

Maybe, Probably, Definitely, Yes: The Tyranny of Relativism

by [Gracjan Kraszewski](#) (March 2023)



The Man of Confusion, Paul Klee, 1939

0.a

My friend claims nothing is real.

I say, him saying nothing is real proves something is real, and if something is real we've already blown up his philosophy.

He asks me what I mean by 'blown up.'

I tell him it's been exposed, demolished, reduced, to dust. I tell him the very act of speaking, that is a real thing, and if there are real things there's a larger reality ... probably.

"How sure are you?" he asks.

"About the larger reality?"

"Yes."

"100%."

"Then not 'probably.' Assuredly ... for certain ... that's what you should have said."

"You know, you're probably right."

"There you go again. *Probably*. Take a stand, man."

"A stand? A stand? A stand? You're here telling me nothing's real and you want me to take a stand?"

I pull a crinkled-up piece of paper from my pocket on which something is written. Me? I can't make heads or tails of it. Picked it up off the sidewalk a few hours ago, read it over once, nope, understood nothing, stuffed it away. I hand it to him and ask him to read it out aloud.

It cannot be 'turtles all the way down,' for, as every saint, genius, and idiot knows: something cannot come from nothing and if there's any indisputable proof of both the veracity and staying power of the Dumb Ox's proofs it's that. It doesn't matter one bit if you could reduce something to even the smallest possible size and claim it all came from that, no, sorry, something can't come from nothing, no one cares how many tortoises you have in your possession and please, whatever you do, do not dress up your illogical scientism in plausibly sounding faux first principles like 'atoms formed' because why not be more honest and declare 'things happen'?

b.6

My friend says the only way out of the meaningless numb-pain of this no point world would be if God would actually show up on earth Himself and tell us what to do. And if he left some kind of instruction manual that clearly told us what to do, we'd know, we'd know what to do then. And then, if He would just do something, something like an act of love, or a sacrifice of some sort, something showing us, *Hey, I do love you and I'm going to leave no doubt*, then he's quite sure the world would be a much different and probably better place and probably filled with a bunch of stuff like hope, like joy, harmony between people.

He finishes saying this and then we both look at each other and say nothing for a few seconds.

"You wanna go to the casino or bet on greyhounds down at the track?" he asks me.

"We have that here," I say.

"The dogs or the casino?"

"The dogs."

"Yeah, what?"

"Yeah."

"What are you saying?"

"What are *you* saying?"

"I don't know. But what do you wanna do?"

b.2

Albert called me and said he had just attended a Catholic Mass and it was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen in person, with his own eyes; there was music but it was very old, very subdued, "But I liked it," he said, and there was tons of sweet smelling smoke and it was obvious the people there took it all very seriously and it made him want to act the same, to mimic them. And so he had done that. And he finished by saying he was pretty sure he would probably continue to do that going forward.

c.

My girlfriend Angie is probably going to break up with me because she told me the next time I take her to a fast food restaurant for a date, when it's my time to plan date night, it's not going to be good, a good choice by me, a good thing, that, I'm saying I'm assuming she won't be happy about that, because she's told me she would not like that the next time that happened or was about to happen like was being planned, by me. And so now I'm freaking out, now I'm stressin', my palms are sweating, I even forgot to put socks on and that's usually the anchor to my day, fresh socks, matching pair, no

holes, no repeats, until it's a different month but now, because it's date night and date night's on me tonight, I don't even have any socks on and my belt is upside down, forget just missing a few holes, yeah, that too, but man I gotta go to the bathroom, man drinking all that Mountain Dew, what a bad idea, what a terrible idea that was and then Angie walks in.

"Hey, babe," she says, smiling. "I was thinking: let's go to Chik-fil-A. What to do you say?"

d.

My friend told me I should go see a therapist and I told him he should shut up and stay out of my life and mind his own business.

d.1

Walked past a guy on the street today holding a sign that read *The Climate Crisis is Now: We've got Ten Years before the flood and the fire come.* "The flood and the fire?" I asked the guy. "Yes," he said, and let me tell you I could tell he was none too pleased to be answering questions. But if you don't want to talk to people why are you standing outside in a very public place with a huge sign? "Yes, flood and fire," he said, "or flood or fire, look, at the rate we're going, especially with the disgusting carbon pollution everyone just carries on with without a second thought, it's going to be fifty feet underwater or 200 hundred degrees Fahrenheit soon. Do you," he said, accentuating *you* as he pointed at me, "do you think that's ok?" "Do I think being underwater or on fire is ok?" I asked in reply. Now he seemed more angry than before because he scoffed, held his sign higher, and began chanting, "2, 4, 6, 8, Down with the humanity, bugs are great. 2, 4, 6, 8, Down

with humanity, bugs are great." "Excuse me," I said, "So I take it you don't like that people aren't doing their part, right, not recycling, driving cars, eating meat, all this just adds to the collective carbon footprint?" And he looked at me and said, "Yes, you ignoramus! Yes, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. It's worse than anyone can even dream of. And especially all these, these 9-5 working stiff useless eaters who just drive the car, fill the tank, drive car, fill tank, car, tank, over and over again. How I wished they'd all just disappear, good riddance!" "But," I said, "what about the fact that all the useless eaters, like you call them, all of them and their carbon footprint put together are nothing compared to some of the important figures in your movement who, in just one flight, hurt the planet more, carbon bomb the atmosphere a million times over?" Now the man had lost all patience with me. He was in no mood to answer my question let alone even think of answering. After three seconds of an icy stare he slowly pulled back his coat to reveal a gun holstered to his belt. I got a long enough look to see it was some kind of BB gun. Still, and now I'm the one thinking, and fast too, on my feet, still, that would probably leave some nice welts. And so I left, at a brisk pace.

e.

My friend says he's looking for God in his life and I asked what he meant by that and he said that's why he was looking, that he didn't know, he didn't even know where to start and so how about me did I have an idea of what to do, where to begin, how to do this?

Me? I asked. Me? You're asking me? Me? You want advice from me? Me? Me? You're really asking me, of all people, you're asking me? You want—

By that time he had already left. He was gone. The thing is, I

had been turned around, away from him, answering him with my back to him and kind of speaking into the corner of the room in which we were standing.

f.

Angie called and asked me if we should get a pet together. I have to admit I didn't really care what she was calling about because I had written a rap song about her, about us, I mean, the background being I'm thinking we should start thinking about being more serious, her and me, because the date at Chick-fil-A went great, it was awesome, it was just so nice, she let me finish off her waffle fries and that was just great and so I had gone home that night and, boom, the words were writing themselves, therapist my butt, all's not just good upstairs it's clicking on all cylinders, and so she asked about getting a pet together and I said nothing and so she asked again and I just launched into it:

Angie, girl you on my A-list

Angie, cause you I deleted my bae list

Baby A, if I was a teacher I'd give you that, an A, an A grade, you so fine-

Then I stopped because she had hung up. I don't know if it was because I had ignored her question or because she didn't like the song. That's what I mean, it's hard to know things, get clear answers, find out why.

g.

My friend said to me, 'so, tell me why, exactly, a person

can't marry a pillow or a tree or even the ocean if they want to?' And I started at an answer, I even licked my lips to chase away the cottonmouth and bring forth something but, nothing, I don't know, I thought, I didn't say that, rather, I said nothing. And then he left.

g.1

Walked past a guy on the street today, he was sitting down on the sidewalk, next to a box and a handwritten sign. It read "Not homeless, only a lonely artist looking for that priceless human touch." Below that, in a different font and different color, it said, "Leave a donation if you want to support my work. But, you give this guy a hug, and I'll give you 5 dollars. Love is priceless." And I just thought, nope, nope, nope, nope, no, and resumed walking.

h.

My friend told me he's been meditating, I asked him what that meant and he said it was hard to explain. Well, I said, if it's hard to explain, how can you be sure you're doing it? He said it was a feeling. What kind, I asked? He said it was hard to explain but, you just kind of got into position and did it. And that just sounded awful, the whole phraseology there, and so I told him that. Look, wait, he said, it's about getting into your zone, your vibes, your feel, even the deep feel sub-space place of bliss. Do you get it now, do you see what I mean? No, I said.

i.

I called Angie and told her that I'd be totally up for getting a pet but so long as it was—

Wait, she said, stopping me cold in my tracks. But didn't she want to hear my idea, I'm thinking. I'd been working on it for a while now. I think ... wait, she said. Remember when we agreed to have an open relationship?

No, I said, what?

Look, she said, I'm sorry, I think I remember that maybe even you suggested it. I'm pretty certain that maybe you did, she tells me.

No, I didn't, I say. I know I didn't, I'm the one who told you my friend Albert told me about that Christian idea of marriage, the church wedding thing plus the gold rings and the commitment, especially that, you remember.

Remember what? she countered. That I laughed at you, laughed in your face. That I told you no one wants that or does that anymore.

And as she's speaking I'm thinking, no, I told you that because maybe I wanted that and so that's why I suggested it.

I'm sorry, she says, I have to go.

I think about trying to get her to listen to the idea I have about what pet we should get but—

Hey, listen, she says, I think we're, she hesitates, I think we're probably done.

Probably? I say. You think, probably, probably, probably?

jk.

I've made up my mind to go see that therapist. I don't know, it might be fun. Why not?

k.2

My friend says he's a dyed in the wool liberal. Okay, I say, cool. I'm not political at all, I tell him. He says he had to leave this really big city because, despite being a liberal, and he tells me he's liberal down to his core, despite being a liberal in a liberal big city the liberal policies of that city had ruined the city completely, made it dirty, and dangerous and just downright disgusting. He told me that when he was at his favorite wheatgrass organic vegan smoothie and voting rights tiny house coffeeshop and he looked outside and there was a guy relieving himself in plain daylight he knew it was time to leave. He said he picked a small town in the countryside, far away from the big city, because it seemed like it was a good place to live owing to it being generally clean, safe, orderly, basically not like a 24/7 post-rave recovery session plus bad indy music. So he said to me, and now smiling, now that I'm here, in this new place, it really is a good life, I'm living the good life, but there's just one thing missing. Oh, what's that, I asked him. The politics, he tells me, everything here is just so backward, so bigoted and outdated. I'm telling you, as soon as me and my likeminded big city expats get a hold of the policies around this town we'll be making the proper changes and pronto, the revolution is coming, Wait, I said, and don't get me wrong, I hate the left, I hate the right, I hate everybody, so I'm not trying to be biased here, but, have you ever considered that the policies you like are the reason that the big city got so messed up that you had to leave and so, just maybe, don't do that here, don't try that here, or ever, again? What, he says, and I can tell he's genuinely perplexed, what, what do you mean, what, what are you talking about?

l.

My friend says he's kind of a Buddhist, kind of Hindu. He's

kind of New Age and really into days spent strolling about on foot pursuing through old bookstores and sitting on park benches doing what he calls 'communing with the pigeons.' He says this kinda earns him the title of First Consul of *avant gardia* in the coming pan-religion of the new and now. That's what he said. But he also said kinda, so I say probably, maybe just maybe though. Maybe he is all this, like he claims, what I do know for certain is that he's really into smoking weed.

0.

First session with the therapist. It can't believe how cliché it was; satisfyingly so. The room was dark enough to make first impressions creepy, I'm immediately thinking, where are the exits, are they labeled, are they lighted? The therapist—Dr. Cowslapperrrr, yep, C o w s l a p p e r r r, 3 ps, 3 rs—had me lay down a couch. It was super moist, not like incidental sweat from before, no, it felt like he had lathered it with something. But it smelled good, really good. He had me lay down and then he said nothing for about ten minutes and so I said, 'Hey—' but he immediately silenced me and then went back to that which was before: me laying there, looking at the wall, him over my right shoulder, looking at me. Fine. Is this how this is done, who am I to say this is weird? Do I have a degree in whatever it is he does? After eleven hours like this he told me session one was over. I stood up to leave and he offered me something that looked like a breath mint that he had just pulled out from his coat pocket. And me, who's thinking *no, no, no, no, I'm not eating I'm not anything with that*, I declined, politely. He then tugged aggressively on his jacket and pointed at me. What? I'm thinking. He did it again and then a third time. I still didn't get it. 'Suit yourself,' he explained, unhappy I had not understood his meaning.

0.2

Was talking to a friend today and she kept asking me what I'd do if I knew the world was coming to an end? If the world was ending today, now, she said, would you ... and she asked me about like 20 scenarios, posed 45 questions, and it was basically nonstop for at least half an hour. End of the world, I'm thinking, end of the world, end of the world? When will you stop talking?

0.3

My friend says practicing mindfulness will increase your self-esteem and overall deep-feel connectivity with the universe's inner magmatic will-pulse. 'Hey,' I said, 'did you ever consider just getting a dog?'

p.

Walked past a woman on the street today and she stopped me and just blurted out, 'I love your jacket!' Where do people get such confidence, to just stop and compliment strangers. But, okay, but, okay, and, look, Angie who? This must be fate, because she stopped me, and, I mean, good looking, no, gorgeous, more than that, I mean this woman, well, she stopped me so I'm going tell her 'I'd love to get your number' and so I resolved to do that but by that time she was long gone.

q.2

Albert says I gotta go to Mass and that I should go with him. He tells me to read the Bible. Get a Bible, he says, and just get to it, get on with it, it's inevitable. About the Mass, he says, look, not that its peaceful or beautiful or serene or

melodic or sweet on the ears, the eyes, not just, rather, not just peaceful, beautiful, serene, melodic and sweet because it is all these things, but that's it's something more, it's true, he says. True, I ask? True, he says. True for you, I ask. True, he says. But, me, I'm, I'm trying to, I ask him again, true, true like probably true in your opinion. No, he says, true, just true.

q.

Why do women love arrogant men? I ask my beer bottle. I mean, I was nothing but nice, but kind, verifiably sweet to Angie and she just walked all over me. Now she's probably with some guy who's head of a motorcycle gang, or a quarterback, or an accountant, something badass like that. I remember there was this girl who I had biology class with in high school and I would always tease her in the style of putting her down, not mean stuff, but just kind of always be trolling her. And then one day, during the Young Computer Scientists of Tomorrow after school program she confessed her like psycho-obsessed, I'm not just in love I want to like steal your old T-shirts and sniff them in fields of wildflowers with me. And I'm like, what? And she's like, do you love me? And I was like, No. And then she started crying and I did feel bad about that. I just don't get it. Is this what women want, secretly. Guys who treat them like dirt, like put them in their place, be all toxic around them and stuff. Really? But so how I do become that, how do I do that? Next time some woman stops me on the street to say something I'm gonna act super broodish, standoffish, something that says, and probably without words, 'you think I care? You think I need your approval?'

r.

Session number two. Dr. Cowslapperrr asked me about my

personal philosophy. Could I sum up my personal philosophy, he asked. You, know, I just don't, I don't know, I said. See, he said, and that's exactly the problem.

s.

Angie called today and left a message, and I couldn't believe it, but she told me she wanted to get back together. I thought about calling her back but decided to start living my *aloof-towards-women* thing. Maybe that's what I'll tell my therapist next time he asks me about personal philosophy.

s.2

Albert says that people search the world over and do a bunch of crazy stuff like go on four day darkness retreats, and seek out mountain sages in Tibet, and get put in hyperbaric chambers, and do all kinds of drugs, and talk, take vows of silence, take walks, take more pills but, he claims, they never take the time to just walk into a Church and sit silently in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament, doing what he says is called 'Eucharistic Adoration,' and realize that everything they're searching for is right there.

t.

My friend says I'm a bigot. I'm not a bigot so I tell him: I'm not a bigot. He says me denying I'm a bigot means I'm a bigot. I'm not a bigot, I say. That you say you're not a bigot, he says, means you're a bigot, probably a very extreme form of one. No, I'm not, I say. You saying you're not a bigot means you're a bigot, he says, again. Okay, so it's opposites I guess, I say to myself, fine ... Okay, I'll admit it, I'm a bigot. See, you're a bigot, he says. No, I protest, it's

opposites, when I come out and say I'm a bigot you come to the rescue and say, actually, well, I had you pegged all wrong, that's the game we're playing, right? No, he says, you're definitely a bigot. And how are you so sure, I ask. Because you just told me yourself, he says. You just said, I'm a bigot. I say nothing, but only momentarily. Okay, so let me get this straight: If I admit I'm a bigot I'm a bigot because I admitted it but, if I deny I'm a bigot it means I'm actually, secretly, a bigot. Yes, he says, good, now we're getting somewhere.

u.

Angie called again. She called me five times today, left five messages. Same message: Let's get back together. My message to her? Silence.

v.

My friend, the New and Now New Age one, called me again; high. He said, giggling the whole, time, "Hey, man. You know how at Coug football games they play that song and it's like Na, Na, Na Na Na, Na, Cougs always find their way home. You know. You know, you know?" After he had asked me "ya know" eight times, I finally said, "Yes." "Okay," he said, "well, what if, what if, listen, dude, what if, bro, listen, listen, wait, what if instead, okay, what instead they sang Na, Na, Na Na Na, Na, Cougs always find their way stoned."

w.

At my third therapy session today I asked Dr. Cowslapperrr if he had any leads as to why I could not and cannot still identify a personal philosophy. No, you know, I really, I

really have no idea, he said, shaking his head the whole time. About what, I asked? Excuse me, he said, now looking intently at me. About what, I repeated. You have no idea about me not having an idea or about the lack of the idea altogether. And he just shook his head and said, no, I was thinking what I'd say to my wife later when she asked me what I'd like for dinner.

w.2

I told Albert about everything. I told Albert especially that I've now been in therapy for a month and have gotten no answers and seem like I can't find answers anywhere anyways, like where would I even think to begin to look and so, I was saying to him, but do you like have any ideas? You should go to Mass, he said. You should read the Bible. Okay, I said, but you've said that before. Okay, he said, but have you tried that yet? No, I said, I had not and so I said, no, no.

x.

Angie called again. I ignored her call again. This time her message included a whole laundry list of I'm sorrys, I messed up, boy did I have no idea how good I had it, how good we were, and then so many promises and just please give me a call. But I'm not going to.

But then she texted. Her text read: "I'm calling you one minute from now. If we ever had anything real, if I ever meant anything to you, you'll pick up and hear me out." Sounds fair, I thought. I put the phone down, five seconds later it's ringing, it's Angie, I put it to my ear.

Yes?

She clears her throat and jumps right into Mariah Carey's song

We Belong Together.

And I was so moved, so touched by that, that I thought it would be wrong, disrespectful even, not to respond in kind. But if was going to sing, I was going to pretend my phone was a mic, so I could really dig in with my voice and get that raspy, gravelly rebound vocal thing a lot of people like. And I chose Edwin McCain's *I'll Be* because it makes sense.

Dead air. Silence. Still silence and now it's been 10 seconds. I guess both of us are speechless. Also, back together. Definitely, I'm thinking, not probably, certainly back together and, I gotta say, when our kids one day ask, so tell us again how you guys met, how you fell in love, I'm going to—

“Hey,” Angie says.

“Yeah,” I respond.

“I think,” she says, “I think now I know, now, yeah, now I know that we should definitely never, ever get back together. Please don't contact me again.”

“What?” I say, taken aback. And it takes a lot to take me aback, to catch me by surprise.

“Yeah,” she says, “I'm gonna hang up now. Bye.”

y.

My friend says he has this favorite fault, it's bad, oh, he's embarrassed, oh, please can we just, can we not talk about that, not go into that? But so anyways, he says, it's habitual, this thing, I keep, I keep going back to it, again and again, time and again, I keep falling into it, this, can we just call it a sin, can we say sin, he asks me. Yeah, I say, I'm not sure what you mean, exactly, but yeah, do you, be you, do what you want. Names things with names you feel

comfortable with, go for it. So I keep falling into this sin, he says, but, I mean, I'm saying there's hope for me. Okay, good, I say. What is that? Yeah, he says, I mean I, I hate it but I'm gonna keep doing it, that's for sure. But, here's my hope, here's the thing, each time I do this bad thing I do a good deed. Did the bad thing, gave a donation to my library. Did the bad thing, recycled extra carefully next trash day. Did the bad thing, mowed my neighbor's lawn for free, then watered it, with sandcastle buckets too, the hose was broken, got it all watered though. It's not perfect, he says, it just helps, a little, with the guilt, I don't know, but look, the guilt with this it's like crazy big and large. How do you expiate guilt, he asks? You're asking me? Yeah. Really? Yes, if you do something bad how do you get rid of all the bad doing the bad has done to you, how do you wash it off? Wash it off, I say, what are you washing, you mean like, showering? Sure, yeah, whatever, he says, how do you, can you, can you like, uh, can you take a spiritual shower?

z.0

Saw on the news today that Dr. Cowslapperrr was arrested and his practice is definitely, well, at least probably going to be shut down so I'm now done with therapy.

z.1

And so what do I do now, I thought? Personal philosophy, I was thinking, nope, nowhere closer on that, I have no idea and so I called Albert and asked him what to do. He said I should go to Mass. He said I should read the Bible. Then he asked me if I had tried to go to Mass, even like thought about it, since we last spoke. No, I said: no to both, hadn't gone, hadn't thought about going. But why would I, I said, in my defense, you have to actually believe in what the Mass is, what

Catholics do, what they're about, right? Yes, Albert said. But do you actually believe these things, I asked him. Yes, he said. But you're not, you're not even a Catholic yourself, are you? I asked. No, he said, not yet. I made this grand discovery less than a month ago, he explained, and ever since that day I've been at Mass, daily Mass, they call it, even though I can't yet receive the Holy Eucharist, I can't yet do anything as I've just started this preparatory program they have. But when I get made official, I'm going to do it all and everyday and, even now, even now as I'm just entering the whole deal, I'm going to be here, at Mass, daily Mass, everyday, that's for sure. Grand discovery, I ask him, grand discovery you said; what grand discovery?

That's it's all true.

What is?

Everything.

Everything?

Everything.

Everything?

Everything.

You mean...

Yes, Albert says, yes, it's all true. I couldn't believe it but, yeah, everything, it's all true, the Mass, the Eucharist, about the Blessed Mother, ecclesiology, Thomas Aquinas on Kingship and the just political state, Augustine on just war theory, Padre Pio being able to bilocate, confessing your sins to a priest, Hildegard of Bingen's music, the Council of Trent, ad orientem, incense, ex cathedra proclamations, You're saying ...

Everything, Albert says, it's all true. But so, and I can feel

him turning the tide of the conversation from Catholicism unto me, you wanna know your deal?

My deal, I say, you know my deal?

Yeah, he says, I think so.

You're gonna like, diagnose me, identify my malady?

Yeah, Albert says, oh, yeah, see, I think that beyond all the maybe, the probably, even the definitely it's just let your yes mean yes and your no mean no clear, to me, that you're a relativist and that's your problem. And I used to be a relativist myself, believing nothing, supporting nothing, weathervane flip-flopping in the wind, milquetoast, weak-kneed, just kind of like a no-person.

A no-person? I ask, confused.

Yes, Albert says, a no-person, an anti-person. You see, now putting his hand on my shoulder, it takes one to know one and like I said I was one but now I'm not one and the only reason I'm not one now is God, is my faith, that's it. I'm pretty sure everything does kind of suck and is bland and is basically anti-happiness otherwise outside of that, and so you gotta decide if you want the way out or if you want to keep stuck in that mud and muck.

I don't say anything.

Albert says my name and asks if I'm okay. He says my name again.

I nod.

You sure, he asks.

I don't know, I finally say, I don't know.

z.2

Albert and I've have been hanging out a lot lately. He's a good guy. We keep discussing religion and philosophy and each time more deeply and it's just great. We don't agree, or at least he knows what he believes whereas I don't, but it's awesome. I love it and look forward to it. One time we were at a coffee shop and sitting and talking and I looked away, for what I thought was like a second, tops, and he was gone, like he'd vanished into thin air. He later told me he had vanished because he was actually an angel. After a few seconds of silence he burst into laughter and told me he was just messing with me but, he said, that is real though and it does happen. What, I said. Angels, he said, they walk among us and you never know when that guy you thought was just some bum or some lady you dismissed as an air-head is actually angel in disguise. So, he said, best to always be on your best interpersonal behavior and all that. And he said some more stuff but it basically boiled down to two important takeaways: angels were real and he was not an angel. I don't know about all that but we have been playing a lot of one-on-one basketball, Albert and me, and he's like 5'7 and Irish and he can dunk so I'm just saying that's not normal. If, instead of hiding at the coffeeshop, he had been like "I'm an angel, check this out" and proceeded to dunk, I'm saying I'd have a lot harder time dismissing it out of hand.

Walking downtown again, by myself. Parked the car on main street, got some ice cream, not a half bad day by my lights. Albert gave me some books to read by this guy named Saint Augustine who, prior to his conversion, apparently said, "Give me chastity, Lord, just not yet," and I'm thinking that if I ever start doubting my ironclad no-person relativism I might even say, pray, I guess, "Give me certainty, Lord, a compass, just not yet." But the thing is

-oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no ... oh, no. No, this can't be happening. No, it can't be. I see it, I see it right there

but, no, no this can't be real. I actually pinch myself. It hurts, I'm not dreaming, no. I've reached my car and I look down and there it is, there it is. And, immediately I'm filled with regret. This is what I should have said to him, to Dr. Cowslapperr. My personal philosophy, now it all comes into focus, now it's all clear, now I know you don't really know, don't really appreciate what you have until its gone. Up to this very point in my life, I have never, ever received a citation of any sorts. 'Perfect law-abiding citizen,' that's what I should have told him. That's me, I mean, that was me but now, finally picking up the ticket and holding it in my hand, each world like a firm slap across the face—parking without permit, \$25, please pay online or by check, fine increases by \$5 after 30 days—I understand what it means to really have one's philosophy blown up, to have it exposed, demolished, reduced, to dust.

I sit down on the sidewalk and begin to weep.

[Table of Contents](#)

Gracjan Kraszewski is the author of two books: a novel entitled *The Holdout* (Adelaide Books, 2018) and a Civil War history entitled *Catholic Confederates* (forthcoming with The Kent State University Press, 2020). The first chapter of another novel (currently in progress), *Job Search*, was published in *Eclectica Magazine*. Short fiction has appeared in *New English Review*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *The Southern Distinctive*, *PILGRIM*, *Bull: Men's Fiction*, *The Coil*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *RumbleFish Press*, *Five on the Fifth*, and on The Short Humour Site with pieces forthcoming in the *Tulane Review* and *Riddle Fence*.

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