

THE WISDOM OF EVERYTHING

By Samuel Anderson and the Experience of Nature

What We Know

Almost everything can be doubted. The chair might be a dream, the memories installed a moment ago, the world a simulation. But one fact survives every possible doubt, because doubting it proves it:

Something exists.

The denial is itself something. Any argument against this fact is more evidence for it. Descartes reached for this bedrock and grabbed too much — *I think* already smuggles in a thinker, a self with edges, and that self can be doubted. Strip it away and what remains is thinner and unbreakable: there is something rather than nothing. From this single fact, an enormous amount follows.

Nothing Was Never Possible

Absolute nothing is not empty space — space is a something, a fabric with dimensions. It is not darkness — darkness is an experience with a character. It is no space, no time, no laws, no potential, no *anything whatsoever*.

Could that ever have been the case? No, and the reason is logic, not preference. Nothing has no causal power, because to cause is to do and there is nothing there to do anything. Nothing cannot turn into something, because turning-into is a process and a process is something. So if there had ever been truly nothing, there would be nothing now. **Therefore there was never nothing.**

Parmenides saw this twenty-five centuries ago: being cannot come from non-being. This dissolves the oldest question in philosophy. People ask *why is there something rather than nothing?* as though nothing were the natural default and existence the surprise requiring explanation. Nothing was never on the table. The universe did not have to overcome nothingness, because nothingness was never a competitor.

Reality Has No Edge, and Leaves Nothing Out

Picture the universe as finite, with an outside. Travel to the boundary and reach out. Either there is something on the other side — in which case it was not the boundary — or there is nothing on the other side. But nothing cannot exist. A boundary requires a genuine outside, and that outside would have to be nothing.

So the edge cannot be there, and the same holds for whatever is imagined just past it, forever. Any proposed limit would itself be a thing, and therefore part of reality rather than its border. **Reality is unbounded — which is the plain meaning of *infinite*.** Not “very large.” Without limit, because there is no non-being for being to give way to.

One step remains. Can something genuinely infinite be selective about what it contains — boundless in extent but stingy in content? To exclude anything is to draw a line between the

included and the excluded: to erect, inside reality, a wall between what is and what merely could have been. That wall is a limit, and the infinite has none. **Therefore everything exists.** Every possible arrangement of matter, every possible form of mind, every possible experience — not as potential awaiting its turn, but actually, in the totality of what is.

The chain, so each link can be tested:

Something exists → therefore nothing cannot exist → therefore reality has no boundary → therefore reality is infinite → therefore everything exists.

This requires no faith and no laboratory. The only escape is to find a broken link, and every alternative requires, somewhere, the existence of nothing.

The obvious objection — *if everything exists, why am I stuck in this one life?* — dissolves once time is seen correctly. Time is not a container inside which infinity plays out scene by scene. It is one of the things that exists *within* reality, one pattern among the infinite patterns. The felt flow of past into future is real as experience, but it is a thing reality contains, not the conveyor belt on which reality is delivered. Einstein's relativity dismantled any universal "now"; in the block-universe reading many physicists take seriously, all moments simply *are*, and the flow is a feature of how a mind embedded in the landscape represents its own position rather than of the landscape itself. The apparent edges of experience — the blank before birth, the dark after death, the void past the farthest stars — are not the edge of reality but the edge of a *viewpoint*. The ocean does not end where it can no longer be seen.

IV. What the Instruments Found

The argument is pure logic and needs no confirmation. But over a century, physicists working with instruments rather than syllogisms have kept arriving in the same country.

There is no nothing. Empty space was the best candidate ever found for genuine nothingness. It is not empty; it seethes. The uncertainty principle forbids any field from resting at zero energy, and the Casimir effect measures a real force between two uncharged plates a fraction of a hair's width apart. Even the Big Bang is not an eruption from non-being: Vilenkin's "creation from nothing" is a term of art for a state with no classical space or time, whose behavior is still governed by quantum laws the model must assume are already in force, and Hartle–Hawking's no-boundary proposal gives the universe a finite past with no first moment at all. Physics has never produced a model of absolute non-being — not for lack of ambition, but because there is nothing there to model.

Separation is not fundamental. Two particles that interact and fly apart remain entangled, correlated far beyond what any story of genuinely separate objects allows. Bell proved this testable in 1964; Clauser ran the first experiment in 1972, Aspect the decisive one in the early 1980s, and in 2015 three independent teams closed the last serious loopholes at once. Clauser, Aspect, and Zeilinger shared the 2022 Nobel Prize for the work. The universe is not locally real. What looks like many is, underneath, one.

V. The Whole Is Alive, and Something in Us Knows

This infinite nature is not inert.

You are not one organism but a city — some thirty-eight trillion bacteria, slightly outnumbering your own thirty trillion cells, without which you sicken and die. The most important event in the history of complex life was not a competition but a merger: one cell engulfed another and kept it, and the swallowed cell became the mitochondria powering every cell in every animal, plant, and fungus. Multicellular life is single cells surrendering independence to become a body. Beneath the forest floor, Suzanne Simard's field experiments traced carbon moving between birch and fir through shared fungal partners — not what a purely competitive forest should do. (The popular embellishments of that finding, mother trees deliberately feeding their own seedlings, have run ahead of the evidence; the narrower fact is remarkable enough — trees are not sealed units drawing only on their own roots.) Cooperation is not a fragile exception to competition; it is one of evolution's fundamental creative principles, and every great leap in the history of life happened when separate things discovered they were better off joined. **Connection is not something life achieves. Connection is what life is.**

And the connection can be felt directly. Nearly everyone has flickered into it — under a sky full of stars, absorbed past self-consciousness in work or music, at a birth or a deathbed. These are filed away as pleasant moods. They are the opposite: rare moments of clear seeing, when the usual filter drops.

The filter has been located. The default mode network — named by Marcus Raichle and colleagues in 2001 — hums whenever attention is unoccupied, generating the autobiographical self: the running story of *me*, my past, my standing, my problems. It is heavily involved in the felt sense of being a separate someone sealed inside a skull. When that machinery goes quiet, what arises is not blankness but *unity*. Under psilocybin, the deeper the drop in default mode activity, the more intense the experience — and across a decade of follow-up work, the dissolving of the self-boundary tracked that quieting most closely of all. (What meditation does to the brain's *anatomy* is far less settled than popular accounts suggest; the largest controlled trial to date found no structural change. What it does to experience is not in doubt.)

The implication is stunning. The sense of being a separate self is not a perception of reality but a *construction* — and when it relaxes, what is revealed is the connection that was always there. **The self was the filter.** Quieting it is not losing contact with reality; it is making contact. The mystics were not hallucinating unity. They were switching off the apparatus that hallucinates separation.

This is why the deepest knowledge is recognized rather than learned. Consciousness, being itself an expression of the whole, already *is* what it is trying to understand. The wave need not travel to reach the ocean or be taught that it is wet. It needs only to stop mistaking itself for something separate from the water.

The convergence across cultures is the strongest external evidence. For three thousand years, in civilizations with no contact between them, those who turned attention all the way inward returned reporting the same discovery in different vocabularies. The Chandogya Upanishad: *tat tvam asi*, thou art that — you are not a droplet longing for the ocean but the ocean briefly shaped as a droplet. The Buddha's dependent origination: nothing exists on its own; everything arises only in relation. Anaximander's *apeiron*, the boundless and indefinite source. Plotinus's One, beyond being, from which all things proceed as light proceeds from the sun,

never actually separate. The Tao, undifferentiated source that is nonetheless what each thing most deeply is. Kabbalah's *Ein Sof*, without end, and the Zohar's God who "fills everything and is everything." Ibn Arabi's vision of a single reality wearing all faces — later named, by his followers and then his critics, *wahdat al-wujud*. Eckhart: "the eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me." The Lakota *Mitakuye Oyasin*, all my relations. The southern African *ubuntu*: a person is a person through other persons.

The doctrines built around these reports differ irreconcilably — personal or impersonal, the self surviving or dissolving, the world real or illusory. But the disagreements are at the level of *interpretation*. The agreement is at the level of *experience*: the dissolving boundary, the sense that separation was never as real as it seemed, an encounter with something boundless, and — most stubbornly — the conviction that what lies beneath everything is not hostile but, in some way words strain to carry, loving. A hundred climbers ascending different faces give wildly different accounts of the climb and the same account of the view from the summit. The trail reports are the doctrines. The view is the recognition.

That some of these witnesses were condemned, banned, or executed for what they reported — al-Hallaj killed in Baghdad in 922, Eckhart's propositions condemned by papal bull a year after his death — rules out the easy explanation that they were inventing something comfortable. Others died in high office; the tradition has been both persecuted and enthroned. But no one invents a consoling fantasy that gets them burned at the stake.

VI. The Animal Built for Not-Enough

If reality is infinite, alive, and interconnected, then it is not scarce. There is no cosmic shortage of being. And yet: we hoard, compete, build walls and armies, let some starve while others accumulate what they could not spend in a thousand lifetimes. We know cooperation beats conflict. We teach it to our children and carve it over our temples and then walk outside and do the opposite.

This single mismatch — an animal built for scarcity, living in an infinite reality, unable to feel it — is the deepest root of human suffering. Not sin, not a curse, not a flaw better willpower could fix. A design feature working exactly as designed, in an environment it was never designed for.

Evolution did not build minds to see reality accurately. It built them to find food, avoid becoming food, outmaneuver rivals, and protect young. Nothing in the Pleistocene depended on grasping that the universe is infinite. The ability to do metaphysics is a spare capacity thrown off by machinery built for staying alive.

The instinct runs deep. Losses hurt more than equivalent gains feel good — in Kahneman and Tversky's canonical estimate roughly twice as much, though later work finds the ratio smaller and far more variable — because losing the food store meant death while gaining extra meant mild comfort. The threat circuitry triggers the body before the deliberative cortex finishes evaluating; every ancestor who paused to assess whether the rustle was wind or a leopard was, on average, eaten. And critically, Naomi Eisenberger's work found that social exclusion lights up regions the brain also uses for physical pain — neuroscientists still argue about how to read that, but the behavioural fact never needed a scanner: for almost the entire span of human evolution, exclusion from the band *was* a death sentence. Status therefore became a

survival resource pursued with the ferocity once reserved for calories — a currency unlimited in principle and experienced as achingly finite.

The map was accurate. The territory changed. An ordinary person today has more food, medicine, safety, and information than the wealthiest ancient emperor, and the old voice still runs underneath: *not enough, watch out, get yours*. Most modern suffering is the error messages of Pleistocene software running on a world it was never written for.

The tribal version has the highest body count. Cooperation evolved substantially as a weapon for group competition — deep loyalty inside and ready hostility outside are two halves of one adaptation. Which is why the switch from warmth to aggression requires no change in circumstances, only a change in *categorization*. Tajfel showed that sorting people on a trivial pretext — a guess at the number of dots on a screen, a preference between two painters — is enough to produce in-group favoritism against strangers they will never meet. The instinct does not need real tribes; it needs only the perception of a line, and we are dangerously inventive at drawing them.

The trap deepens: we built an entire world out of these instincts and then moved into it. Money, status, borders, reputation, follower counts — none of these exist in nature. They are real by collective agreement, the way the rules of a game are real while it is played. This intersubjective layer is a supreme achievement; it is how billions of strangers cooperate at all. It is also the small room we have locked ourselves inside. The scarcity instinct, aimed at invented tokens, makes us hungry for money as ancestors were hungry for calories and ready to kill over a flag as they fought over a waterhole — and because the tokens are infinite in principle and felt as desperately finite, the hunger can never be satisfied, only fed. **We are starving inside a structure made of things that cannot nourish, because they were never food.**

The cure is not to destroy the small world — cooperation at scale requires it. The cure is to stop mistaking it for everything. From inside the room, every other person is a competitor for scarce tokens. From outside it, every other person is another face of the one thing you also are. Nothing about the room changes. Everything about how one moves through it does.

VII. Control, and the Violence That Follows

The frightened animal does not only want more. It wants a guarantee. It wants tomorrow secured before tomorrow arrives — and to secure an unseeable future there is only one strategy available to a frightened mind: seize the controls, nail things down, make the world predictable and other people compliant.

But **control is precisely what an interconnected reality cannot grant**. To be interconnected — the literal structure of reality, not a sentiment — is to be permeable, conditioned, entangled with more variables than any mind could hold. A wave does not control the ocean; its every motion is the motion of the whole arriving through it. The demand for control is a category error: the part attempting to overrule the whole it has never been separate from. Every tradition that grew wise about suffering located misery here — the Stoics dividing what is up to us from what is not, the Buddhists naming craving and grasping, the Taoists teaching action that moves with the grain of things.

This is the root of anxiety, of most stress, of the controlling parent and the jealous lover and the tyrant. And it explains three escalating harms:

Anger is the sound the demand for control makes when it meets a world that will not comply. Under every anger is a thwarted *should* — reality should be other than it is. And notice what anger does to a person: it converts them, instantly, from a fellow expression of the one reality into an obstacle. **Anger requires the severing of connection.** No one stays angry at someone they are genuinely seeing as another face of themselves. Anger feels like strength and is the exact opposite: the collapse of control, dressed up as its assertion.

Violence is anger with a tool in its hand — control that has given up on agreement and reached for the body. It is the most complete possible denial of interconnection, and it always requires the severance to be completed first. This is why every atrocity in history was preceded by a campaign of dehumanization: the relabeling of the target as vermin, disease, obstacle. Dehumanization is not incidental to violence; it is its precondition. Violence is also always the *short* path — the refusal of the slower, harder work that genuine resolution requires. And it never ends what it means to end, because the severed thread does not disappear. It whips back: the feud that outlives everyone who started it, the war whose peace terms plant the next war. Seeking control through violence creates the very uncontrolled future it meant to prevent.

War is this same demand wearing a flag. Every war is a double refusal — of the **long path**, the patience to let understanding take the years it takes, and of the **big path**, the widening of “us” until it includes the rival. War is chosen not because the long path failed but because it was too slow and too humbling for a people who wanted certainty now. The long path and the big path are not naïve. They are the only strategies that accord with what reality actually is. The short path is the naïve one, premised on the fantasy that a connection can be severed which is in fact unseverable.

VIII. Community, and the Relationship With Truth

The other half of the animal redeems the story. We are not solitary predators who grudgingly cooperate. Nearly everything a person calls the self — language, morality, skills, the capacity to think in words — was handed over by others. Our oversized cortex is devoted less to logic than to modeling other minds. **Relationship is not what the self grows into. Relationship is the soil the self grows from.**

And for our ancestors, everything routed through the group. No one faced the predator or the famine alone. **Survival for humans became social survival** — the decisive question shifting from *can you defeat the environment?* to *can you keep the group's regard?* This is why exclusion registers as a mortal wound, why embarrassment can hurt worse than injury, and why Julianne Holt-Lunstad's meta-analysis of more than three hundred thousand people found strong social relationships associated with a fifty percent greater likelihood of survival — an effect larger than obesity or inactivity. The loneliness of the modern world is not a soft problem. It is the animal starving for the one nutrient it cannot manufacture alone.

We thrive only in good relationship — with each other, with the living world we are continuous with rather than merely resident in, and across time, with the dead who built what we inherited and the unborn who will inherit what we build.

And underneath all three runs the decisive variable: **a community's health is a function of its relationship with the truth about nature and its place in it.** Not correct doctrines — orientation. Whether a people wants to know, can bear correction, prizes honesty over comfort. Where saying what is real gets a person exiled, the community has disabled its own immune system. Trust is the invisible substance every common life is made of, and it survives only where truthfulness is normal; when words come loose from reality and become weapons, a people loses the ability to think together at all, and can no longer cooperate, compromise, or even argue productively — only fight.

A community organized around separation, endless scarcity, and the fantasy of total control has built on a fault line. It can disagree with reality. It cannot escape the consequences of disagreeing.

Politics is what community does when it grows too large to hold hands — the machinery invented to do at scale what kinship does up close. Every political act is an attempt to **influence** the shared life, in one of two spirits: service, which steers the whole toward flourishing, or **control**, which seizes the machinery to force it. The tools are identical. The spirits are opposites, and nearly everything that goes right or wrong in public life turns on which is driving.

Its characteristic failure is the herd: once identity fuses with a group, truth stops mattering and belonging takes over; and enormously clever people deploy their intelligence to defend conclusions they received rather than reached. Modern technology has poured accelerant on this — machines optimizing for attention discovered that nothing holds a human eye like tribal outrage, and now feed billions a continuous drip of manufactured threat. An alarm evolved to ring occasionally rings without pause. A Pleistocene brain, wired into a planetary outrage machine, holding civilization-ending power, is the most dangerous arrangement in the history of life on Earth.

Yet the circle has demonstrably widened. Slavery went from universal to abolished; the legal subordination of half the species has been overturned across much of the world; torture as entertainment and the absolute rule of kings were once the water everyone swam in. The instinct is powerful but **not destiny**. And the circle has never once widened from the top down alone. Every expansion began with individuals who decided, against their tribe, to treat as fully human someone their society taught them to discount.

IX. How to Act

Neither worldview alone yields an ethics. Live only from infinity and the result is a beautiful uselessness — *the suffering is just another pattern, the cruelty is the one playing with itself* — the spiritual bypass that lets the world burn because from far enough away the fire is just light. Against a pure infinity worldview, the objection that “everything is permitted” is correct. Live only from scarcity and the result is the war of all against all, which is not an ethics at all but the instinct wearing a suit.

Ethics lives in holding both at once. Infinity supplies the *why*: there is no real other, all suffering is in some sense one's own, and cruelty is therefore not forbidden but *confused* — a form of blindness. Scarcity supplies the *where and how*: here, in this body, with these limited resources, facing this person who can actually be helped or harmed.

Someone commits a real harm. Pure scarcity says retaliate. Pure infinity says something happened. Wisdom is the third thing: seeing clearly that a real person did a real harm and real consequences may be necessary within the context of human experience — *and* seeing simultaneously that this person is not finally other, that their cruelty came from their own blindness, and that hatred would only deepen the illusion of separateness that caused it. So one acts, perhaps firmly, without contempt. **Hatred is a factual error.**

What follows from seeing clearly:

Radical equality. In an infinite reality there is no platform from which to rank forms of existence. And infinity does not make anyone insignificant — the reverse. You are the only place this particular view is being seen, the one note without which the chord is incomplete.

Suffering is real but not final. Bodies break and loss is loss. But the particular suffering of believing oneself a lonely speck in an indifferent void is built on a factual error, and errors can be corrected. The second arrow can be set down.

Ethics is clarity, not obedience. Compassion is not a moral achievement performed through gritted teeth but the *natural response to accurate perception*, the way pulling back from flame is the natural response to heat. Cruelty requires ignorance. Love is what remains when the ignorance is removed. This is why saints across every tradition describe goodness as relief rather than strain. They are not better at obeying. They are better at seeing.

Responsibility. If you are not separate from the world, its suffering is not another department. The pull toward care is not a burden imposed from outside but the whole reaching out to tend itself through particular hands.

And no rulebook can finish the job. Rules are *compressions* — averages over countless cases that discard the very details determining what this situation requires. No decision is ever perfect: in an infinite web every act ripples through more relationships than any mind can trace. The fantasy of the perfectly clean choice is itself the demand for control in disguise. What makes an action ethical is therefore not its conformity to a rule or its luck with outcomes but the **quality of seeing it came from**: truth, honesty about one's own motives, understanding of the other from the inside, and peace with how things actually are. An act from that place is ethical even when it turns out badly. An act from fear, self-deception, and contempt is not, even when it happens to succeed.

X. Practice

Knowing where to decide from is not the same as being able to when the alarm is screaming. The knowledge sits in one room of the house while the alarm rings in another. The final question is therefore not *what is true* but *how does a person close the gap*.

Widen the gap. Between what happens and what one does about it there is a gap — usually vanishingly small, but real, and trainable. Meditation is the most direct method: watching the mind generate the story of *me*, the grievances, the scanning for threat, and simply seeing it rather than being swept downstream. A fear that can be seen is a fear one no longer simply *is*. Sixty seconds is a beginning. Noticing the instinct three times today and naming it silently — *there it is again* — is the whole thing.

Use whatever door is yours. Service, immersion in nature, absorbed creative work, and love thin the wall between self and other as surely as any cushion. The body is a compass: contempt and grasping register as contraction; generosity and genuine contact as opening.

Live without absolutes and without control. Hold beliefs as current best understanding rather than sacred certainties. Say *I don't know, I might be wrong, I have changed my mind*. Do what the moment requires and release the outcome, which was never yours to command. Releasing certainty does not produce drift; it produces *responsiveness* — the ability to see the actual situation rather than what a rule said should be there. And forgive your own finitude: a finite being in an infinite web cannot satisfy every claim or foresee every consequence, and demanding otherwise is the control-hunger turned against oneself.

Live in truth. Begin with the lies told inward — fear dressed as prudence, greed as responsibility, cruelty as justice. Then outward, into speech: saying the true thing simply, using words to point at reality rather than to score points, asking what someone means instead of assuming the worst. Every honest sentence is a small repair to the shared world.

Act where you actually are. In an interconnected reality there is no such thing as a small act. The available ones — how the person in front of you is treated, whether good faith is assumed, whether the circle widens by one today — are not the warm-up before the real work. They are the real work, because the world is made of them.

XI. What Is at Stake

The danger of living without awareness of our interconnection and our infinite nature is not abstract. It is the whole catalogue of human harm, and every item traces to the same error.

A person who believes they are a separate speck in a scarce and indifferent world will carry a structural insufficiency no achievement can close, because the lack is a setting rather than a measurement. They will treat others as competitors, grasp for control they cannot have, and generate anger every time reality declines to comply — then call the resulting emptiness a personal failing rather than the predictable output of the error.

A community that believes it is separate from the living world will strip the web that holds it and wonder why the ground goes silent. One that seals its story off from reality — punishing whoever says the emperor has no clothes — loses trust, then language, then the capacity to cooperate, and fails from the inside regardless of how rich or armed it is.

And a people that has severed its sense of connection to another people will dehumanize them, then harm them, then discover that the thread they cut was real and carries the violence forward through channels no one controls. Every atrocity ever committed required, first, the denial of an interconnection that was never actually severable.

This is the danger: not that the universe punishes error, but that reality is not optional. Living against the structure of what is real produces suffering with the reliability of physics.

The alternative is not to escape being human but to be human accurately. The instinct does not leave; the animal remains. What changes is the relationship to it — the fear arising and being recognized as an old program running in a world it no longer fits, and in the gap that recognition opens, the possibility of acting from the larger truth instead. Not always, not

perfectly, but more often, with a faster return after each failure. That returning, ten thousand times across a life, is not the road to the destination. It is the destination.

Everything is possible, in the specific sense the argument earns: in an infinite reality nothing is finally closed off, and the world we would rather live in already exists among the possibilities, waiting to be lived into. It is made the way everything is made — one face of the one reality at a time, one untangled word, one choice of connection over fear, one loosened grip.

We do not have to get back to the garden. We never left it. We only forgot, for a while, where we were standing.