

# The Wonder of it All

by [Larry McCloskey](#) (July 2025)



Yellow Cow (Franz Marc, 1911)

**Some of the most accomplished** writers have reverential regard for the muse of wonder. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Saul Bellow said, "There is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of." Virginia Woolf wrote, "Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern." Oscar Wilde credited wonder (the creative sensibility) for allowing a "temperament of receptivity," and Tolstoy identified the transference of "emotional infectiousness." For Susan Sontag divining for wonderment in art was a "form of consciousness."

Still, despite my proclivity towards the dreamy sentiments of

right brain writers, the left-brain musings of scientists seem most instructive. Albert Einstein famously quipped, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle." Einstein's simple mantra, a formula for living, is wonderfully liberating. As modern noctambulists sleepwalk through a repetition of yesterday, we subversives fill our days with enchanting, 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.' [\[\\*\]](#)

There is something compelling about the world's largest brains arriving at the end of science, and speculating, as spell-bound children, what that might mean. For all their ingenuity and intellectual accomplishments, they are not afraid to actively engage in the curiosity that follows from not fully knowing. Or to put a finer point on it—in knowing much, the biggest brains have come to understand how little they know of what there is to know. Objective reality exists—I am no relativist—beyond which there are astonishing possibilities to those with an open mind.

Biologist Richard Dawkins, the foremost scientific materialist and atheist *enfant terrible*, says it's all about the science dummy. He claims, along with second banana atheist/physicist Lawrence Kraus, that science will solve all, in time.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, acknowledging a limit to what can be known furnishes the hunger or, call it wonder-lust for understanding beyond conventional knowledge. Even Stephen Hawkins, no slouch as a scientist and certainly not a theist, expressed frustration at the claim of science ever knowing all. For Hawkins, the quest for a unifying theory—the holy grail in science—even if achievable, does not answer *the* essential question, "Even if there is only one possible unified theory, it is just a set of rules and equations. What is it that breathes fire into the equations and makes a universe for them to describe?" Though Dawkins and his atheist adherents explain away the inconvenient limitations of

science—multiverses most often used as plausible deniability—Hawkins understands that these theories lack credibility in defying the law of causality.

Like many, I was intimidated by science as set against the frivolous nature of my childhood musings. For all the answers swirling about, essential questions never seemed to be asked. Little did I know that childhood wonderment was shared by quantum physics pioneer, Edwin Schrödinger:

*The scientific picture of the world to me is very deficient. It gives me a lot of factual information, puts all our experience in a magnificently consistent order, but is ghastly silent about all that is really near to our heart, that really matters to us. It cannot tell a word about the sensation of red and blue, bitter or sweet, feelings of delight and sorrow. It knows nothing of beauty and ugly, good and bad, God and eternity. Science sometimes pretends to answer questions on these domains, but the answers are very often so silly that we are not inclined to take them seriously ... If its world picture does not include beauty, delight, sorrow, if personality is cut out of it by agreement, how should it contain the most sublime idea that presents itself to the human mind?*

And if science has limits, where might the inquiring mind go? From Robert Jastrow's *God and Astronomers*:

*At this moment it seems that science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest*

*peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for decades.*

With the big questions unanswered, maybe the musings of a nine year old are valid. My original question was and remains: is there meaning to human existence? Consider this: on the scale of probability, each of our individual lives is impossible if not for the fact that we exist. The logical context for this claim is as follows:

Bioinformatician Eugene Koonin worked out the probability of life arising on its own to be 10 to the 1,018rd power (making the title to Lawrence Krause's *A Universe from Nothing* rather absurd). To give Koonin's probably estimate a real world comparison, life arising without intention would be about as likely as picking a single designate grain of sand from all the sand in the world.

And our unlikeliness is reinforced by our loneliness. Physicist and atheist, Brian Cox (not to be confused with actor and patriarch of television sensation "Succession") argues that for all the speculation of UFO's and alien presence in the universe, there is no credible evidence of their existence. It is a very big neighborhood in which to be the lone occupant. Asked about the most impressive feature of the universe Cox replied, "Its incomprehensible size." The universe has two trillion galaxies, each with billions of stars, requiring at least 100,000 light years to cross, with a staggering 93 billion light year diameter. These figures—no idea how they are calculated—only pertain to the observable universe, so estimate might be low, possibly ridiculously low.

In a dark, obscure region of this haystack universe is a metaphoric needle called earth. The universe is a hostile, uninhabitable place if not for the Anthropic Components. These

taken for granted planetary features comprise the many states of astonishing equilibrium that exist for no apparent reason other than to make life possible on earth, human-centric creature that I am. Anthropic components are sometimes referred to as the Goldilocks effect—the earth is neither too hot nor too cold—and are precisely calibrated for life to exist. For example, the earth's distance from the sun for precise temperature, the earth's distance from the moon for precision of ocean tides and gravitational functioning. Each individual component is spectacularly unlikely if we are talking the language of chance, and it must be emphasized that life only happens because all components work and we need all of them to work. So, maybe when we look up into the night sky and feel our insignificance, we should recalibrate that thought into appreciating our miraculous singularity within space of incomprehensible proportions.

Human existence is just as unlikely in biology as it is in physics. The dismissive citing of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* as explanation for life on earth has become a wee bit time worn. In *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Michael Behe deftly demonstrates how advances in science have made unquestioning allegiance to material Darwinism too simplistic for serious inquiry.

*In Darwin's day, the cell was thought to be so simple that first rate scientists such as Thomas Huxley and Ernest Haeckel could seriously think that it might arise from sea mud, which would be quite congenial to Darwinism. Even just fifty years ago it was a lot easier to believe that Darwinism evolution might explain the foundation of life, because so much less was known.*

Among many staggering revelations in cellular biology, it is

now known that a single human cell's DNA coding contains approximately 6.2 billion bits of information. With each human being having roughly 30 trillion cells, the thought that life could spontaneously arise out of sea mud defies the complexity, and hence, wonder of the world.

We humans have a propensity for leveling wonder and taking for granted the impossibility of our lottery winning existence. Still not convinced to run out and buy a couple dozen lottery tickets? Consider that each male ejaculation contains between 40 and 300 million sperm (which surely takes the notion of male toxicity to a whole new level). If a male ejaculates twice a week, or 100 times a year for 60 years, one's chances of being the successful applicant for birth canal egress is one in many trillions. (Okay, weird thought I'll concede, but following the dictates of wonder does have its indiscretions).

I often hear educated, caring people casually declare that what the world needs most is for its population of seven billion to be reduced by several billion. I've never heard an adherent of this progressive wisdom volunteer to be among those eliminated, which probably makes me candidate for elimination. As further reason for my unworthiness, I can't help wondering if in the constant handwringing over the 'human problem,' we forego the wonder of it all; that is, we miss the forest of meaning for the disposing of trees.

Still, each individual's living testament to winning the improbably lottery is not my argument—though hopefully it can help undermine the scientific materialist contention that life in the cosmic boondocks is no big deal. If we are a machine, nothing more than cells that live and die, wholly explainable in physics and biology, there is no wonder.

But the child and occasional scientist filled with wonder intuits there is more. My argument speaks less to the phenomenology of science than to the exceptionality of humanity.

If human life has value, if there is meaning to our existence, it begins with a human-centric acknowledgment that in the vast hostile universe in which we reside, no amount of science can fully account for how the hell we got here.

This changes everything, freeing us to reiterate the childlike inquiry: is our wonderful impossibility proof of purpose and meaning? For the sleepwalking majority, the answer is a stark and decisive no. For those with the curse of childhood enchantment mixed with an eye to logic, the odds of randomness producing a universe from nothing, are non-existent. If the odds of our spontaneous existence are non-existent and we exist, it follows that there must be a reason why. Reconciling the seeming contradiction of unexplainable existence with reality may be impossible for the modern mind steeped in the presumptive narrative of knowing. Those whose lifetime habit is to wonder can easily live with such uncertainty. If fact, wondering in the absence of knowing is what makes this life so bloody rich. And if finding meaning is the meaning, we have a lifetime quest. With uncertainty in full bloom, the best bet for finding transcendent answers may be to seek without expectation.

For fifty years Anthony Flew (*There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*) enjoyed a career as one of the world's foremost atheist philosophers. But late in life, he made a complete reversal because of his conviction that one "must follow the evidence wherever it leads." Flew did not become religious in his old age, but could no longer sustain his philosophical bias because of allegiance to truth and logic. Anthony Flew was a very un-modern man.

We are tethered to narratives and societal bias today in a manner unprecedented in human history. Education, entertainment, social media and politics mimic each other in algorithmic lockstep around acceptable ways of seeing, thinking and being, based on assumptions of race, gender, et al. as determinants for who the hell we are. Given the

fantastic trajectory of how any one of us came to be, this narrowing of thinking is the antithesis of wonder and logic. It is intellectual and spiritual death. Most of all, a world without wonder kills the child within, our life force, and connection both to where we came from and where we are going.

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come*[\[†\]](#)

[\[\\*\]](#) William Wordsworth, *Intimations of Immortality*, 1802.

[\[†\]](#) Ibid.

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**Larry McCloskey** has had eight books published, six young adult as well as two recent non-fiction books. *Lament for Spilt Porter* and *Inarticulate Speech of the Heart* (2018 & 2020 respectively) won national Word Guild awards. *Inarticulate* won best Canadian manuscript in 2020 and recently won a second Word Guild Award as a published work. He recently retired as Director of the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities, Carleton University. Since then, he has written a satirical novel entitled *The University of Lost Causes* (Castle Quay Books, June, 2024), and has qualified as a Social Work Psychotherapist. He lives in Canada with his three daughters, two dogs, and last, but far from least, one wife. His website is [larrymccloskeywriter.com](http://larrymccloskeywriter.com).



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