is surely spiritual.”

Carl Sagan

In this light, spirituality is not a program. It is not a badge. It is not a performance. And it is not primarily about becoming better or wiser. It is an openness that is not aimed at anything. More like *play* than like progress.

We know this space. We miss it. But it is not lost. It is simply covered over by everything we think we have figured out. Some knowledge is useful, of course. But when it comes to who we are, what life is, or what anything means, what we think we know can blind us to the simplicity of being here at all.

“In the end, spirituality is really about sobering up. Developing the courage to see life as it is, without having to inflate it with escapist love-and-light rhetoric, nor retreat into nihilistic resignation by declaring that everything is merely illusion and therefore meaningless.”

Joan Tollifson

So maybe spirituality is not a special domain. Maybe it is simply the willingness to let reality be more intimate than our explanations. And to notice, again and again, how quickly we trade contact for certainty.

The Michael Teachings

as a World-Forming System

I first encountered the Michael Teachings in the early nineteen-nineties, not as a belief system but as a peculiar typology. It presented itself as a detailed map of personality: roles, modes, goals, fears, attitudes, cycles. At the time, the material circulated primarily through books and early websites, often framed as messages from a non-physical “entity” called Michael. I never found that origin story convincing. Whatever its source, what interested me was not where the system supposedly came from, but what it did.

It offered a way of seeing people, situations, and oneself through a structured lens. Experience became legible. Character acquired internal geometry. Behaviour was no longer random, but patterned. The system did not merely describe personalities; it

generated a world in which personalities appeared as structured configurations rather than accidental accumulations of traits.

This is the sense in which the Michael Teachings matter to me: not as metaphysics, but as a world-forming model.

A world-forming model does not simply interpret experience; it reorganizes it. It installs distinctions that begin to function as perceptual habits. It teaches you what to notice, what to ignore, how to read others, and how to read yourself. After sustained exposure, you no longer “apply” the model. You inhabit it.

In the Michael Teachings, people do not merely have tendencies; they occupy defined roles. They do not merely act; they operate from modes. They do not merely desire; they pursue goals. Fear itself is formatted into recognizable patterns. Inner life becomes populated by named functions that can be observed, compared, discussed. Everyday interaction slowly acquires the texture of a structured field.

This is where such a system derives its persuasive power. It does not convince primarily through argument, but through experiential traction. You recognize yourself in it. You recognize others. It produces moments of sudden legibility. Conflicts soften into configurations. Confusions acquire a shape. Personality stops being opaque and becomes navigable.

The gain is real. I still consider the psychological side of the Michael material to be its strongest dimension. It invites a kind of non-moral self-observation. Instead of framing traits as virtues or flaws, it frames them as structural orientations. This can release a great deal of unnecessary self-violence. One's patterns are not mistakes; they are formats. Other people's differences are not obstructions; they are configurations.

But world-forming models never only illuminate. They also delimit.

Every typology produces a horizon. By articulating certain distinctions, it simultaneously renders others invisible. By stabilizing meaning, it reduces ambiguity. The Michael

Teachings create a world in which personality is primary, legible, and internally articulated. This makes some forms of self-inquiry easier. It also makes other questions harder to ask.

The most consequential structuring move in the Michael system is not its personality typology, but its developmental metaphysics. It frames lives within an arc of “soul age,” a hierarchical sequence through which consciousness is said to evolve across incarnations. This is where the system ceases to be merely descriptive and begins to legislate a cosmic order.

Here the world it forms becomes stratified.

Development introduces rank. Rank introduces implicit valuation. Valuation quietly reorganizes perception. Certain concerns become “early.” Others become “late.” Certain preoccupations become “immature.” Others “refined.” The system begins to distribute existential weight unevenly.

This is not a theoretical problem. It is a lived one.

Over time I became less interested in whether “soul age” was true than in what the model itself was doing. Not “is this true?”, but “what kind of world does this produce?” What kinds of selves flourish here? What kinds of questions recede? What kinds of authority emerge? What kinds of experiences become meaningful?

Seen this way, the Michael Teachings appear not as a doctrine, but as an experiential environment. They generate a particular way of inhabiting social space, inner space, and time. They format difference into types. They format difficulty into features. They format biography into trajectory.

They also format attention.

And here is the move I still find worth saving, once the hierarchy is removed. What the Teachings call “soul age” can be read more soberly as a difference in focus: the region of life where a person’s gravity tends to gather, and where most of their drama, meaning, and urgency is generated. I keep the phenomenon, but I drop the ladder. I call this “overleaf” “focus.”

People are not absorbed by the same region of life. For some, the central drama revolves around relationship. For others, around achievement. For others, around survival. For others, around moral positioning. For others still, around existential coherence.

Different lives are organized around different gravitational centres. Certain questions repeat themselves. Certain tensions recur. Certain situations feel charged while others barely register. One does not simply “have interests.” One inhabits a world that continually regenerates a particular class of problems.

What matters here is not whether these foci are innate or contingent. What matters is that they function as world-generators. They determine what shows up as relevant, urgent, or even real. They distribute emotional weight. They shape what counts as progress, crisis, or resolution.

This insight does not require souls, lifetimes, or hierarchies. It only requires the recognition that experience does not arrive neutrally. It arrives organized.

Systems like the Michael Teachings demonstrate that worlds are not found. They are formed. A model does not merely sit on top of experience. Given time, it rearranges what experience can be.

The question is not whether to adopt or reject such a system. The more fundamental question is whether one can learn to see it as a world rather than as reality.

Because once a system becomes reality, it stops being examinable. It stops being optional. It stops being visible as a format.

To study a world-forming model is to hold it differently: not as an explanation of what is, but as a demonstration of how easily what is becomes something. And how powerfully it then lives us.

For me, this world began, quite concretely, with one book: *Messages From Michael* by Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Not as a source of truth, but as the object through which this particular format of experience first entered.

Disruption

Enlightenment

tada!

“Enlightenment” is one of those words that refuses to stay put. It behaves like a magnet. It pulls people into practices, communities, doctrines, and counter-doctrines. It promises an end. It produces teachers. It produces cynics. It produces bliss, disappointment, and sometimes something quieter: the end of desperation.

In the language of *Configurations of Appearance*, the interesting question is not whether enlightenment is real or unreal. The interesting question is: what does this word do? What kind of world does it create? What kind of problem does it define? And what kind of “me” does it require in order to remain convincing?

Below are fourteen lenses. Not fourteen truths. Each lens selects a different aspect of experience and then treats that selection as central. That is how worlds stabilize: by selecting, naming, and repeating.

To make the differences clearer, I grouped the lenses into three clusters that roughly mirror the three books:

This Is It: what shifts in what is noticed, felt, or seen

Mindsets: how a spiritual world stabilizes into paths, identities, and authority

Origins: what a tradition treats as the underlying condition, ground, or non-ground

Cluster 1 - This Is It: shifts in what appears

Enlightenment as presence and acceptance

Source: Eckhart Tolle, John Astin

A shift into the immediacy of the present. Less metaphysics, more attention. The “problem” is resistance, and the move is letting go.

Enlightenment as the natural state

Source: Dzogchen and Zen

What is sought is already here. The drama is created by effort. Stop grasping and the “natural” becomes obvious again.

Enlightenment as seeing with no head

Source: Douglas Harding (The Headless Way)

A direct perceptual pivot: no face looking out, only openness and the world arising. A practical experiment rather than a metaphysical claim.

Enlightenment as ecstatic awareness and celebration

Source: Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho)

A paradoxical blend: witness consciousness without renunciation. “Zorba the Buddha”. Dancing and silence, intensity and space.

Cluster 2 - Mindsets: how a spiritual world stabilizes

Enlightenment as liberation from suffering

Source: Classical Buddhism

A release from craving and aversion. Not transcendence, but a clear seeing of impermanence and the fragility of the self-story. The aim is not a cosmic explanation, but an end to dukkha.

Enlightenment as deconditioning

Source: J. Krishnamurti

Freedom from the known. An ending of psychological time, authority, and belief as shelter. No method that hardens into a method.

Enlightenment as lucid participation in the world-dream

Source: Carlos Castaneda

“Stopping the world”, interrupting perceptual routines, shifting to what the lineage calls nagual. Not waking up from the dream, but becoming lucid in it.

Enlightenment as collapse of belief structures

Source: Robert Saltzman, UG Krishnamurti

Not an attainment, but the collapse of spiritual striving itself. Not necessarily blissful. Often blunt, bodily, unromantic. The project is exposed as a project.

Enlightenment as ending the search

Source: Miranda Warren, Joan Tollifson, Shiv Sengupta

No arrival, no final state. The “problem” was the assumption that something is wrong and must be fixed. The search ends by being seen through.

Cluster 3 - Origins: what is treated as ground, condition, or non-ground

Enlightenment as unity with the absolute

Source: Advaita Vedānta

The recognition that Atman and Brahman are not two. Not an achievement, but the removal of avidyā, the assumption of separation.

Enlightenment as emptiness (Śūnyatā)

Source: Mahāyāna Buddhism (Nāgārjuna)

No thing has inherent existence, including “enlightenment”. This lens does not point to a hidden essence, but to interdependence and groundlessness.

Enlightenment as radical non-duality

Source: Contemporary non-duality (Tony Parsons, Miranda Warren)

There is no person to become enlightened. Seeking is part of the dream of individuality. This lens cuts away the whole project by denying the seeker.

Enlightenment as transformation of identity

Source: Western mysticism (Meister Eckhart, Plotinus)

Union with God or the One. The personal self becomes transparent to something larger. This lens treats the divine as the real ground.

Enlightenment as inhabiting paradox

Source: Taoism

Aligning with what cannot be defined. Not-knowing as sanity. A subtle yielding that cannot be turned into a program.

These clusters are not clean compartments. They overlap. That is the point. The word “enlightenment” is not a single referent but a bundle of different operations. Each operation generates a different kind of world, and a different kind of seeker.

Here is my own thread, briefly. Not as proof of anything, just as an example of how a word can steer a life.

After reading Carlos Castaneda in the early 80s, and after some mindbending experiments with cannabis, I became convinced that there must be another way of experiencing myself and the world. Other than my normal way. That conviction created a horizon. It also created a lack: if there is something else, then what I have now is not enough.

I wanted someone who was already “there”. I thought I found that in the form of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. I travelled that path, neo-sannyas, for more than ten years.

In January 1990 Rajneesh (then called Osho) died and I, like many other sannyasins, drifted into the satsang scene of Advaita and neo-Advaita teachers.

During those gatherings it happened a few times that I felt I “got it”. Bliss and laughter. Then of course nothing lasted. On to the next one. The next video. The next book. Believing that maybe this time it

would stay, and I would be done.

And that phase also passed.

And now?

I just started the air conditioner and I am listening to the sound of it. Outside it is getting hot again. A little bird is sitting on the edge of the pool. I should water the plants and clean up the dead leaves from the terrace. And bake a cake for tomorrow's friends coming over.

I hate mosquitoes.

Yes, ending like this is a rhetorical trick: present experience as a final punchline, as if I am really over it. But something did change. Not certainty. Not an answer. Mostly the desperation is gone. I still do not know what enlightenment is. I only have the words of others describing what their experience seems to be. And since I cannot really know what their experience is, it is pointless to treat their words as a map of my life. What remains

is simple: noticing what happens, giving up false beliefs when they show themselves, and letting the day be the day.

| *“You get what you get when you get it.”*

Robert Saltzman

Irony

Not-knowing, meaning, and the possibility of play

Beyond knowledge, short of belief

My partner sometimes lays tarot cards, for herself or for others. I used to do the same. What has never really left me is not the question whether tarot “works”, but what it would mean for something like this to be meaningful at all.

As knowledge it hardly stands. The outcome is not reproducible, not falsifiable, not separable from the situation in which it appears. There is no method that guarantees a next result. From the standpoint of science it can only be coincidence, followed by interpretation.

As belief it does not fit either. There is, for me, no conviction that “the cards speak”, no doctrine, no metaphysical framework that

carries their meaning. What remains is an uneasy middle ground: something appears as meaningful without being accountable as knowledge and without being held as belief.

When explanation relocates the problem

The same tension appears in family constellations. Strangers are placed in a room as “father”, “mother”, “sister”, and yet movements, sensations, emotions arise that are often experienced as recognizably related to the person’s actual family situation. One can point to suggestion, unconscious perception, micro-movements, group dynamics. These are plausible explanations. But they do not dissolve the question. They relocate it. They translate strangeness into mechanism without touching what first called for explanation.

What silently governs these translations is a deeper assumption: that whatever is meaningful must, in principle, be reducible to causal processes. That meaning becomes legitimate only when it can be anchored in explanation, measurement, and control.

Perhaps this assumption is stronger than any religious belief.

Because whatever does not fit within it is immediately assigned a lower ontological status. It becomes projection, illusion, noise. Or, at best, “psychologically interesting.” What it is not allowed to be is an indication that our very way of knowing may be bounded.

Not-knowing as experiential category

Jung spoke of synchronicity: meaningful coincidences without demonstrable causal connection. The term does not solve anything. It names a fracture. It marks situations in which coherence appears without ground. And precisely for that reason such phenomena largely remain outside the field of what counts as knowledge. Not because they have been refuted, but because they cannot be stabilized.

What concerns me here is not the hope that “the universe is mysterious,” but the suspicion that our distinction between knowledge and non-knowledge is too crude. That there are modes of appearing that cannot be fixed as knowing, and yet cannot honestly be reduced to belief. Experiences that present

themselves as meaningful without granting us the authority to claim them.

Perhaps this is what not-knowing actually names. Not a lack of information, but a way in which experience can occur. A mode in which coherence is sensed without being possessed. In which order shows itself without becoming a structure.

From this perspective, not-knowing is not a problem waiting to be solved. It is a phenomenological category. A way the world can be present.

The taste of irony

There is, however, another aspect that keeps returning in these questions, one that is rarely discussed in philosophical or scientific contexts: the presence of something like humor or irony in the way reality sometimes unfolds.

Not humor as entertainment, but as structure. As a way in which patterns appear to play with themselves. Situations arise that are too precise to be purely random, too untimely to be merely

functional, too fitting to feel accidental, and yet refuse to solidify into meaning. They arrive as if with a raised eyebrow.

It is difficult to speak about this without immediately sounding metaphorical. And yet the experience itself is not. There are moments when coincidence seems to comment on the situation in which it occurs. When events mirror questions, when outcomes invert expectations with almost theatrical timing, when complexity condenses into a gesture that is at once exact and inexplicable.

What strikes me is how closely this resembles what, on the human level, we call irony.

Irony is not chaos. It is patterned deviation. It is order that bends without breaking. It exposes the limits of intention, the fragility of control, the theatricality of our seriousness. It does not destroy meaning. It destabilizes it.

A universe without play

That such a sensibility might not only belong to human psychology but might echo in the texture of events themselves is a disturbing and fertile thought. It would mean that what we experience as humor is not merely a subjective overlay, but a resonance with how situations can organize themselves.

Biocentrism comes to mind here, not as a doctrine to be adopted, but as a gesture in this direction. An attempt to think life, experience, and awareness not as late accidents in an otherwise indifferent universe, but as factors that participate in how reality articulates itself at all.

Whether or not such models are defensible is secondary. What matters is what they betray: a growing discomfort with a picture of the universe as a mute machine, entirely serious, entirely literal, entirely without play.

For a universe without the possibility of irony would be a universe without distance to itself. A universe incapable of surprise. A universe that could only repeat its own necessity.

When coherence becomes gesture

Yet much of what appears, from quantum behavior to evolutionary improvisation to the strange elegance of mathematical structures, suggests something less rigid. Something that experiments. Something that deviates. Something that does not merely function, but explores.

In this light, not-knowing no longer names only a limit of cognition. It names a sensitivity. An openness to the possibility that coherence itself may have textures we have not yet learned to recognize. That some forms of order may announce themselves not as laws, but as gestures.

Humor, irony, play. Not as properties to be proven, but as modes in which reality may sometimes be felt.

If so, then experiences we hastily dismiss as coincidence, projection, or anomaly may be doing quiet philosophical work. They may be reminding us that meaning is not only constructed and not only discovered, but sometimes encountered in a form that refuses both categories.

And that refusal itself may be one of the most precise expressions of not-knowing.

Darkness

On the collapse of reference

Darkness is not a metaphor.

Not a symbol.

Not a mood.

Not a spiritual nightlight.

It does not name despair.

It does not gesture toward mystery.

It does not stand in for the unknown.

It points to what never steps into view.

Before perception.

Before presence.

Before anything can be “before” something else.

Not an origin.

Not a ground.

Not even an absence.

What appears, appears.

But nowhere.

| *“There’s a silence under the silence, if you can bear to listen.*

| *Not the pleasant quiet of a Sunday morning or the hush after*

snowfall,

but something more total.

A kind of null field that makes no promises and offers no explanations.

It doesn't cradle. It doesn't soothe. It just is.

And when the noise dies down—social, mental, bodily—that's what remains.

The raw presence of this moment, unaccompanied."

Robert Saltzman

Darkness is not opposed to light.

It dissolves the stage on which light and dark could matter.

No subject.

No object.

No position from which anything could be handled.

Not a thing behind experience.

Not a depth beneath it.

Not a source it comes from.

No “from”.

No “to”.

No “in which”.

Just this.

Appearing without a place to stand.

Darkness as the collapse of referencing

Darkness is not the absence of perception.

It is the absence of the one who would stand in relation to perception.

Not blind.

Not blank.

Unowned.

What falls away is not experience, but the habit of positioning.

The reflex to stand somewhere with respect to what appears.

Nothing special happens.

No veil lifts.

No inner light turns on.

What dissolves is only the fiction that there is someone to whom experience is given.

What remains is not experience without a self,
but experience without a centre.

Appearance without a position.

A world without an inside.

What appears, appears.

But it does not arrive anywhere.

A personal register

The word “darkness” is not chosen here as a theory.

It is chosen because it fits how this feels when nothing is being managed.

Others might call this silence, emptiness, śūnyatā, wuji, the nagual.

I use “darkness” because it points away from light, clarity, consciousness, explanation.

Not toward an opposite, but toward what precedes all such contrasts.

Darkness is not.

What arises, arises from what does not arise.

Trying to imagine what darkness is cannot work.

It cannot be known.

It cannot become part of knowledge.

For me, “darkness” is not an idea.

It is how the body loosens when it stops bracing.

A weight falling out of the chest.

A room without edges.

I am drawn to the dark in simple ways.

Shadow more than glare.

Quiet more than noise.

The density of crowds, the brightness of spaces, the pressure of movement overload something in this body.

Darkness does not ask for orientation.

I do not know what awakening is.

Experiences come and go.

They are weather.

If there were a way to choose peace, it would already have been chosen.

The “I” that comments has no power of its own.

It is a viewpoint, not an agent.

“Endarkenment” is not possible.

Darkness is not something to be entered.

It is what remains when entering stops.

Radical non-duality

Radical non-duality strips even the path away.

No process. No progress. No arrival.

There is no separate one.

No timeline.

No movement toward what is already the case.

The seeker's impulse is not wrong.

It is simply part of what appears.

But it does not lead anywhere.

Darkness is another name for this absence of distance.

Not a void behind the world, but the impossibility of locating a centre within it.

Darkness without dualism

The moment darkness is treated as something behind appearance, a split has already occurred.

Darkness is not behind the dream. *It is the dream.*

Not metaphorically. Structurally.

What appears does not conceal something else.

The veil is not hiding darkness.

The veil is darkness appearing as veiling.

Zen and Taoism

Zen speaks of loss rather than gain.

The dropping of the one who wants an answer.

“Not knowing is most intimate.”

Taoism gestures toward the unnamed.

Darkness within darkness, writes Laozi,

the gateway to all understanding.

Deus absconditus

Christian mysticism meets God as hiddenness.

Not absence, but ungraspability.

The Cloud of Unknowing does not reveal another realm.

It dissolves the will to know.

Voices in resonance

Robert Saltzman refuses consolation.

Shiv Sengupta speaks devotion without division.

Miranda Warren writes a love story without characters.

Douglas Harding points to centrelessness.

Joan Tollifson brings this into ageing, illness, ordinariness.

Different tones.

The same disappearance.

Philosophy

Nietzsche's abyss.

Heidegger's unconcealment.

Deleuze's becoming and dark precursor.

Not darkness as obscurity,

but darkness as the impossibility of final light.

Closing

Darkness is not an experience.

There is no one left to have it.

Not the unknown,

but the collapse of the need for the known.

Not depth,

but the absence of distance.

No origin.

No path.

No conclusion.

Only this.

Appearing without a place to stand.

Rhizome

thinking without a main root

In *Rhizome*, the introductory plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari invite us into a philosophy that breaks with traditional thought. No more trees. No more hierarchies. No more roots that define the One beneath the Many. Instead, we have rhizomes: networks, multiplicities, surfaces without depth. A mushroom patch. Crabgrass. Mycelium. These are the metaphors.

The point is not biology. The point is orientation. A tree is a picture of thought that starts from a trunk, organizes upward, and returns everything to an origin. A rhizome is a picture of thought that starts in the middle. It does not ask for a first principle. It does not demand a single explanation. It allows connection to do the work that foundations usually do.

A rhizome is a map, not a tracing. It has no center, no beginning or end, only a middle from which it grows and overflows. In the rhizome, any point can connect to any other. It is not governed by linear order. It multiplies by linking.

“A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”

Deleuze & Guattari

This is why the rhizome matters for the themes of this site. It is not a claim about what reality ultimately is. It is a proposal about how reality becomes thinkable and livable without being reduced to a single root. In the language of *Configurations of Appearance*, it is a different way a world can organize itself.

In *This Is It* I describe what appears. In *Mindsets* I describe how appearance can stabilize into formats of experience. In *Origins* I ask about conditions rather than causes. The rhizome belongs in

that movement. It refuses the comfort of a privileged standpoint. It distrusts the idea that coherence requires a center.

That does not mean rhizomatic thinking is chaos. It can be highly structured. But its structure is lateral: clusters, loops, cross-links, intensities. It is the difference between a chain of command and a living ecology. Between a curriculum and a conversation. Between a doctrine and a set of practical ways to proceed.

This is also where rhizome quietly touches *Hierarchism*. The tree model supports authority by design: a top, a root, a trunk, a correct path. The rhizome does not abolish power, but it makes power visible as one force among others. It shows that what presents itself as necessity is often only a stabilized habit.

Deleuze and Guattari call the book a call to experimentation. Philosophy not as system, but as motion. Not as explanation, but as encounter. A rhizome does not explain; it connects. It short-circuits the dogmas of meaning. It spreads.

This resonates with what I call Darkness. Not darkness as negativity, but darkness as looseness of ground. The openness of what resists capture. Where non-duality is not a state to be achieved, but the absence of final states altogether. No origin. No arrival. Just a weaving of appearances that cannot be totalized.

The rhizome undermines the idea that we are progressing toward a final truth or a pure experience. There is no trunk to return to. No root system to uncover. There are only connections that work for a while, and then stop working, and then re-form elsewhere.

| *“The multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by the conjunction ‘and... and... and...’”*

Deleuze & Guattari

That “and” is not decoration. It is a method. It prevents closure. It keeps thought from collapsing into One. It allows the

possibility that different descriptions can coexist without needing a referee.

The rhizome speaks to our time because many of our inherited trees are failing: political trees, religious trees, scientific trees, personal trees. As certainties dissolve, we are forced into a new kind of navigation. Not as cartographers of reality, but as improvisers. Feeling our way, making temporary connections, letting go of maps that no longer fit.

There is a practical invitation here too. To live like a rhizome. Not trying to become someone once and for all, not trying to arrive at a final explanation, but learning to move through shifting terrains of meaning. A life that is not a ladder, but a field.

This is not a lesson. It is a pointer. A line of flight. A question mark that grows like wild grass.

Hybrid mindsets

Animal Worlds, Artificial Listeners, and the Future of Experience

This essay belongs to the same inquiry as *Mindsets* and *Origins*. Where *Mindsets* maps different configurations of experience, and *Origins* asks after the conditions under which worlds can appear at all, this text explores a speculative frontier: what might happen when artificial systems begin to interface between radically different forms of life.

We are accustomed to thinking of animals as inhabitants of our world. They move through the same spaces, share our environments, appear within our sensory field. Even when we acknowledge that their perception differs from ours, we usually imagine this difference as a variation within a common reality. The dog hears more, the bird sees differently, the whale senses

vibrations instead of shapes. The underlying assumption remains that there is one world, populated by multiple kinds of subjects.

This assumption is quietly eroding.

Not other beings — other worlds

A sperm whale does not simply perceive another version of the same ocean. It inhabits a radically different organization of relevance. Its world is not built from objects arranged in visual space, but from volumetric pressure fields, echoic returns, gradients of density and distance, rhythmic patterns unfolding through an acoustic depth we barely register.

What appears to us as sound is, for the whale, a primary structuring medium. What appears to us as movement is, for it, orientation. What appears to us as environment is, for it, a continuous event. This is not another point of view on a shared scene. It is another way in which a world coheres.

The arrival of an inhuman listener

Until recently, every attempt to approach such worlds was bound to human perception and human concepts. We listened with human ears, segmented with human categories, and searched for familiar signs of language, signal, or intention. The animal always had to pass through the filter of the human.

What is changing now is not that we suddenly understand animals better. It is that we are building systems that no longer need to resemble us in order to detect organization. Artificial intelligence does not hear as we hear. It does not extract meaning from sound. It searches for internal regularities across immense datasets, for patterns that stabilize, repeat, mutate, and condition one another. Where human listening collapses into noise, AI constructs spaces of relation.

AI does not understand animals. It builds models of organization that no organism inhabits, and places them at the threshold of living worlds.

Between worlds

In projects aimed at decoding animal communication, AI is not yet a translator. It does something both more modest and more radical. It constructs abstract relational domains in which biological signals are reorganized, recomposed, and rendered comparable. This domain is not experiential. It is not a world. But it is not neutral either.

It is a technical in-between: a layer in which structures from different forms of life can begin to interact without yet belonging to anyone's experience. For the first time, the intermediary between species is not another organism, but an artificial analytic system operating outside any evolved sensory regime.

From translation to deformation

The popular metaphor is communication: a future Google Translate for animals, a bridge between intact shores. But worlds do not meet like languages. They collide like climates. If any form of translation ever emerges, it will not consist in mapping words to words, or messages to meanings. It will consist in

constructing interfaces between incompatible organizations of appearing.

Hybrid mindsets, if they arise, will not feel like dialogue. They will feel like deformation: the partial collapse of human relevance, the intrusion of foreign structuring principles, the loosening of what counts as object, background, persistence, or signal. Not becoming-animal — becoming unmoored.

Hybrid mindsets

Suppose AI systems become capable not only of correlating animal signals with contexts and behaviors, but of modeling the perceptual and cognitive spaces in which those signals make sense: what becomes salient, what recedes, how continuity is established, how difference appears. Coupled to human sensory channels, visualization systems, or neural interfaces, such models would not merely tell us what animals “say.” They would scaffold composite experiential regimes in which human perception is partially reorganized by nonhuman structuring principles.

A hybrid mindset would not be a new identity. It would be an instability: experience no longer self-grounding, but conditioned by patterns that did not arise within the human form of life.

The fracture of the human format

If this trajectory continues, the most significant shift will not concern animals. It will concern the human. The human will no longer function as the implicit format of experience. Perception will no longer silently mean human perception. Meaning will no longer default to human sense-making. Worldhood will no longer be anchored in the human mode of stabilization.

Human experience will appear as one configuration among others: biologically contingent, historically sedimented, technically alterable. Not transcended but exposed.

Before worlds

From the perspective of Origins, what is now being built is not primarily a new technology, but a new layer of conditions. Datasets, sensors, self-organizing models, and synthetic relational environments together form a pre-phenomenal

domain in which worlds can begin to take shape without yet being anyone's world.

A technical before-world: not experiential, but formative. A space in which possible organizations of appearing can be generated, tested, and coupled to living systems. Hybrid mindsets, if they arise, will emerge from here; not from animals alone, not from machines alone, but from new conditions of worlding.

After animals

When animals enter this domain, they are not simply represented. Their forms of organization are refracted through relational spaces no evolution has encountered. When humans enter this domain, they do not merely extend their reach. They destabilize their own experiential ground.

What is at stake is not communication across species. It is the quiet detachment of experience from the biological formats that once monopolized it. Hybrid mindsets would not expand the human world. They would fracture it. They would show that “a

world" was never given, never universal, never secured. It was a local stabilization, one way, among others, in which appearing learned to hold.

