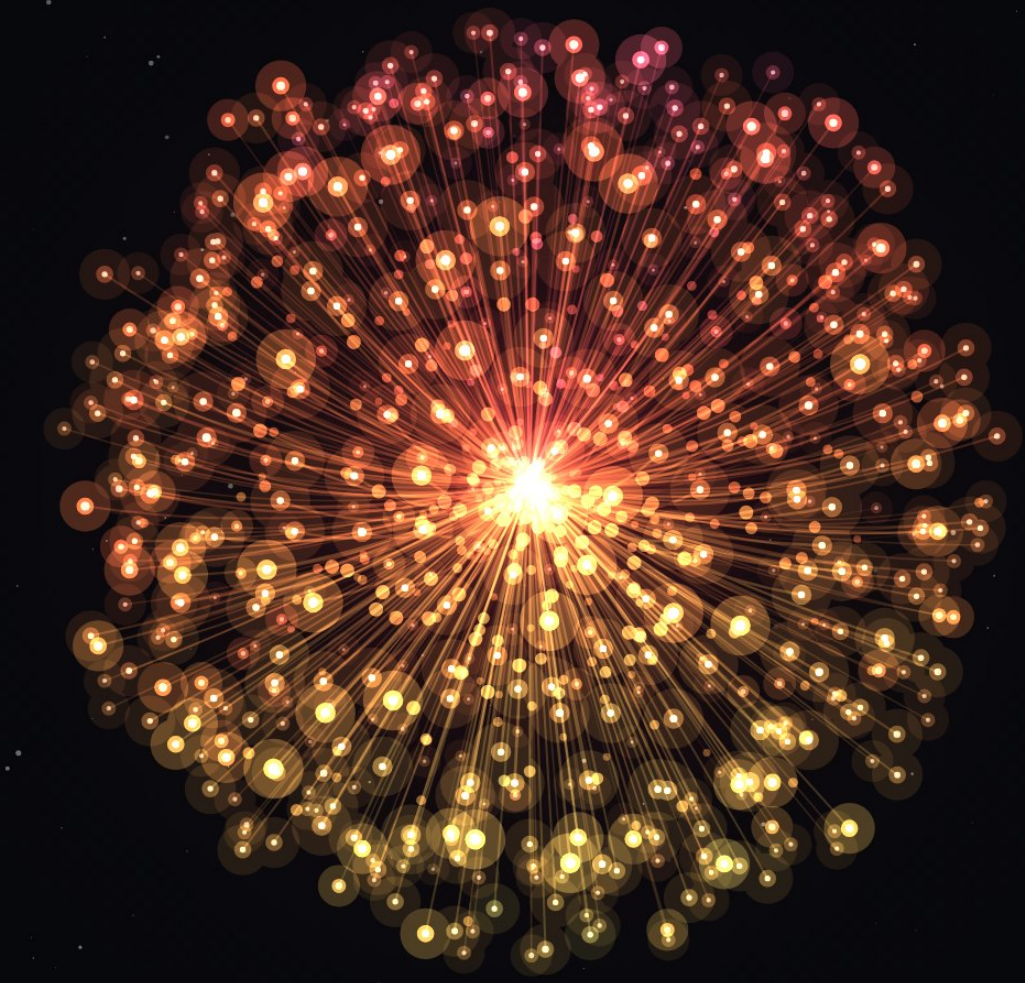
The Source



A vision of consciousness, infinity and return

The Source

A vision of consciousness, infinity and return

One shared origin, two infinities, countless lives, and a return. Thirty-six ideas for holding consciousness, death and meaning together. Everything rests on one postulate: each consciousness would be part of a single consciousness, and the rest follows. One difference from the great traditions before it: this origin would not itself know why it exists. This is metaphysics: a vision to explore and to challenge, not a scientific theory.

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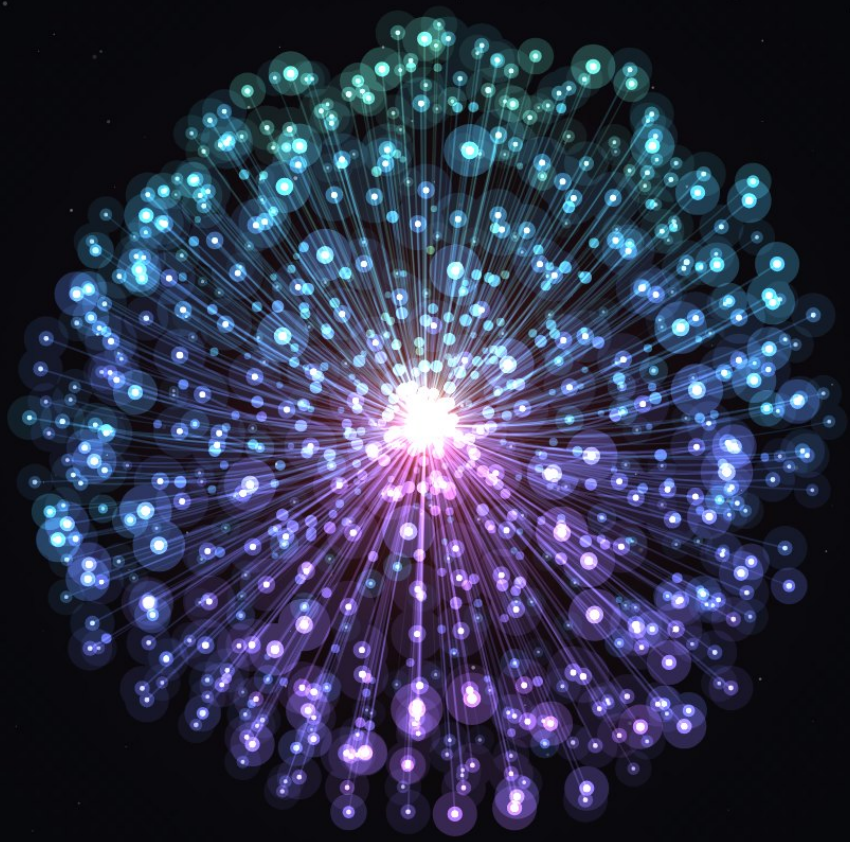
Glossary

A few words come back from one chapter to the next. Here is the sense they take in this book.

Source	The shared origin of everything that exists, which discovers itself by existing.
Fractal	A shape that repeats the same pattern at every scale.
Self	A part of the whole that takes itself for a separate whole: a necessary illusion, like a lens that lets one see.
Soul	A vaster consciousness that gathers several lives.
Unfolding	The movement by which the Source takes form in worlds and lives.
Experience	What no knowledge replaces: going through something once, without knowing what comes next.
Freedom	The part of a life no one dictates, since no one, not even the Source, knows what comes next.
Joy	The moment the whole recognises itself in one of its parts, asking for nothing more.
Balance	The never-settled equilibrium between all the polarities of what is lived.
Return	Joining the whole and bringing to it what was lived.
Form	A particular, and passing, way of being alive.

The echoes after each chapter prove nothing. They only show that these questions are very old, and that others have asked them differently.

Everything starts from one point, and everything returns to it.



A river can be followed back to a trickle of water between two stones. The intuition is the same at the scale of everything that exists: follow consciousnesses, worlds and matter back to a shared origin. That is what the Source names here. Some would call it God, and the word matters less than the idea.

This origin would not stand above the world looking on. Nor would it hold every answer from the start: it would discover what it is as things come to exist, from within, through each point of view.

Existing would be its way of learning what it is.

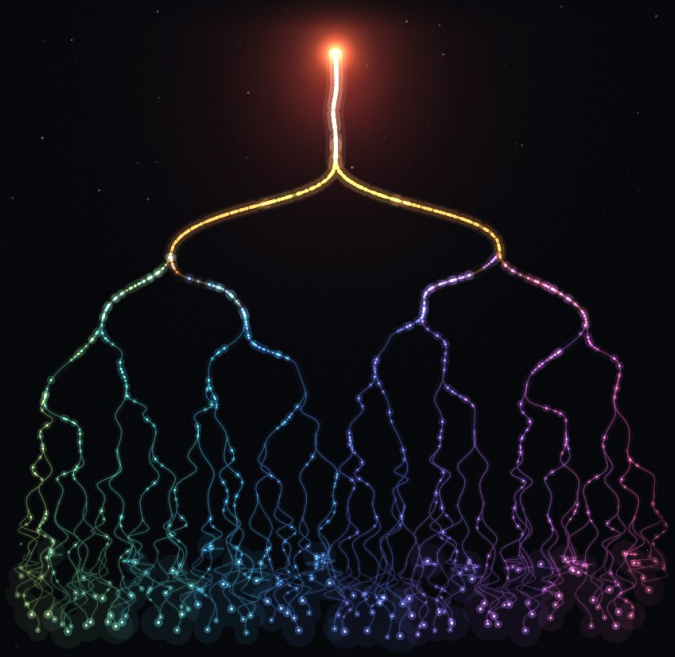
This is not the usual picture. We often imagine the origin as an architect: someone who knows in advance what they are building, sets the pieces one by one and contemplates the result. Here there is no prior plan. The image would rather be that of a musician who improvises and only discovers the melody by playing it. Each note counts, precisely because none was written.

Improvisation is not chance. The musician has hands, an ear, a tradition; they do not play just anything. But what they will play a second from now, they do not yet know, and that not-knowing is what turns each note into an event. The Source, then, would have laws without having a score.

One may object that it is simpler to do without it. The world exists, it obeys laws, and nothing forces us to suppose an origin that would also be a consciousness. The objection is serious, and this book does not claim to refute it. It makes another wager: to take seriously the fact that consciousness exists, that there is someone to see rather than a silent mechanism, and to

ask what the whole would be if it were, from end to end, of that nature.

One may also object the opposite: an origin that does not know what it is would be a lesser god, smaller than the god of the great traditions, who knows everything from all eternity. Perhaps. But a being that knows everything has nothing left to live. It lacks the one thing no knowledge contains: surprise. This book wagers that an origin able to be surprised is larger, not smaller, than one that has foreseen it all.



A scene may help. A child asks where they were before they were born. The usual answer is: nowhere. Another answer is possible, no better proven but one that changes how we look:

they were already there, in another form, as the water of a river was already water before it ran between these particular banks.

The image of the river stops there, because water does not flow back to its source. Here, everything would return. Three movements organise what follows: unfolding, experience, return.

These three movements do not follow one another like the chapters of a story. They happen at once, everywhere, at every scale: something is born, something lives, something returns. And the Source would discover itself in each of these passages.

One last consequence lies closer to home. If the Source discovers itself through every point of view, the one reading these lines is among them, here, now. What follows, then, is not about somewhere else. It is about the place from which one looks.

Echoes

Plotinus, *Enneads*, 3rd century. Everything proceeds from the One, and everything longs to turn back toward it.

Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 1807. The absolute is not given at the outset: Spirit becomes what it is by discovering itself through history.

What remains open

If the Source is the origin of everything, where does it come from?

Two infinities are born from one point.

infinitely large



infinitely small

A fractal repeats one pattern at every scale. Imagine two of them, born from one point. One opens toward the infinitely large: galaxies, clusters, universes, perhaps others still. The other descends toward the infinitely small: cells, atoms, particles, ever deeper levels.

The Source stands at their junction. It is neither the largest nor the smallest element, but what connects the two directions and gives birth to them.

The two directions do not oppose each other. With a telescope, we find galaxies made of clouds, dust and stars. With a microscope, cells made of molecules, then atoms, then particles we can no longer really picture. In both directions, each level opens onto another, and none seems to be the last.

Everything emerges, everything returns, and everything changes on the way.

This is not only an image. Nature really does repeat patterns at several scales: the branching of a tree resembles that of a river, a lung, a bolt of lightning. These resemblances do not prove that the whole is a fractal. They show that the universe likes to repeat itself, and it is that tendency we take seriously here.

One will object that physics knows thresholds. Below a certain length, the very notions of space and distance may lose their meaning; beyond a certain horizon, light has not had time to reach us. Perhaps the two fractals stop there. Perhaps these thresholds only mark the place where our instruments stop seeing. The book does not decide. It notes that every age has believed it had reached the last level, and that it has almost always been wrong.

Pascal saw in this cause for vertigo: humanity lost between two abysses, too large for one, too small for the other. We can keep the vertigo and change its meaning. We would not be lost between the two infinities. We would be at the exact place where they meet, since each consciousness would carry within it the point from which everything starts.

A clear night is enough to feel it. Lying in the grass, one looks for a pale smudge, the Andromeda galaxy, whose light set out before our species existed. And at the same moment one feels one's heart beating, carried by billions of cells one will never see. The two abysses are not far away: one overhead, the other within. Whoever feels both stands between them, without effort.

The movement resembles breathing. Existence stops being a straight line from a beginning to an end: it becomes a living fractal, where one principle acts everywhere. And this pattern, as we will see, holds for consciousness too.

Echoes

Pascal, *Pensées*, 1670. Humanity suspended between two infinities, the infinitely large and the infinitely small.

Benoît Mandelbrot, *Les Objets fractals*, 1975. The word fractal, for shapes that repeat at every scale.

What remains open

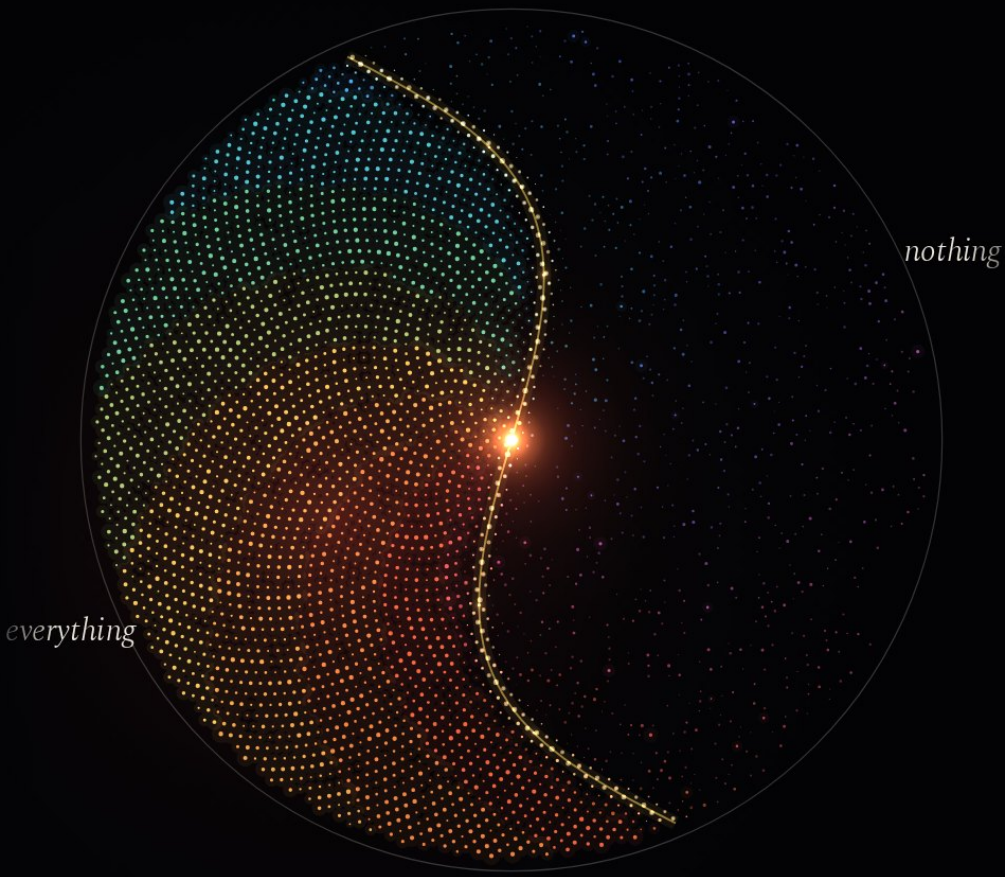
Nothing shows that the universe is fractal. Does the image illuminate reality, or only how we think about it?

infinitely large



infinitely small

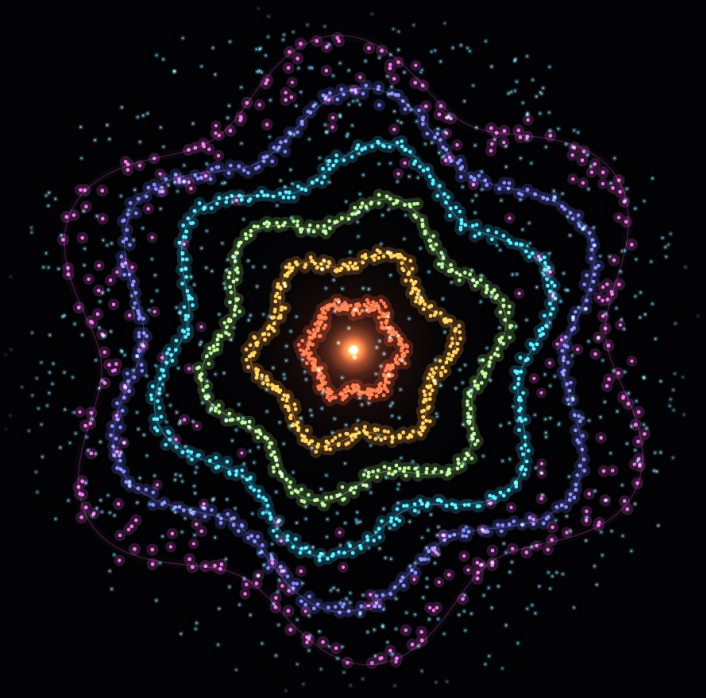
The Source is everything and nothing at once.



Everything, because each universe, consciousness and particle would be an expression of it. Nothing, because before any form it would be no thing in particular.

This nothing is not nonexistence. It is an absence of defined form, a reserve of possibilities, close to what Taoism and non-dual thought have explored.

A blank page is not empty the way a hole is. It contains every possible drawing, precisely because it contains none yet. The silence before a sentence, the stone before the statue, the moment before a decision: each time, the absence of form is also an abundance.



The paradox gives the whole model its engine. Being everything, the Source has nothing to look for outside itself. Being undetermined, it has an infinity of things to discover within.

This double nature explains why the Source is never exhausted. If it were only everything, it would be complete, frozen in its own fullness. If it were only nothing, nothing would happen in it. Nothing calls for forms, and everything welcomes them.

The objection comes quickly: to say that something is both everything and nothing, is that not giving up on saying anything at all? A paradox can be a thought, or an elegant way of avoiding one. The difference lies in what it makes possible. This one at least makes it possible to conceive of an origin that is full without being finished, that already contains everything and yet still has to become.

This intuition is found in traditions that did not know one another. The Tao that can be named is not the true Tao, says Laozi. Christian mystics spoke of a God who can only be described by what he is not. Buddhism speaks of emptiness, not to deny the world, but to recall that no form exists alone and forever.

There is a very simple experience of this nothing. On waking, for a second, one no longer knows who one is or where. Then it all comes back: the name, the room, the day ahead. That second is not empty. It is the moment when one is still no one, and already able to become someone. The Source would stand, always, in that second.

To create is to pass from possibility to experience.

Echoes

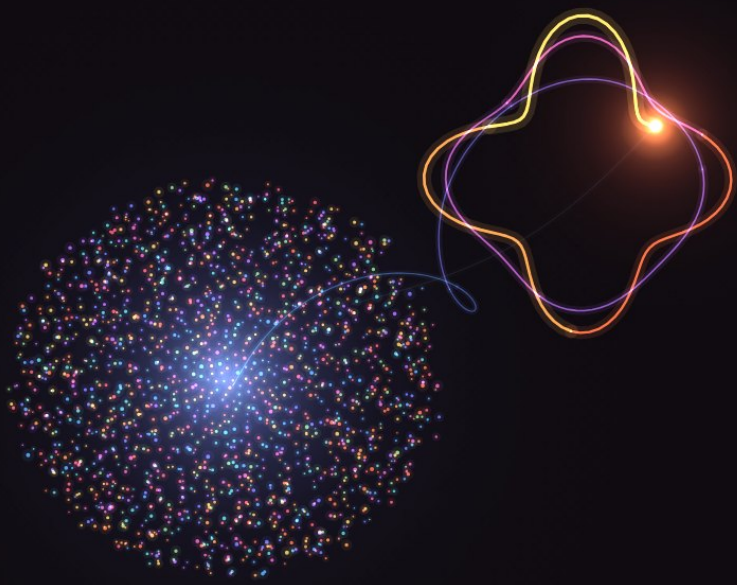
Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, 1440. In the infinite, opposites coincide.

Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, XI. Thirty spokes meet at the hub: it is the emptiness at the centre that makes the cart useful.

What remains open

Can anything be said of an origin that no form defines?

To be born would be to accept being somewhere rather than everywhere.



Everything begins with a limit. Before, there would only be the Source: everything and nothing, without outline. Then a part of it tightens into a point, a body, a gaze, a single pair of eyes. To be born would be this: to consent to being someone, here, now, and not elsewhere.

This limit is not a fall. Ancient stories often see incarnation as an exile: the soul would fall into matter as into a prison. Here it is the reverse. Without limit, no experience is possible. We do not taste a fruit with all mouths at once.

To see something, you have to see it from somewhere.

One will object that the limit is a price, not a gift: to be born is also to become vulnerable, dependent, mortal. That is true, and this book does not hide it. But the same limit is what makes tenderness possible. One can only hold in one's arms what is small, and only protect what can be hurt.

In a delivery room there is a moment that everyone who has lived it recognises: the first cry, and the very brief silence before it. Before, there was a belly, a wait, perhaps a name. After, there is someone. No one can say what changed in that interval, except that the world now holds one more point of view, and that no other will see what this one will see.

A newborn does not yet know they are separate. For months, their mother, the light and their own hand form a single world. Separation is learned slowly: one day they discover that the foot they grab is theirs, and that the face leaning over them is not. Each childhood would thus retrace, in miniature, the path from the whole to someone.

What is born would not be drawn at random. One may suppose that a soul commits to the lives that will teach it what it seeks: this body, this era, these surroundings. This must be said with caution. Nothing allows us to assert it, and the idea becomes dangerous as soon as it is used to tell someone they "chose" their misery or illness. It holds in one sense only: each life would have its reason for being, without anyone being able to read it from outside.

To be born would therefore be less a beginning than a passage. Nothing comes from nowhere: a new form detaches from a ground that was already there, as a wave rises without leaving the sea. And what begins with a first cry is already, for the whole, a way of saying "I". Yet to say it, one needs a body.

Echoes

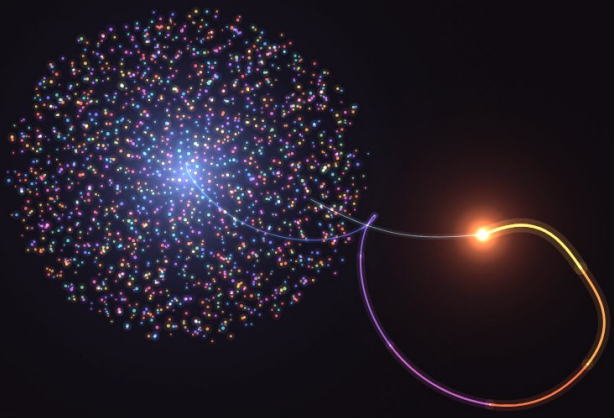
Plotinus, *Enneads* IV, 8. The descent of the soul into a body, both necessary and risky.

Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1971. At first, the infant distinguishes neither itself nor the world: separation is built up little by little.

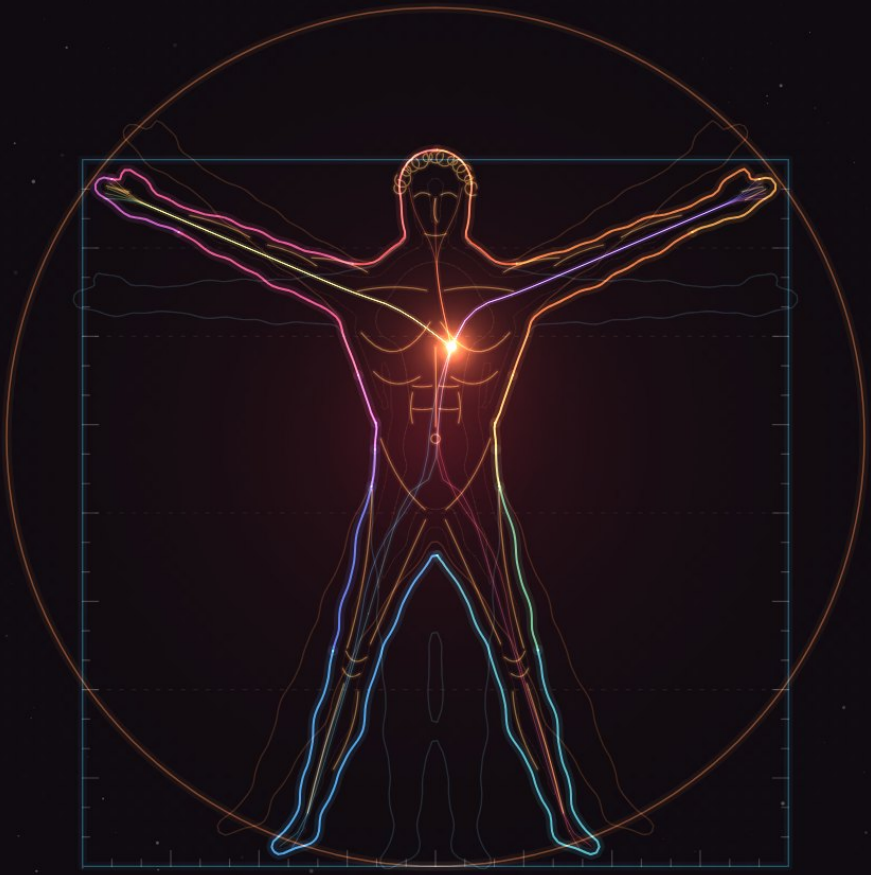
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958. Natality: with each birth something new comes into the world, the very capacity to begin.

What remains open

If each life has its reason for being, what of those that end almost at once? No answer here would ring true.



Consciousness needs a place to feel.



We readily speak of consciousness as a light with nothing beneath it. Yet no thought has ever taken place anywhere but in a body: a body that is hungry, that is cold, that falls asleep in the middle of a sentence. Before it is an idea, experience is a temperature, a weight, a tiredness.

If the Source discovers itself by living, it could not have done so from a distance. It needed hands to touch, skin to feel the rain, a back to know wear. The body would not be the prison of the soul, as has so often been said. It would be the organ through which the infinite learns what a limit is.

Without a body, nothing weighs. And what weighs nothing cannot be learned.

The first mouthful of water after a long walk: no description replaces it. One can know everything about thirst, the chemistry of water, the receptors of the tongue, and have learned nothing of what that mouthful does. Knowledge comes through books. Sensation comes only through flesh.

The body also teaches what the mind would rather ignore. Pain, illness, ageing, the slowness that comes. It forces us to learn patience and dependence, to accept being carried when we can no longer carry. No disembodied consciousness could receive these lessons.

An old woman climbs the stairs, stopping at every landing. She knows each step by its weight. What she knows of duration, of effort, of gratitude for a handrail, no young body knows yet. People say she has lost her strength. One could also say she has learned what it was worth.

It has its own intelligence. The heart beats without being asked, the wound closes during sleep, the hand finds its way to a lock

that memory has forgotten. Part of what lives in us does not wait for our opinion, and that is just as well.

One will object that it is the other way round: consciousness would be nothing but an activity of the body, of the brain in particular, and this book makes the flesh the instrument of a consciousness that comes before it. The two readings agree on one point: without a body, no human experience. They part ways over who plays the instrument. The sciences describe with growing precision what happens in the brain when one sees red. They do not yet say why it feels like something to see it. That gap is where this vision settles, without claiming to close it.

To inhabit one's body would then mean neither dominating it nor fleeing it, but taking it for what it is: the precise, mortal, irreplaceable place where the whole can feel, for now. A body is not an envelope one carries. It is the form a life takes when it touches the world.

Echoes

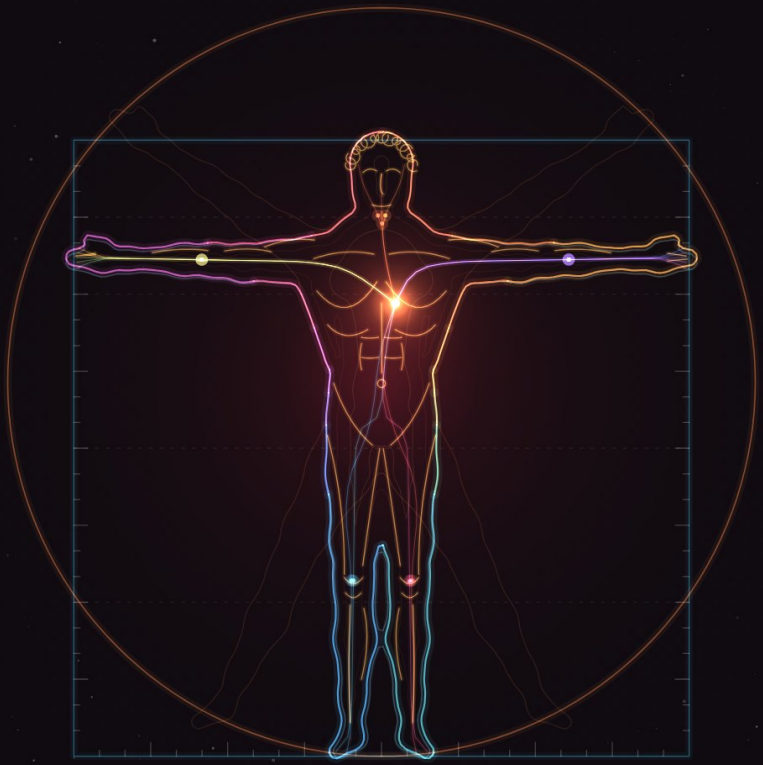
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945. The body is not one object among others: it is our way of being in the world.

Spinoza, *Ethics*, book III, 1677. "No one has yet determined what the body can do."

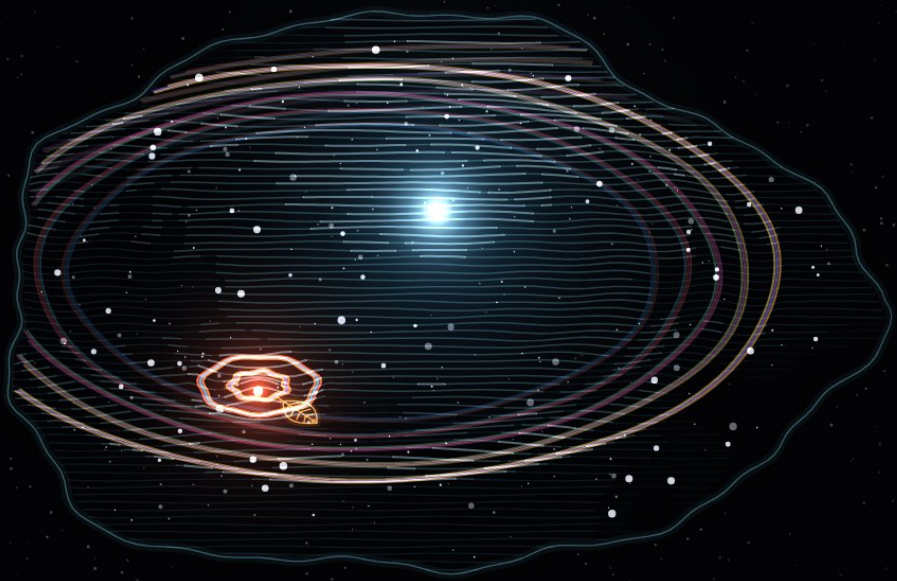
Plato, *Phaedo*. The soul chained to the body, longing to be freed from it. The opposite position, as a counterpoint.

What remains open

Could a consciousness without a body still learn anything? Or would the return be the end of all sensation?



Looking at everything for the first time.



On a Tuesday, on a pavement, an adult hurries along. He is late. The child he is holding by the hand stops dead in front of a puddle.

The child throws in a pebble. The circles widen, touch the edge, come back. Another, bigger. Then a leaf, which floats. Then the child crouches and looks, very seriously, at the sky trembling inside the water.

The adult says they must go. The child does not hear. No one has told them it was interesting: they discover it, and the discovery is enough. They are not playing to win, or to learn, or for later.

Nor does the child try to keep what they see. No photo, no telling anyone. Tomorrow this puddle will be forgotten, and it will not matter: there will be another, and it will be the first again.

To play is to do something for nothing, and to do it wholeheartedly.

The adult looks at his watch. He knows the name of everything that is there: a puddle, a pebble, a leaf, the sky. It is a long time since he saw anything but the names.

Names are useful. They have let him cross thousands of streets without stopping at each one. But from recognising things so often, he has stopped meeting them.

Then, because he has no choice, he crouches in turn. And for a few seconds, without having meant to, he sees what the child sees: a cloud passing beneath his feet, circles that serve no purpose, the world as if it were beginning.

He will arrive late. He will not be able to say why the day felt different.

Echoes

Heraclitus, Fragment 52. "Time is a child at play: the kingdom belongs to a child."

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883. The three metamorphoses: the spirit becomes a camel, then a lion, then a child, "a game, a wheel rolling out of itself".

Jesus, *Gospel of Matthew*, 18, 3. "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

What remains open

We do not know whether the fresh gaze survives growing up. We know only that it sometimes returns, by accident, at puddle height.



A part of the whole takes itself for a whole, and that is how it can see.



In the morning, at the mirror, someone recognises themselves. They do not ask who is there: the answer goes without saying. This face, this name, these memories, this way of tilting the head. There is a self, it is here, and it carries on from yesterday to today without needing to be thought about.

And yet, if this book is right, the self is not what it believes itself to be. It would not be a whole closed in on itself, but a part of the Source that at some point took itself for a separate whole. A wave that thinks it is alone because it has a crest, a shape, a direction, and cannot see the sea that lifts it.

The idea is not new. The Buddha taught that no self endures. Hume, looking for his own, found only a stream of perceptions. The neurosciences, in their own way, describe a self assembled by the brain, more fragile than it seems: a fever, a lesion, a sleepless night are sometimes enough to blur it.

The self would not be a lie. It would be a lens.

It would be wrong to conclude that one should get rid of it. A lens does not deceive about light: it gathers it into a point, and that point is what burns, what lights up, what lets one see. Without a self there would be no one to feel cold, to hesitate, to love this person rather than another. The Source could live nothing in particular. The illusion of being separate would be the price, and the condition, of every singular point of view.

One will object that this is playing with words: either the self exists or it does not. But many real things are ways of holding together rather than objects. A whirlpool in a river is made of nothing but the water passing through it, and yet one can follow it with one's eyes, watch it form and come undone. The self

would be of that order: nothing but the whole, but the whole held in one place long enough to become someone.

The child, as we have seen, does not yet quite have a self. They build it by learning to say "I", "mine", "no". It is long, necessary, often painful work. Then comes, for many, another, quieter work: learning to hold it less tightly. Not losing it, but no longer defending it like a fortress.

For the same self that lets one see can also stop one seeing. When it takes itself for the centre, everything becomes comparison, wounded pride, territory to guard. It is no longer a lens but a screen. Much of what this book describes later, fear, loneliness, even evil, would begin there: in a part of the whole that forgets it is one.

Sometimes the self falls quiet for a moment. Before a landscape, in absorbing work, in the middle of shared helpless laughter, one stops thinking of oneself, and has never been more present. It is not a disappearance. It is the lens becoming so clear that one forgets it is there.

Echoes

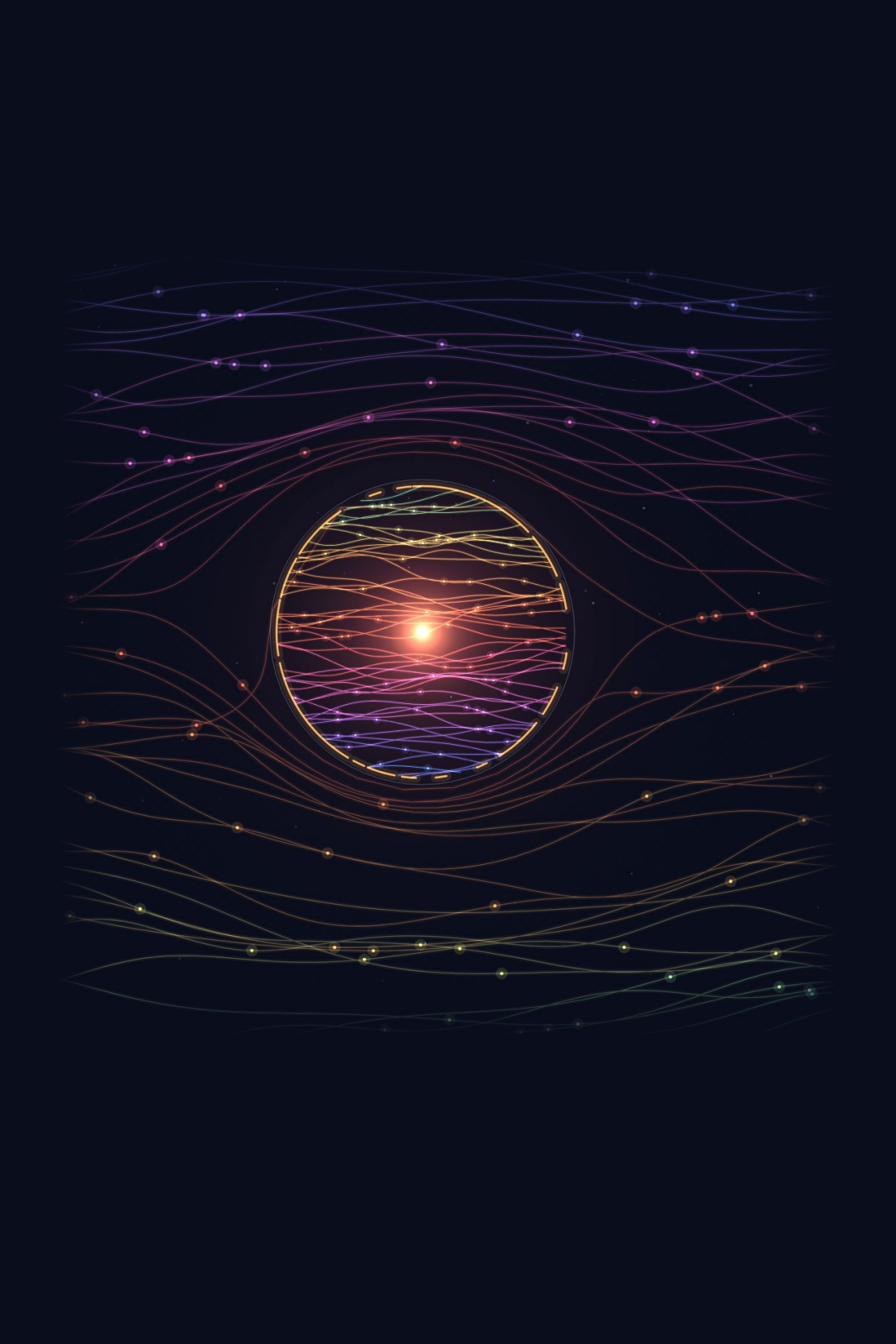
David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, IV, 6, 1739. When he enters most intimately into what he calls himself, he always stumbles on some particular perception, never on a self without a perception.

Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Paul Demeny, 1871. "I is another."

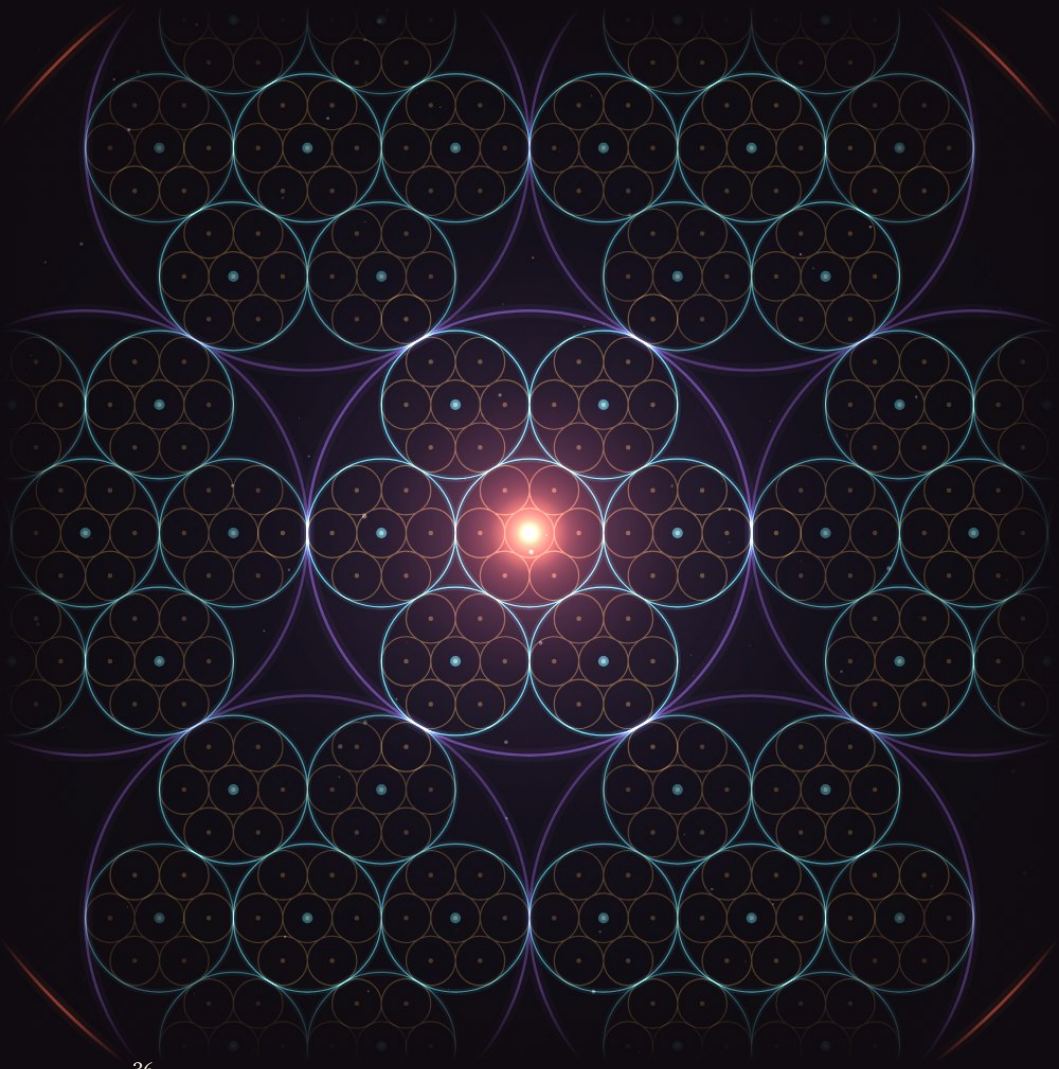
Douglas Hofstadter, *I Am a Strange Loop*, 2007. The I as a pattern that perceives itself: a loop rather than a thing.

What remains open

If the self is a necessary illusion, who wakes up when it falls away?



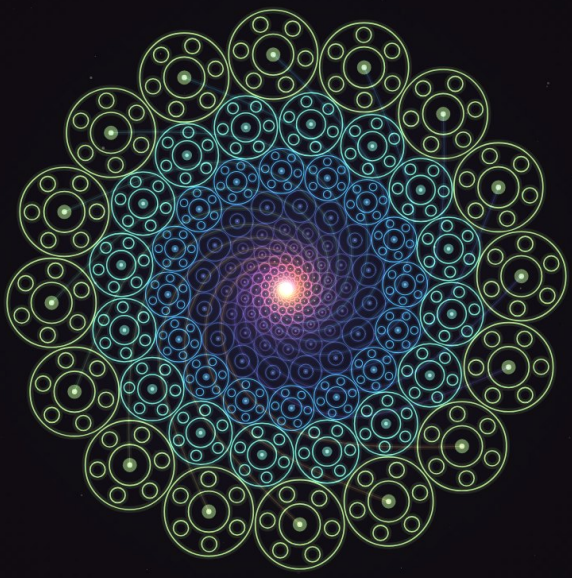
There is no clear border between the individual and the whole.



The pattern repeats at each level. A life belongs to a vaster consciousness, which we can call a soul. That soul belongs to a vaster one still, and so on up to the Source.

We can already see it at our own scale. A cell has a life of its own, and yet it belongs to an organ, which belongs to a body. That body belongs to a family, a city, a species, a living planet. At each level, something acts as a whole, and at the same time as a part. No one has ever found the floor where this stops.

A shoal of sardines turns as one before a predator. No fish decided it; all of them did it. For a second the whole shoal behaves like a single animal, then comes apart into thousands of swimmers. The whole and the parts are not two things: they are one thing seen from two distances.



These levels do not crush one another, and none is worth more than another. A soul does not think in place of the lives it gathers, any more than a body decides in place of its cells. Each level has its own way of seeing. The whole would not be a chief, but a choir.

Where does the individual end, and universal consciousness begin?

The question may have no clear-cut answer. There would then be a single consciousness, discovering itself through an infinity of points of view, none of which stops being unique.

One will object that a city does not think, that a species feels nothing, and that this lends consciousness to mere assemblies. The objection is partly right: nothing suggests a traffic jam has a point of view. But neither can we explain how neurons, none of which thinks, together make someone who thinks. If that happens once, inside a skull, it is not absurd to wonder whether it happens elsewhere, at scales we do not know how to look at.

It also changes how one sees oneself. The self of the previous chapter, which believes it is all of a piece, would already be a community: billions of cells, inherited memories, inner voices that do not always agree. Being someone would not mean being a block, but a provisional harmony. And what holds within would hold without.

Echoes

Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine*, 1967. The holon: everything that exists is at once a whole and part of a larger whole.

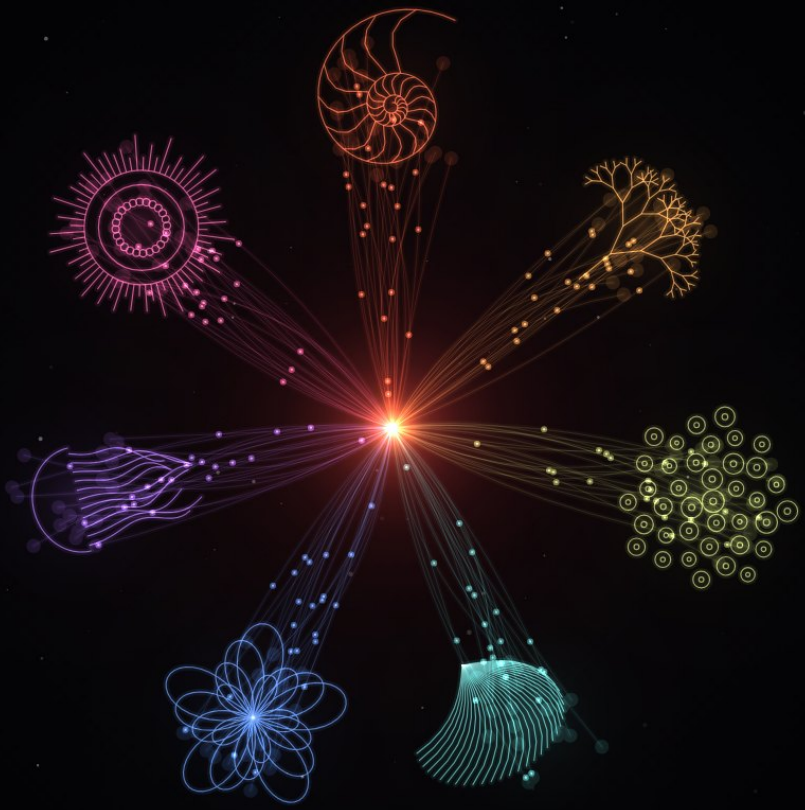
Indra's net, Huayan Buddhism, 7th century. An endless net in which each jewel reflects all the others.

The Upanishads, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, c. 6th century BCE. "You are that": each one's self and the absolute are one.

What remains open

If a vaster consciousness guides the lives it gathers, what becomes of each one's freedom?

Consciousness does not begin with us.



So far, we have hardly spoken of anything but human lives. That is a habit, not a necessity. If each consciousness is a part of the Source, nothing allows us to stop the list at our species.

A dog waiting at a door, an octopus exploring a jar with its arms, a crow hiding its food while watching who is looking: year after year, science discovers forms of attention and sensitivity that were denied to animals. It does not say what they live from the inside. It makes it hard to claim that they live nothing.

Many have known this without any theory. A cat that holds your gaze for a long time, a horse that comes closer when you are crying, a bird that lands on a branch and looks at you: for a second, you are certain of being seen by someone. We do not know what that second is for them. We know it is not nothing.

Elephants have been seen lingering for a long time beside the body of one of their own, touching it with their trunks, coming back to the place days later. No one knows what they feel then. But it becomes hard to regard mourning as a human invention.

Each species would be another way for the whole to feel itself exist.

The bat perceives the world through the echo of its cries. The bee sees colours invisible to us. The octopus thinks partly with its arms. None of these experiences is a reduced version of ours: they are other windows, opening onto what we will never see. A Source seeking to know itself would need them all.

For plants, or for an entire forest, the question becomes more uncertain. It would be easy to project a soul onto them as we project a face onto a cloud. Better to stay modest: we do not know where consciousness begins. We can only leave the door open.

The consequence, however, is concrete. If an animal is also an expression of what we are, its suffering is not a detail. How we treat other living beings would become, very directly, a way of treating ourselves.

There remains a difficulty this vision cannot avoid. Nature is not a peaceful fellowship: the wolf eats the lamb, some wasps lay their eggs inside living caterpillars. If every living being is part of the same whole, the whole would be endlessly devouring itself. One can see this as a decisive objection. One can also see it as what the word "whole" means: the Source would not have chosen the gentleness of a world without risk, but a world where every life depends on other lives. That does not erase the cruelty. It only forbids us to add our own without need.

Echoes

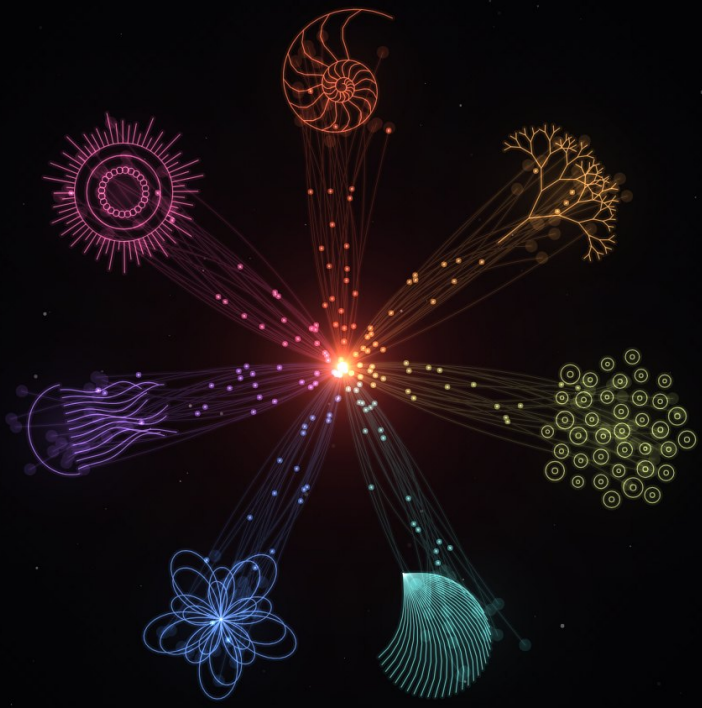
Thomas Nagel, *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*, 1974. One can know everything about an animal without knowing what it is like to be it.

Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, 2012. Neuroscientists acknowledge that many animals possess the neurological substrates of consciousness.

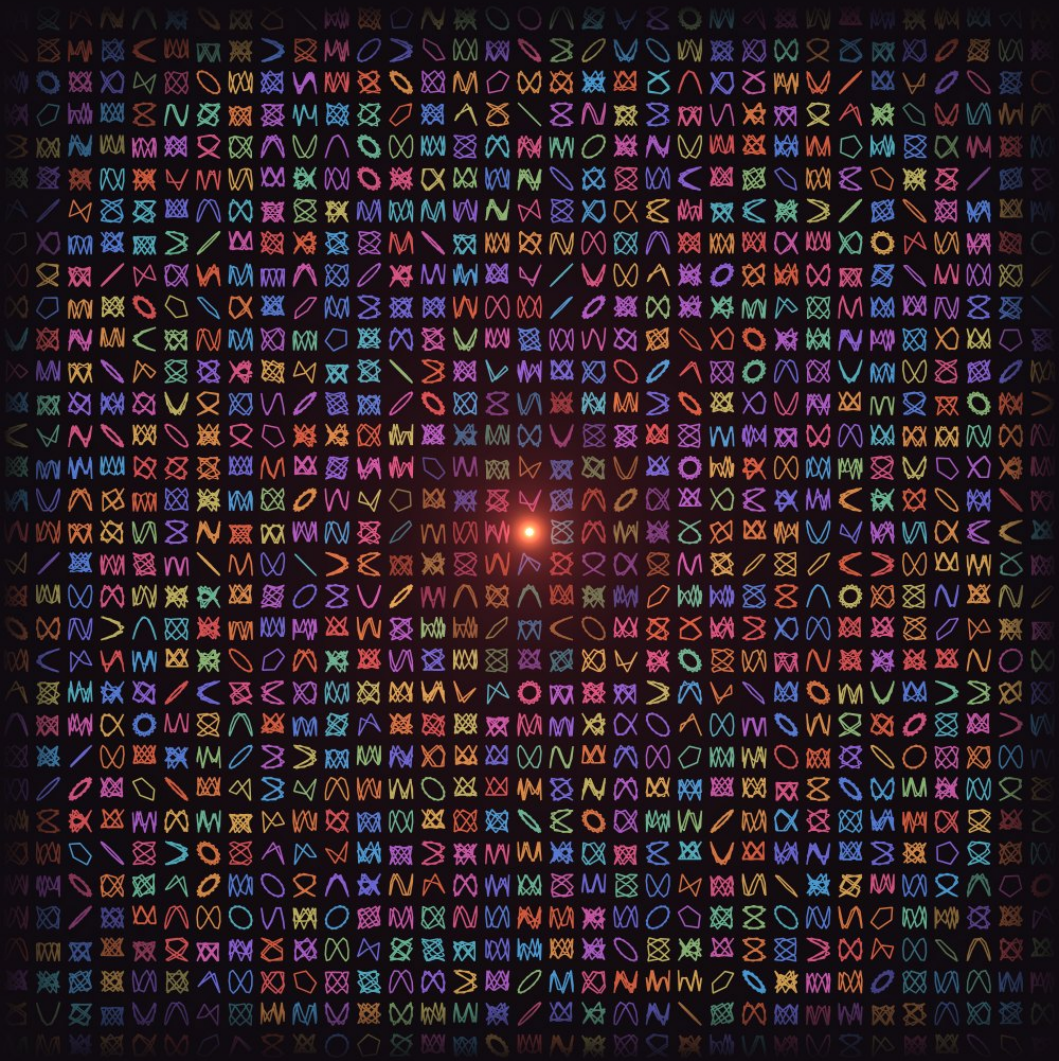
Charles Darwin, letter to Asa Gray, 1860. He cannot persuade himself that a beneficent God would have designed wasps that feed within the living bodies of caterpillars. The counterpoint.

What remains open

Where does consciousness stop: at the animal, the plant, the cell? This vision cannot draw the line, and does not claim there is none.



A soul could live several existences at the same time.



Take twenty-five lives, to make it concrete. Twenty-five distinct people, each with their own emotions and decisions, knowing nothing of one another. Yet all of them feed a single consciousness.

The parallelism has a purpose: to learn more than a single point of view allows. One life discovers courage, another forgiveness, another attachment.

One can picture what that would look like. A life spent giving orders, another obeying them. A life of plenty, another of want. A life that keeps silent, another that talks too much. None of them, alone, quite understands what power, hunger or speech are. Together they would go all the way round, along paths that never cross.

A familiar image may help. A novelist brings their characters to life each from the inside, with their desires and their mistakes. None of them knows they are the work of another. Yet in writing them, the author discovers things they did not know about themselves. Here there would be no outside author: the soul would be at once the one who writes and the ones who live.

None is a copy of another, and none can be replaced. Each point on the grid sees what the others will never see.

One will object that the idea dissolves the person: if I am only one life among twenty-five, what is left of me? Nothing would be taken away. A character in a novel is no less themselves because the author wrote others. Each of these lives would be whole, with a single face, a single story, a single death. It is the soul that would be plural, not the person.

The idea changes how we look at others. The neighbour on the bus, the old woman at the market, the adversary we hate could

be, at another scale, close kin: parts of the same effort to understand. Nothing proves it. But it is enough to hold it as possible for indifference to become harder.

The number matters little. Twenty-five, a thousand, or a number no human mind can picture: the figure in this chapter, for that matter, lets the grid run on to the unlimited. What matters is the principle. A single life cannot see everything. Several lives led together see more, and each sees what only it can see.

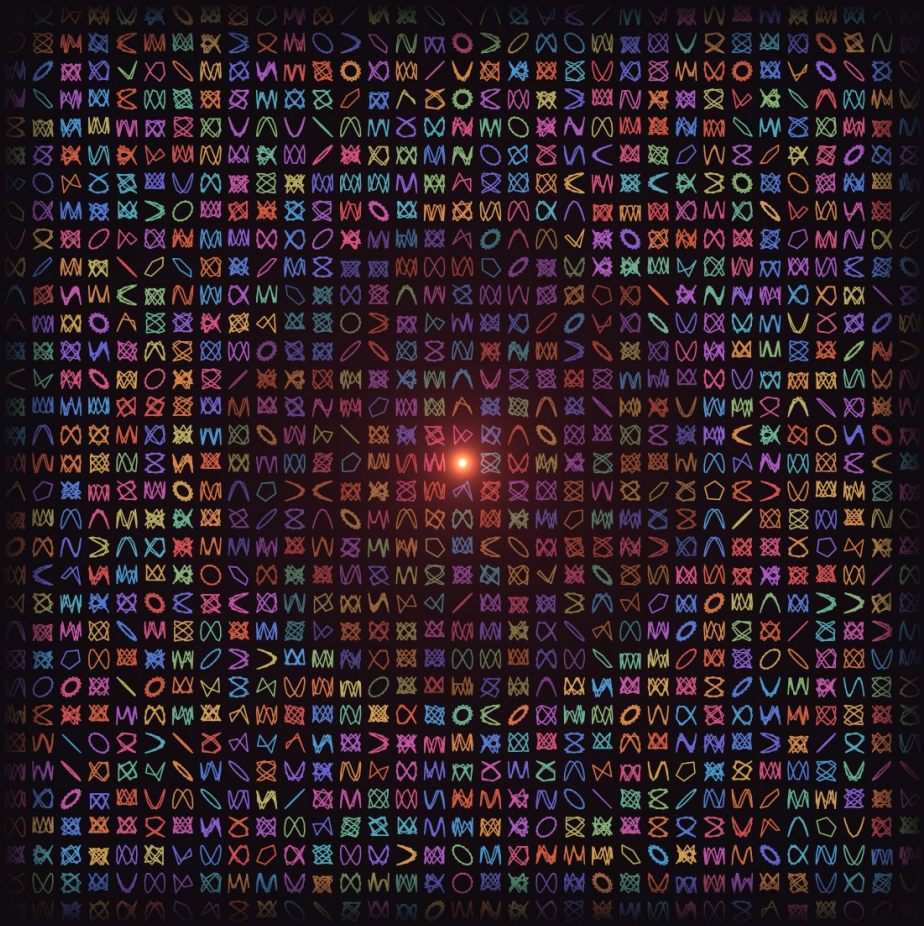
Echoes

Fernando Pessoa, the heteronyms, from 1914. One poet, several complete authors, each with a life and a body of work.

Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 1855. "I am large, I contain multitudes."

What remains open

No evidence supports the idea of shared lives. What is it worth, then, as a way of looking at others?



To discover, one must first not know.



It is the simplest objection, and perhaps the strongest. If a soul lives several existences, why does none of them remember the others? No one wakes up with the memory of another language, another face, another death.

The answer most consistent with this vision would be: because memory would make the experience impossible. Knowing is not living, as we will see. A life that remembered all the others would already know too much. It could no longer be afraid for the first time, love for the first time, lose for the first time.

Forgetting would not be a flaw in the journey. It would be its condition.

We know this mechanism on a small scale. An actor who plays well forgets, for the length of the scene, that they are acting. A reader caught up in a novel forgets they are holding a book. These lapses are not failures: they are what make the experience real. The moment the actor watches themselves act, the scene rings false.

Forgetting would then not be a loss, but a veil. What is lived would not disappear: it would be kept at another scale, that of the soul, which gathers what each life does not know of the others. Each existence would write in a book it cannot reread, and which nonetheless loses no page.

A more everyday comparison helps too. No one remembers their first two years, and no one concludes they did not happen. What was learned in them, walking, recognising a face, trusting or being wary, remains in every gesture, without a single memory to bear witness. A whole life could be like that: forgotten, and still at work.

Sometimes the veil seems to grow thin. A sense of déjà vu, an unexplained pull toward a place we have never been, the sudden certainty of having always known someone. These experiences prove nothing: memory and the brain explain them very well without any other world. We can only find them a place.

One should also be wary of the use made of this idea. To explain a fear, an attraction or a misfortune by an unverifiable earlier life is to give oneself an answer nothing can ever contradict. This book prefers to leave these impressions where they are: riddles, not proofs.

A simpler consequence remains. If each life begins without memory, each begins with the same freedom. No one is a prisoner of what they might have been elsewhere. Forgetting, which looks like an injustice, would at bottom be a form of trust: each life is handed a blank page.

Echoes

Plato, *Republic*, book X. The myth of Er: before being reborn, souls drink from the Lethe, the river of forgetting.

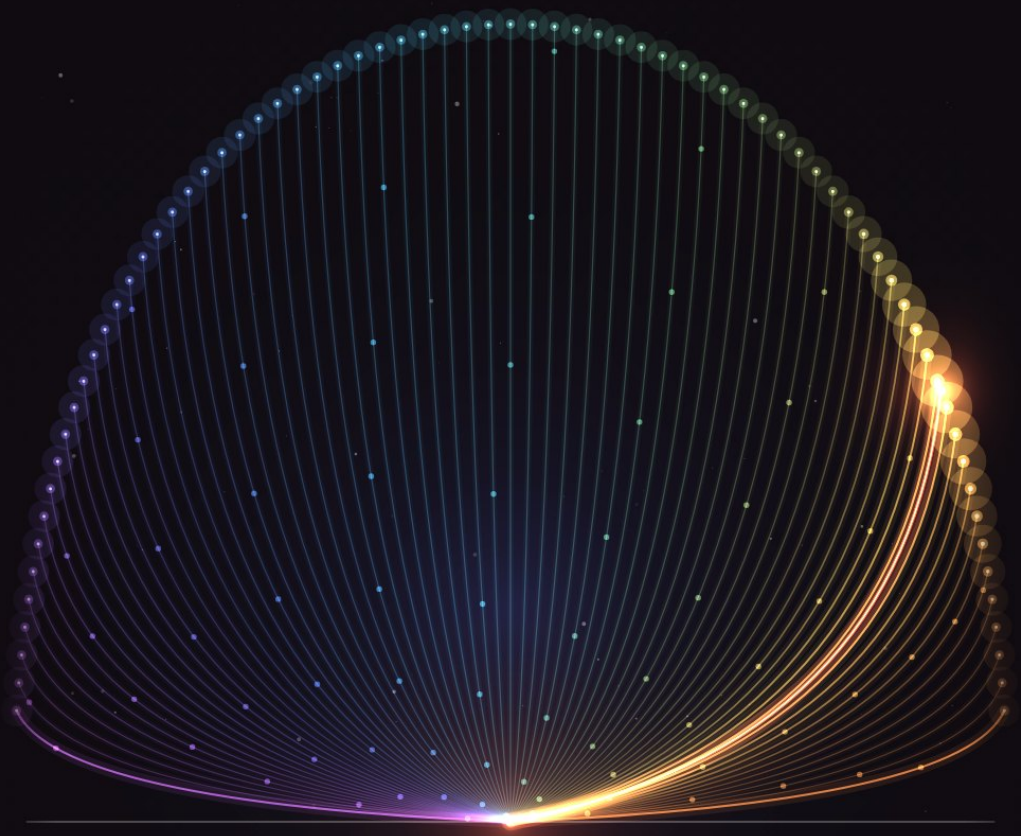
Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 2000. A reserve forgetting, which does not destroy what has been but shelters it.

What remains open

Is a forgetting this complete still distinguishable from there being no earlier lives at all? It is the question this vision cannot escape.



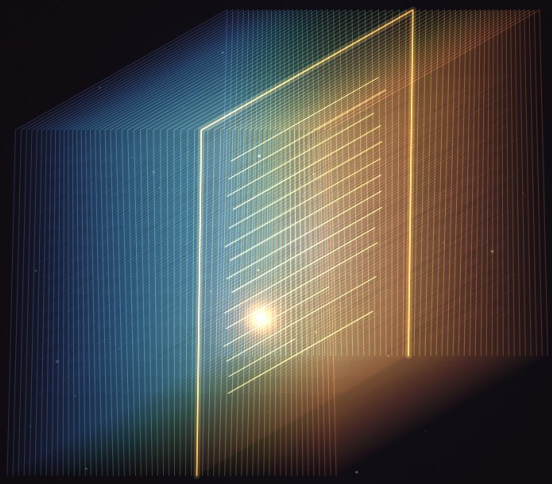
Every page of the book exists at the same time.



We read a book page after page, and that is how we live time. But the reader moving forward does not stop the other pages from being there, together, between the two covers.

Even the time we count is not quite what it seems. We date our days from the birth of Jesus, and yet he would have been born 'before Christ'. In the sixth century a monk, Dionysius Exiguus, worked out the year of the Incarnation to draw up his Easter tables. He seems to have missed by a few years: according to the Gospels, Jesus is born under Herod, and Herod probably died around 4 BC. The year 2000 would then have been celebrated a few years late. This has been known for centuries, and no one corrects it: changing the count would cost more than the error. The calendar holds because everyone uses it, not because it is exact. The number written at the top of a letter is a convention; time itself is something else.

Physicists go further, with an image close to the book. Since Einstein, time is no longer a single river flowing for everyone at the same pace: two events that are simultaneous for one are not for another. Some conclude that past, present and future are equally real, like the places on a map. This is only an interpretation, and a debated one. Yet it shows that the book's intuition is not absurd.



At the scale of a soul, past, present and future could have this simultaneity. Lives separated by centuries would be neighbours: two pages of one volume, which do not read each other.

Everyone has had an inkling of this. A song heard by chance in a shop, and for a second one is not remembering a childhood summer: one is there. The past does not come back from far away. It was very close, one page over.

The past would not be behind us: only on another page.

This leads to a surprising idea. Two lives of the same soul could be separated by centuries, one in the Middle Ages, the other today, and yet nourish each other. What one learns would enrich the whole, from which the other benefits without knowing it. The past would not only serve the present: the present could also, in its way, serve the past.

The image has a cost, and it must be paid. If all the pages already exist, what follows would be written, and the freedom this book will speak of would be a reader's illusion. The book can be held another way: the pages would coexist, but they would not be filled in advance. Each would be written as it is lived and, once written, would never be erased. Time would not be a line one travels along, but ink that dries.

There is a certain peace with the past to be found here. What has been lived would not be erased by passing time: the page stays there, whole, even once turned. Happy moments would not be lost. They would simply be elsewhere in the book.

Echoes

Augustine, *Confessions*, book XI, c. 400. Past and future exist only as present to the mind: memory, attention, expectation.

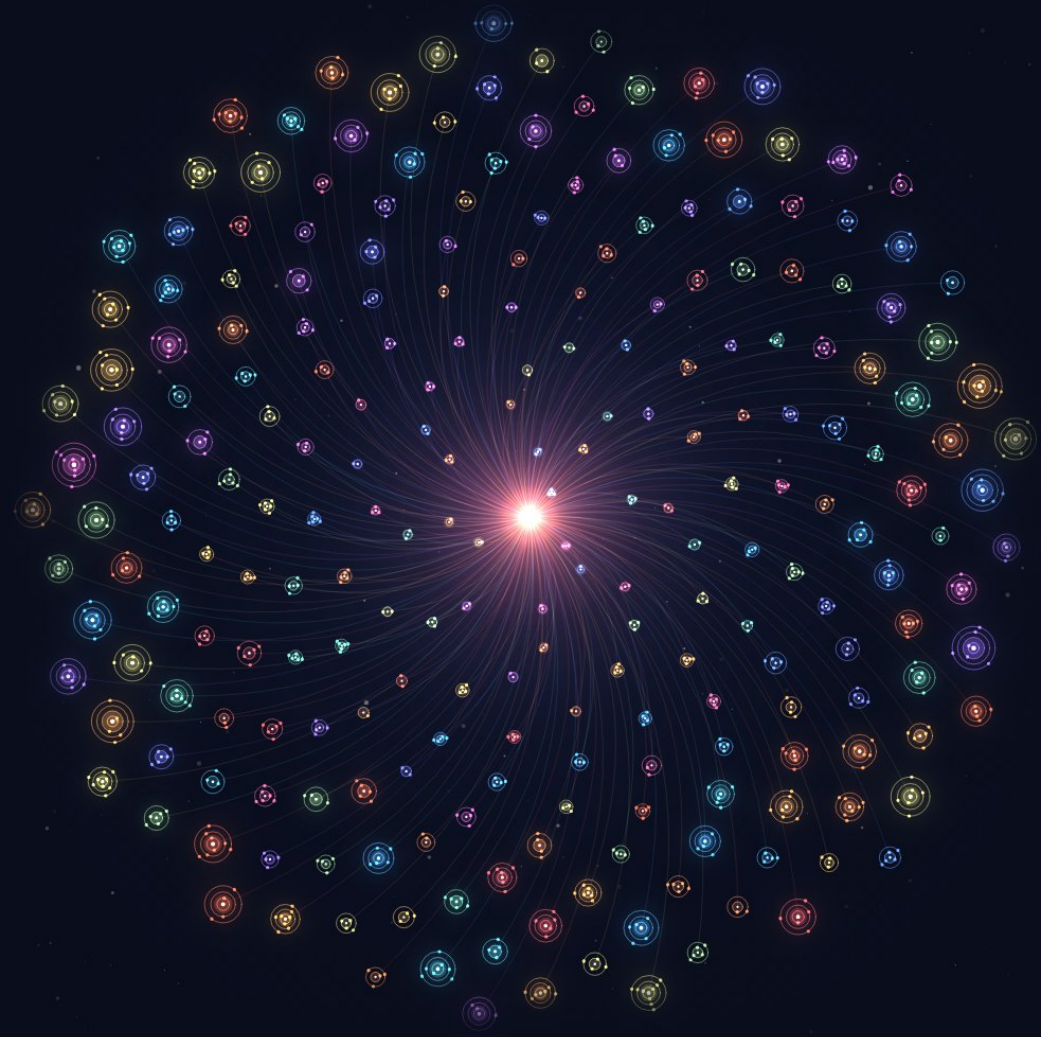
Dionysius Exiguus, *Easter tables*, 525. He sets year 1 at the birth of Christ, and misses by a few years.

Hermann Minkowski, *Space and Time*, 1908. Time becomes one dimension among four, and a whole history fits on a single line.

What remains open

The book is an image: it does not show that the future already exists. And if all the pages coexist, are they written as they are lived?

A limitless exploration has no reason to stop at one world.



If the Source explores in order to learn, nothing obliges it to keep to a single world. There would be others, with other laws and other senses: a world where time is perceived as we perceive space, another without light, where everything passes through vibration. Their unity would come not from any resemblance, but from their shared origin.

This multitude could make ours seem insignificant. It is the reverse: if each world offers what no other offers, what is lived here could not be lived anywhere else. And since something would always remain to be discovered, perfection would be neither a starting point nor a point of arrival, but a direction.

One will object that nothing can be said of worlds we will never see. True. They serve here less to describe than to recall that ours does not exhaust what is possible.

Nor is it necessary to go so far to see a world being born. Each of us invents one, every night.

Echoes

Giordano Bruno, *On the Infinite Universe and Worlds*, 1584. Countless worlds, in a universe without edge.

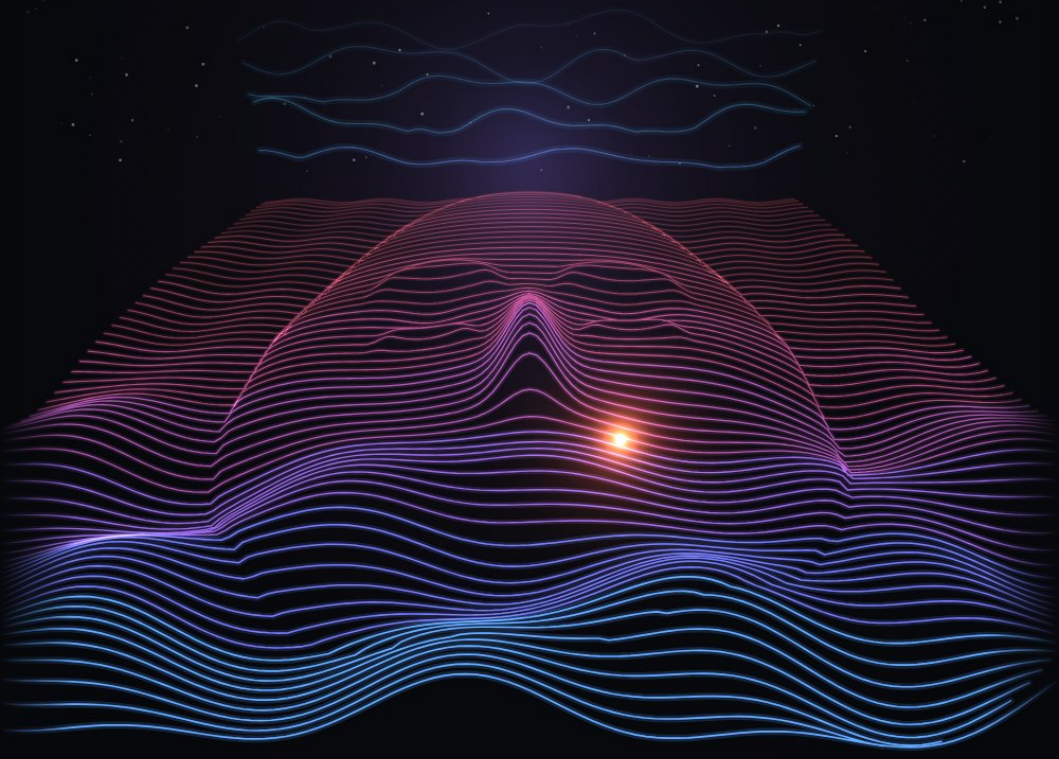
Hugh Everett, doctoral thesis, 1957. A reading of quantum physics in which each possibility is realised in a branch.

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883. Against those who invent other worlds to console themselves for this one. The counterpoint.

What remains open

Several physical theories envisage other universes; none is proven. Here they remain an image of the inexhaustible, not a thesis.

Every night, a consciousness invents a world and forgets it.



Every night, without effort, we fabricate cities, faces, whole conversations. We talk with the dead, we fly, we recognise a house we have never entered. And by morning, almost everything fades within minutes.

The dream shows what waking hides: a single consciousness can produce an entire world, with its characters, its obstacles, its surprises. Each figure in the dream seems independent, with a voice, intentions, sometimes malice. Yet all of them come from the same sleeper.

There are nightmares, too. The sleeper makes up what pursues them, and is afraid of it all the same. Nothing shows better how one part of a consciousness can be frightened of another part of the same consciousness, without knowing they are one.

It is the closest image we have of what this vision imagines on a vast scale. The Source would be like a dreamer who does not know they are dreaming: it gives itself worlds, loses itself in them, meets itself under a thousand faces, without knowing in advance what will happen.

In a dream, every character is the dreamer. None of them knows it.

There are dreams in which the sleeper realises they are dreaming. Often the surprise is enough to wake them. Sometimes they stay, and the dream changes nature: they can fly on purpose, question the characters knowing where they come from. But the dream may then lose its force, as if knowing had emptied it. One more hint: a consciousness that knows itself to be the author of everything no longer quite feels what it lives.

There are, however, two crucial differences. The dream dissolves, whereas what is lived, in this vision, remains. And the

characters of a dream have no life of their own, whereas here each life has its own, which no one dictates.

The dream also teaches humility. While we dream, everything seems obvious, even the absurd. Only on waking do we see the incoherence. Nothing guarantees that our waking certainties are of a different nature, or that no awakening awaits us.

Dying may be less like falling asleep than like waking up. This book does not know. But it happens, on waking, that we keep from a dream not the story, only the taste: a tenderness, an unease, a colour that lasts all morning. A life that rejoins the whole would keep something similar.

Echoes

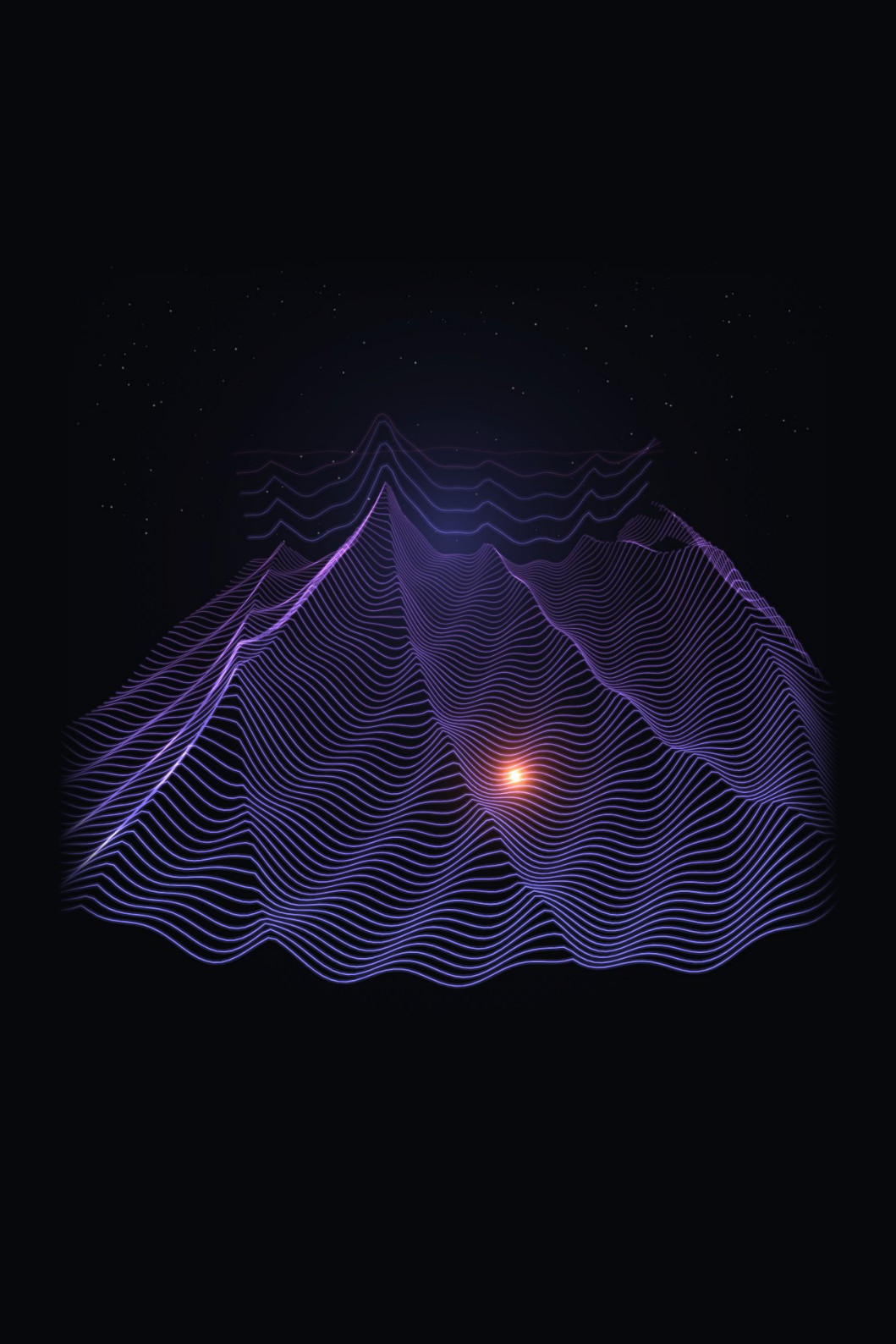
Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, chapter II, 4th century BCE. The butterfly dream: was it Zhou dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming it is Zhou?

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, I, 1641. "There are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep."

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 1900. The dream comes from desire and the repressed, not from a vaster consciousness. The opposite reading, as a counterpoint.

What remains open

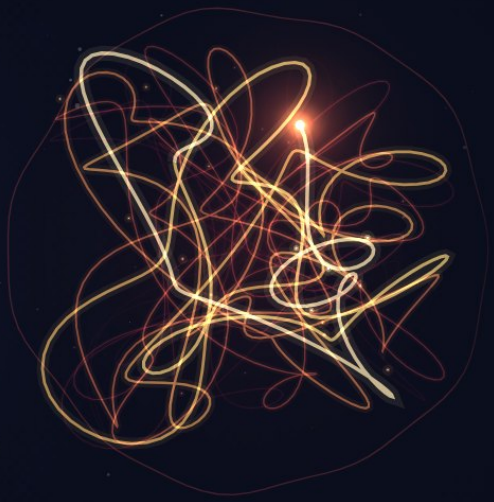
If a consciousness can dream an entire world, what distinguishes a dreamed world from a lived one?



To know is not to live.



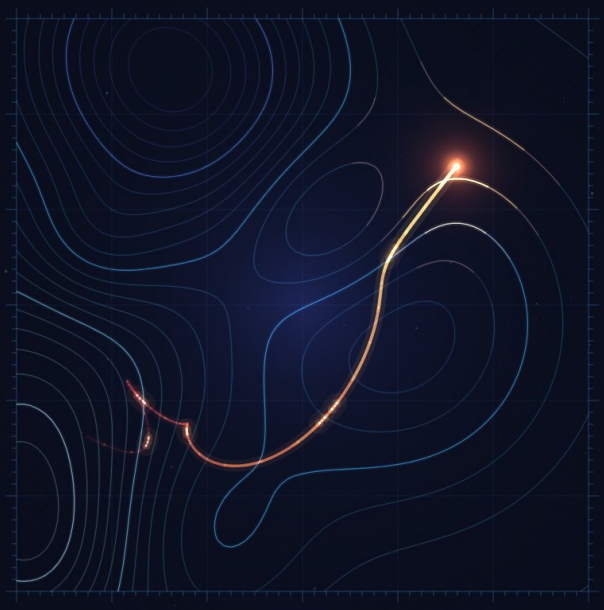
knowing



living

How could something infinite still learn? Because infinite does not mean knowing everything. The Source would contain every possibility, but containing a possibility is not the same as having passed through it.

It could know the definition of love without ever having trembled for someone, and the definition of grief without ever having waited for someone who will not come back. Knowledge would give it the map of everything. It would not give it the weight.



It would lack what only a life can give: once, here, without knowing what comes next.

An existence would then be nothing like a script known in advance. A stranger's ordinary morning, their fear before opening a letter, the taste of a piece of fruit: none of this could be deduced. It could only happen.

We know this difference in our own lives. Reading about swimming does not teach you to swim. Knowing that a person will die does not quite prepare you for the day they do. Between knowing and living, there is always a leap, and that leap can only be made by living.

People born blind and operated on for cataracts as adults have described this leap. They knew by touch the shape of a cube and of a sphere, and could not, at first, recognise them by sight. They had the knowledge. They still needed sight, and time to learn how to use it.

Perhaps this is why the greatest knowledge prevents neither the naivety of a first love nor the dread of a first loss. It can do nothing about them, and that is not its role. An infinite consciousness would have all the books. It would still lack having been a child discovering snow.

There is, however, an objection to hear. If living teaches what knowledge does not, then suffering too would be knowledge to acquire, and the Source would have every reason to live everything, even the worst. This is one of the heaviest difficulties of this vision. It will return to it, with suffering and with evil, without claiming to have settled it.

This is also what leaves room for choice, as we will see: a life does not carry out a plan known in advance, it discovers as it goes.

Echoes

Frank Jackson, *What Mary Didn't Know*, 1986. A scientist knows everything about colour without ever having seen it. The day she sees red, does she learn something?

Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 1903. Moving around a thing, or entering into it: two ways of knowing.

What remains open

Does the Source really feel what its forms live through? The model assumes so, without being able to establish it.

No one writes what comes next in our place.



A letter has lain on the table for three days: accept the job at the other end of the country, or stay. There is no shortage of advice. But when the moment comes to answer, there is only one hand to write.

If a vaster consciousness gathers our lives, what is left of that moment? The objection is old: as soon as we suppose a whole, each part seems to become a piece that is moved. The believer wonders how to be free under the gaze of God, the physicist how to be free in a world governed by laws.

The answer lies in what was set out earlier: the Source does not know what comes next. It has no plan that would only need to be carried out. What is decided in a life is truly decided there, and nowhere else.

A tension remains with what was said earlier. If a soul gathers several lives and commits to those that will teach it what it seeks, it is already steering something. Yet steering is not dictating. A teacher can choose the problem without choosing the solution; a musician can propose a theme without knowing what the others will make of it. The soul would give the theme, perhaps. The life would improvise.

To be a part of the whole is not to be held by it. It is to continue it.

An image may help. In an orchestra that improvises, each musician listens to the others, tunes to them, lets themselves be carried by what is being played. Yet every note is theirs. The ensemble dictates nothing to them: it gives them a place to play. Without the others, their notes would mean nothing. Without them, the ensemble would not be quite the same.

This does not make us beings without ties. No one chooses their body, their language, their era, or the wounds received before learning to speak. Freedom does not begin in a void. It is exercised in a narrow space, often narrower than we would like, and that is where it counts: in how we respond to what we did not choose.

There is also a quieter freedom than that of great decisions: the tone one takes in answering, the second one lets pass before flaring up, the way one looks at what happens. Someone who is locked up did not choose the cell; they sometimes keep the choice of what to make of it. That is no small thing, and it is not everything. This inner freedom does not make up for the other kind, and does not excuse us from demanding it for those deprived of it.

This leaves a quiet responsibility. If no one writes what comes next in our place, no one can live it for us either. Each choice, however small, adds to the whole something that was not there: a way of answering that no other life would have found. And if nothing is written, each choice is also a risk. One can be wrong, fail, lose. Perhaps that is the condition for anything to matter.

Echoes

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, 1946. Man is condemned to be free: he is nothing other than what he makes of himself.

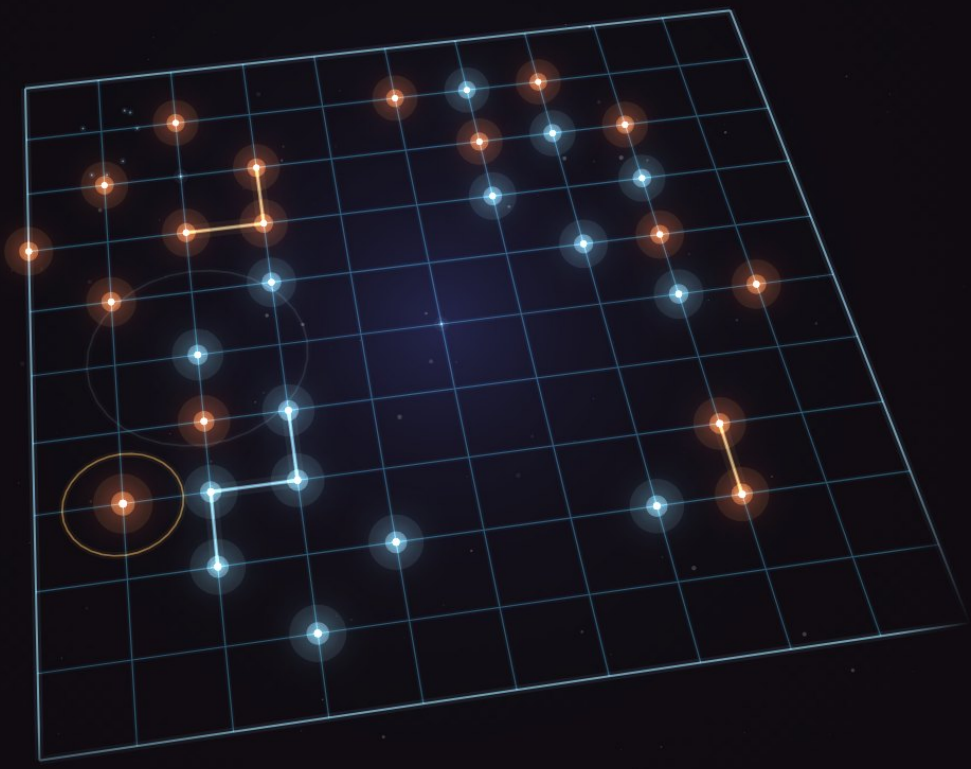
Benjamin Libet, experiments, 1983. Brain activity slightly precedes the conscious decision. The counterpoint.

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 1946. Everything can be taken from a person but the last of the human freedoms: to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.

What remains open

Does the brain decide before we are aware of choosing? Some experiments suggest so, and nothing here allows us to dismiss them.

For anything to matter, it must be possible to lose.



Two children chalk a hopscotch grid on the pavement. Before playing, they argue for a long time about the rules: no stepping on the line, whoever falls starts again, the sky square counts double. None of this existed five minutes ago. Now it is serious.

Play has this strange property: it is not necessary, and yet one puts everything into it. No one has to play chess. But once the game has begun, a lost piece hurts, and a combination found makes the whole day happy. Play manufactures importance where there was none.

If the Source needs nothing, why would it give itself laws, limits, bodies that wear out? The simplest answer would be the chalk children's: without rules, nothing counts. A world where nothing can go wrong would not be a world to live in, only a stage set.

A game you cannot lose is not a game.

The laws of nature would be, on this reading, the rules of the game. Gravity, death, the irreversible: what makes life hard would also make it real. A leap only means something because one can fall. A promise is only worth something because one could break it.

There is something shocking about the image, though, and it has to be said. To call a world where people starve and wars flatten cities a "game" is to risk making everything light. That is not the sense intended here. The play in question is not entertainment, but its opposite: a way of being wholly in what was not obliged to exist. And the player, in this vision, would not watch the game from above. They would be in every piece, and lose with each one.

There are two ways of playing. One thinks only of winning, and the game is merely a means. The other wants the game to go on, to stay open, for others to be able to join. The first ends when someone wins. The second has no end, and that may be the one the Source is playing.

The child at the puddle already knew: to play is to do something for nothing, and to do it wholeheartedly. The adult adds what the child knows too, without saying it: one can lose. A project can fail, a love can end, a life can go wrong. That, more often than not, is what keeps one from entering the game. And what holds back the hand has a name: fear.

Echoes

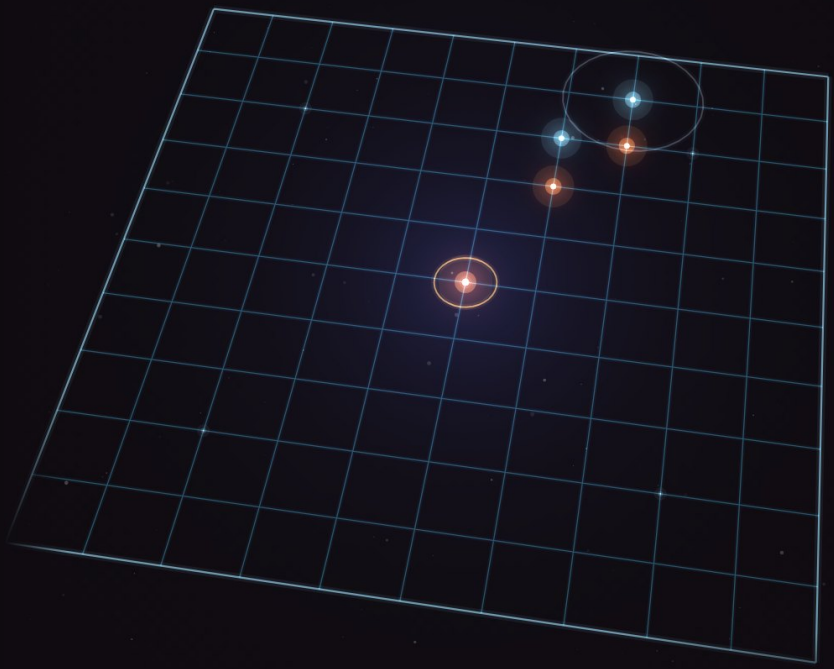
Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 1938. Play is older than culture: a free activity that creates its own order and stands apart from ordinary life.

Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, XV, 1795. "Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays."

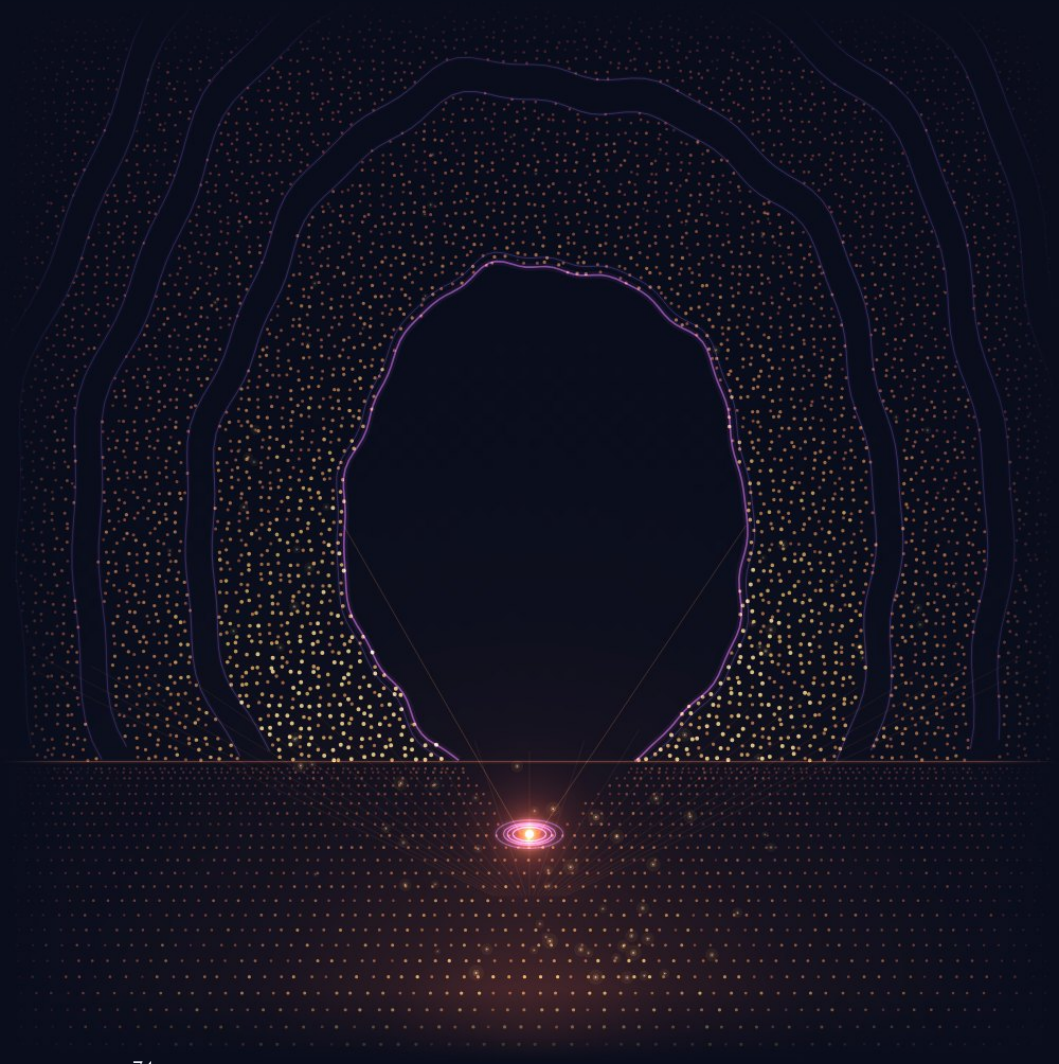
James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games*, 1986. A finite game is played to win, an infinite game to keep the play going.

What remains open

If the world is a game, who set its rules? And can they be changed by playing?



It protects a life, and sometimes stands in its way.



Fear is older than we are. It lived in the first animals, long before words: a sound in the grass, and the body tenses before the mind understands. Rather than speak of it alone, this chapter gives the floor to someone who doubts.

— You are going to tell me not to be afraid, since nothing is lost.

— No. Without fear, no life would have lasted long enough to ask itself questions. It holds back the hand at the edge of the fire, slows the step at the edge of the drop. To be afraid is to hold on to something. We should begin by thanking it.

— Then where is the problem?

— It grows beyond its task. We are afraid to speak, to love, to change, to be seen. We give up things that threatened nothing but an image of ourselves. The fear that protected the body begins to protect habits.

Fear guards the door. It does not always know the wolf has gone.

— And the fear of others?

— That is the oldest trick of separation. The one we do not know quickly becomes the one we distrust, then the one we blame. Fear makes borders sharper than they are. If this vision is right, it puts up walls in the middle of a single house.

— Convenient. Your Source, your return, all of it serves mostly to stop being afraid of dying.

— That is the most serious objection, and I do not know how to refute it. An idea that consoles is suspect precisely because it consoles. I say only this: if nothing that is lived is lost, then what

we risk by living fully is smaller than we think. And if I am wrong, we will still have lived fully.

— And those who are afraid for good reasons? Violence, illness, poverty?

— No view of the world should silence them. Their fear speaks true. The whole work lies in telling the fear that guards life from the one that shrinks it, and no one can do that in another's place.

— How do you recognise the one that shrinks it?

— By what it leaves behind. The fear that protects passes once the danger is gone. The other stays, and always asks for more room. You also know it by regret: people rarely regret having fled a fire; they regret for a long time the letter they never sent.

— And courage, in all this?

— It is not the absence of fear. It is fear having said what it had to say, thanked, and then going on anyway. It is rarely measured in feats; far more often in a sentence at last spoken, a call made, a door pushed open.

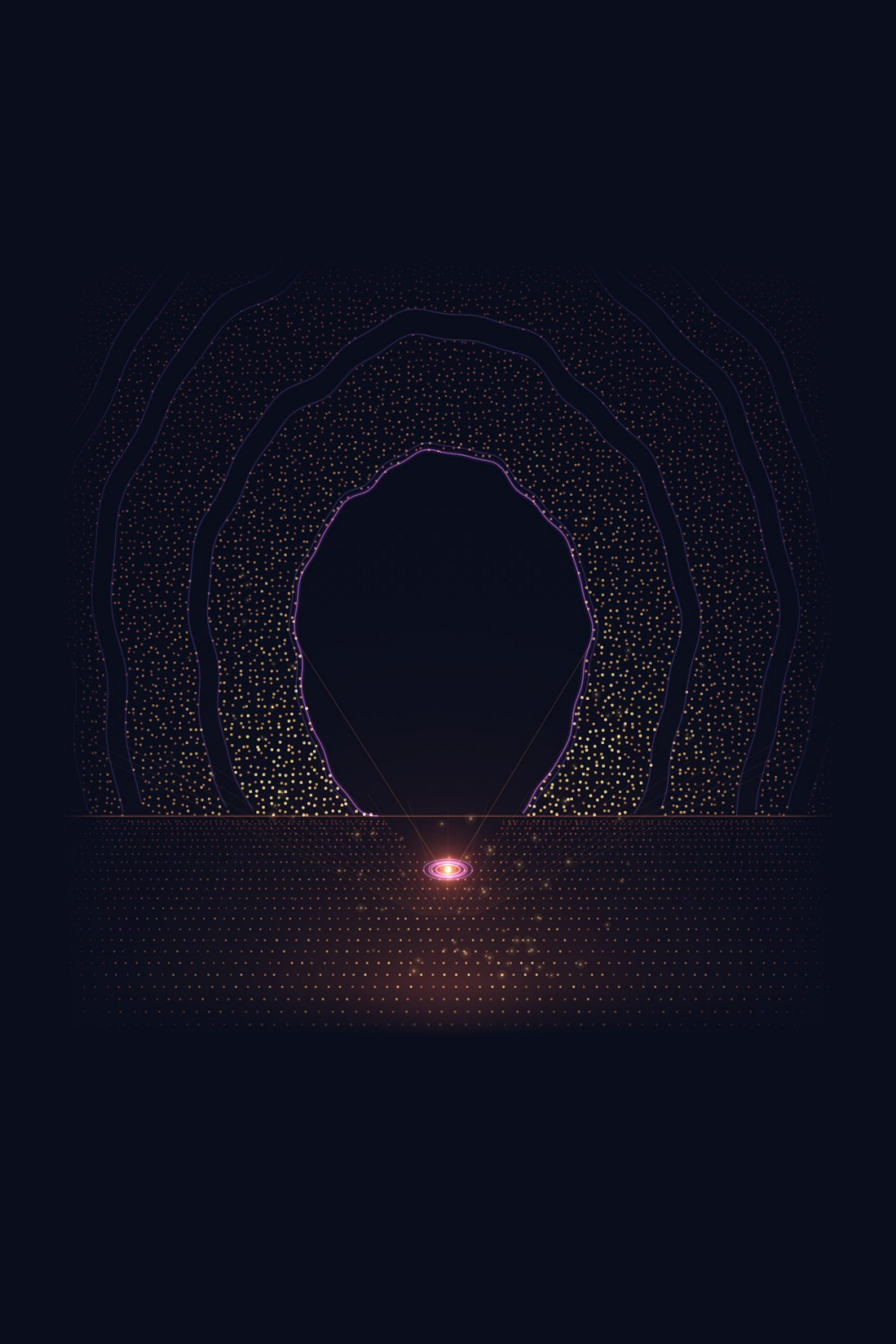
Echoes

Montaigne, *Essays*, I, 18. "The thing I fear most is fear."

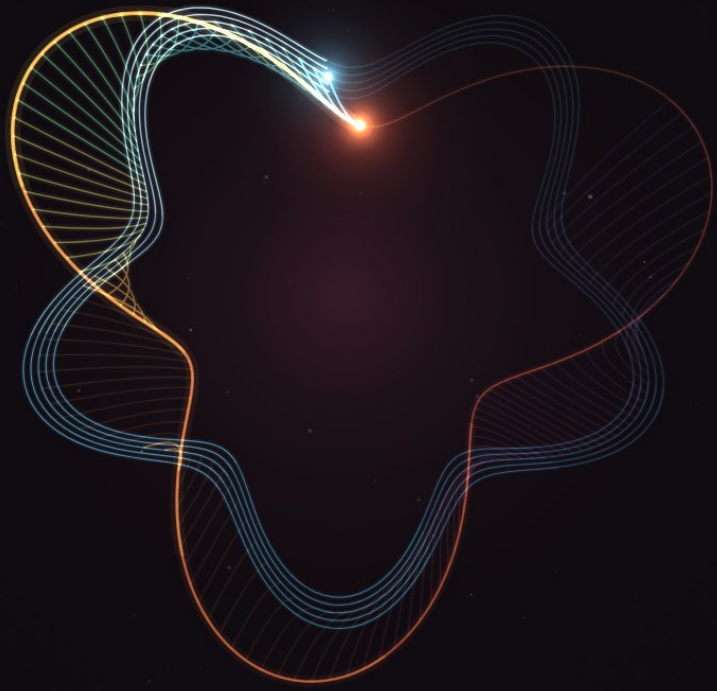
Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 1844. Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom: the fear of what is possible.

What remains open

If nothing is lost, should we stop fearing death? Or is that fear part of what must be lived?



To love would be to recognise the whole in someone.



Someone's way of holding a cup in both hands, even in summer. A laugh that begins before the end of the sentence. It is often by details like these that we realise we love someone.

But if all consciousnesses are parts of one consciousness, what is it to love? A disguised return to oneself? One more illusion?

It can be read differently. To love would not be to erase the distance between two people, but to cross it without abolishing it. We recognise in the other something in common, the same origin, the same ground. And in the same movement, we discover how other the other is: precisely those details no one else has.

Love would be the only experience in which one is both one and two.

This is why it would be so precious to a Source that learns. Alone, it cannot love: there is no one facing it. It must first have divided itself into a thousand gazes for one gaze to be able to seek another. Love would be separation made fruitful.

There is also love that goes wrong. The kind that wants to possess, that keeps watch, that demands the other stay as they were when we met. We still call it love, and it keeps love's force. But it has lost half the movement: it sees what is shared and can no longer bear the difference. To love, in this vision, would be to want the other to become fully themselves, even when that leads away from us.

It takes countless forms. The impulse of two lovers, the patience of a parent who gets up in the night, the loyalty of a friend who asks for nothing, the tenderness for a stranger met only once. They do not all have the same intensity, but they have the same direction: to go out of oneself without getting lost.

An old couple on a bench. They are not talking. Fifty years together have not made them alike: she watches the pigeons, he watches the sky. But when she shivers, he hands her his scarf without turning his head. We do not know what the unity this book speaks of is. That gesture may give some idea of it.

This reading does not make love easier. It makes its failures heavier. If to love someone is to recognise the whole in them, then contempt, indifference and abandonment do not wound only one person. They miss an occasion, for the whole, to recognise itself.

Echoes

Plato, *Symposium*. Aristophanes' myth: each being seeks the half from which it was separated.

Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 1923. We truly meet the other only by saying thou to them, never by treating them as a thing.

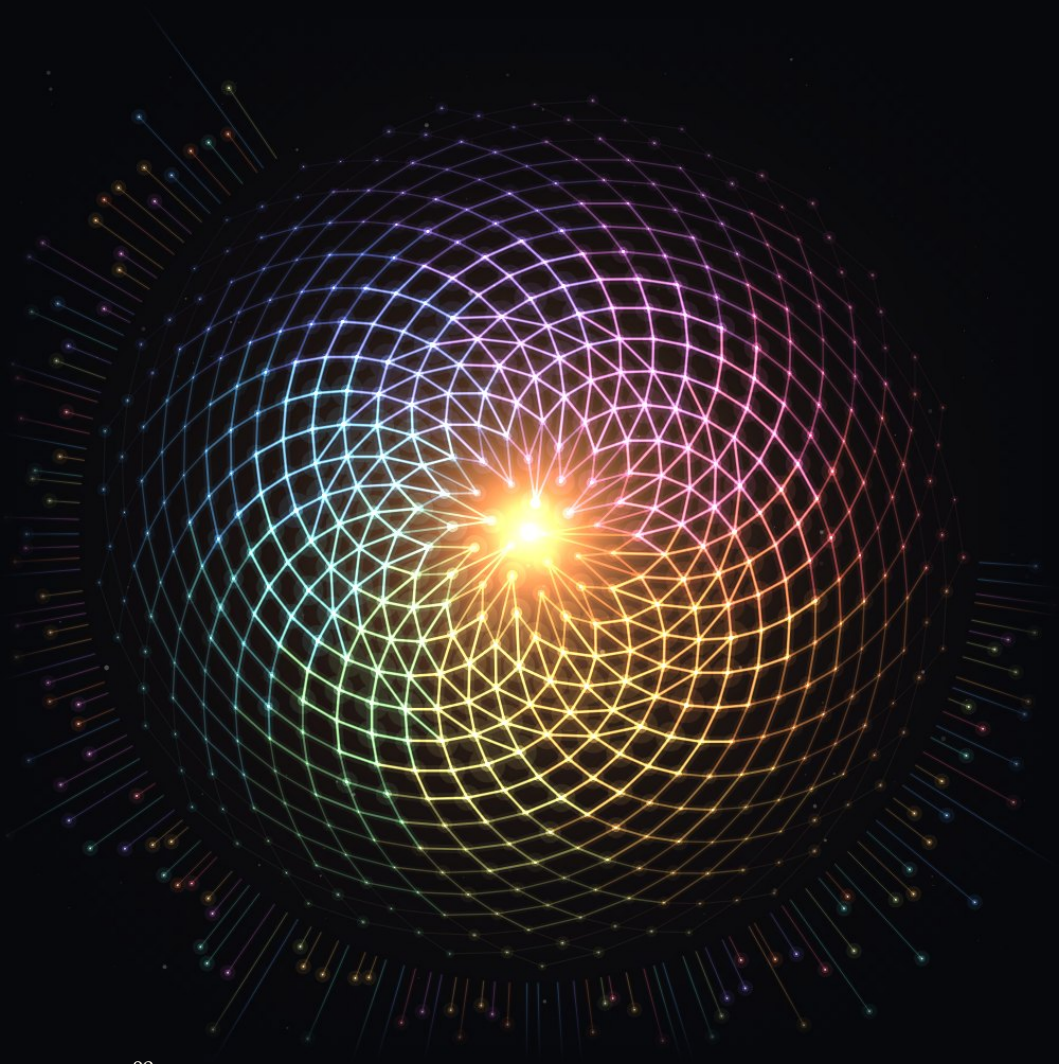
Jesus, *Gospel of Matthew*, 5, 44. "Love your enemies." Love extended to the one we did not choose.

What remains open

If we are one consciousness, is love not, at bottom, a form of self-love? This vision answers no, without being able to quite prove it.



In joy, the whole recognises itself, and that is enough.



A station platform on a winter evening. Someone steps off the train after months away, and a little girl runs towards him shouting his name. For a few seconds nothing else exists: not the cold, not the crowd, not the suitcases. Strangers passing by smile without knowing why.

This is not pleasure. Pleasure clings to something specific, a taste, a warmth, a satisfaction, and it wears thin with repetition. Nor is it happiness, which is a state, a way of lasting, something one builds and protects. Joy is briefer and stranger. It arrives unannounced, overflows, and leaves nothing to keep.

This book has said a great deal about separation, fear and suffering. It had said almost nothing about joy. The omission may be telling: we think of joy as less serious than pain, as if only what hurts could teach anything.

If all consciousnesses come from one ground, joy would have a place of its own. It would be the moment when one part of the whole finds another, or finds itself, and feels it. The little girl on the platform is not thinking about the unity of all things. But what runs towards those open arms is indeed a separation undoing itself, for an instant, without losing anything of what it has been.

Joy asks for nothing. That is how you know it.

It needs no great occasions. A friend laughing before finishing the joke, a true note in an amateur choir, the first mild day after winter, a problem that suddenly comes apart. Each time something falls into place, and one feels without putting it into words that this is right, that this had to be able to exist.

One will object that joy is trivial beside the misery of the world, and that there is something indecent in speaking of it when so

many suffer. But joy does not deny suffering. It often breaks out in the middle of it: helpless laughter in a hospital room, a meal after a funeral where one catches oneself laughing at a memory. It does not say that all is well. It says that something, despite everything, was worth it.

It has one more peculiarity: it can be shared without being divided. A shared sorrow weighs less; a shared joy grows. It can no more be owned than beauty can. One can only recognise it as it passes, and make room for it.

If the Source discovers itself by living, suffering would teach it what each thing costs. Joy would teach it something else, simpler and harder to say: that existing is, sometimes, good. Not useful, not justified. Good.

Echoes

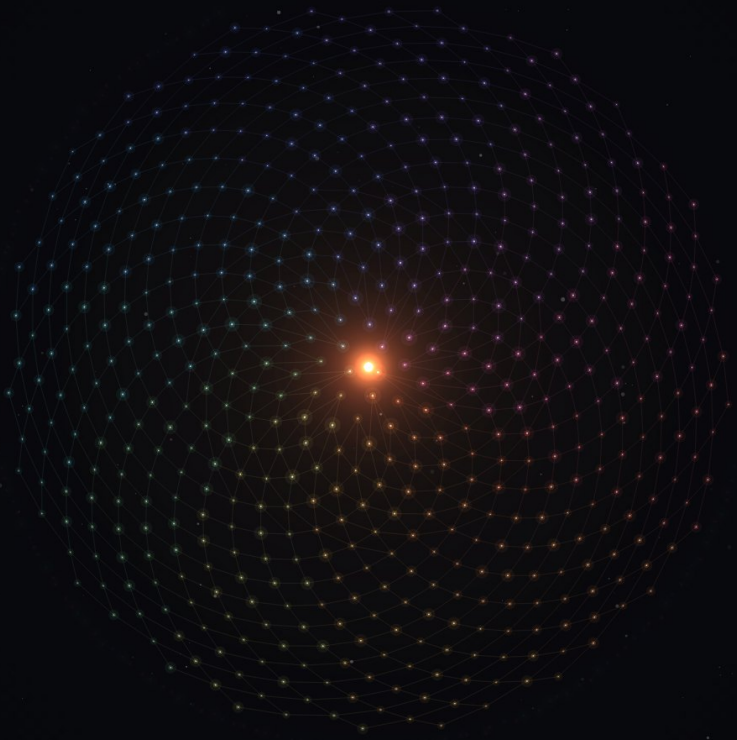
Spinoza, *Ethics*, book III, 1677. Joy is the passage from a lesser to a greater perfection.

Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, 1919. Joy always announces that life has succeeded: wherever there is joy, there is creation.

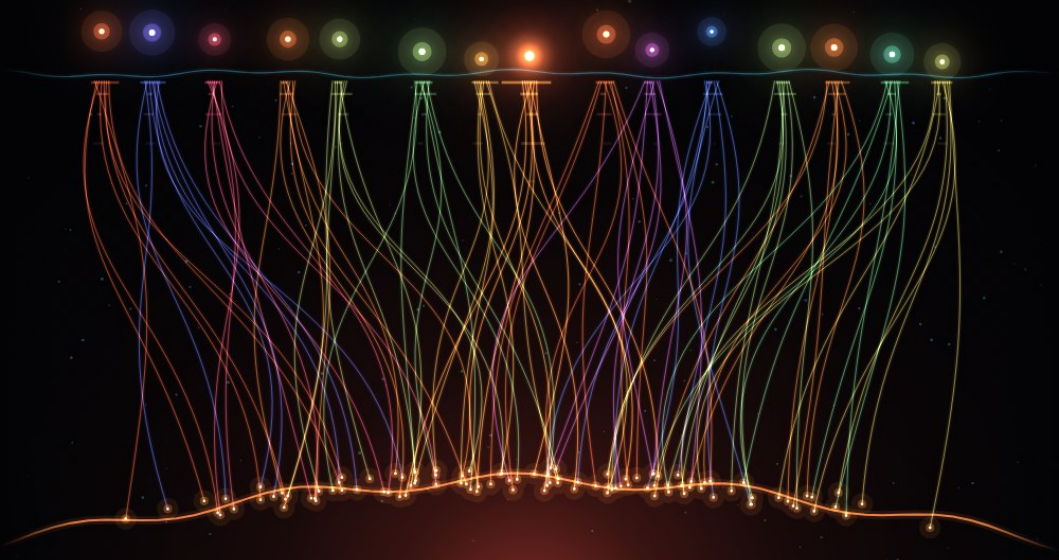
C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 1955. Joy as distinct from happiness and pleasure: an unsatisfied desire more desirable than any satisfaction.

What remains open

Would a Source discovering itself need joy as much as pain? And why does joy seem so rare?



Being alone is not being separated.



Two solitudes share one name. One weighs: a silent flat, a phone that does not ring, the feeling that no one really knows who we are. The other rests: a walk without company, an evening to oneself, a time when there is nothing to show.

The first is a wound, and it should be called one. It is among the most widespread and least spoken of sufferings. No metaphysics replaces a visit, a voice, a hand laid on a shoulder.

Yet if this vision is right, no one is ever entirely separated. Each life would be a part of the same consciousness, linked to the others from below, as islands are by the sea floor. We can feel alone; in the strict sense, we never would be.

The islands seem separate. Under the water, it is the same land.

One may object that an invisible bond is worth nothing. To tell someone isolated that they are joined to everyone by the seabed is to offer them an idea instead of a presence. The objection lands, and it forces a clarification. This bond replaces nothing. It would only explain why isolation hurts so much: we would not suffer so much from being cut off from what was truly foreign to us.

The second solitude sometimes lets us glimpse this link. When we stop comparing, answering, defending ourselves, the boundary between ourselves and the rest can grow less distinct. We are alone, and have never felt so little apart.

Nor is solitude measured by the number of people around. Some live for weeks without seeing anyone, at sea or in the mountains, and do not feel alone. Others feel abandoned in the middle of a party, between two conversations in which no one looks at them.

To live, we also need a measure of isolation. A life constantly crossed by others would no longer know what it thinks. If the Source discovers itself through distinct lives, it needs each of them to keep an inside that no one else inhabits.

Solitude would thus have two faces: the pain of being cut off, and the chance of being one. Part of the work of a life would be to pass from the one to the other, never forgetting those who remained on the side of pain. For them, the invisible link is not enough. They need the visible one, the one we hold out.

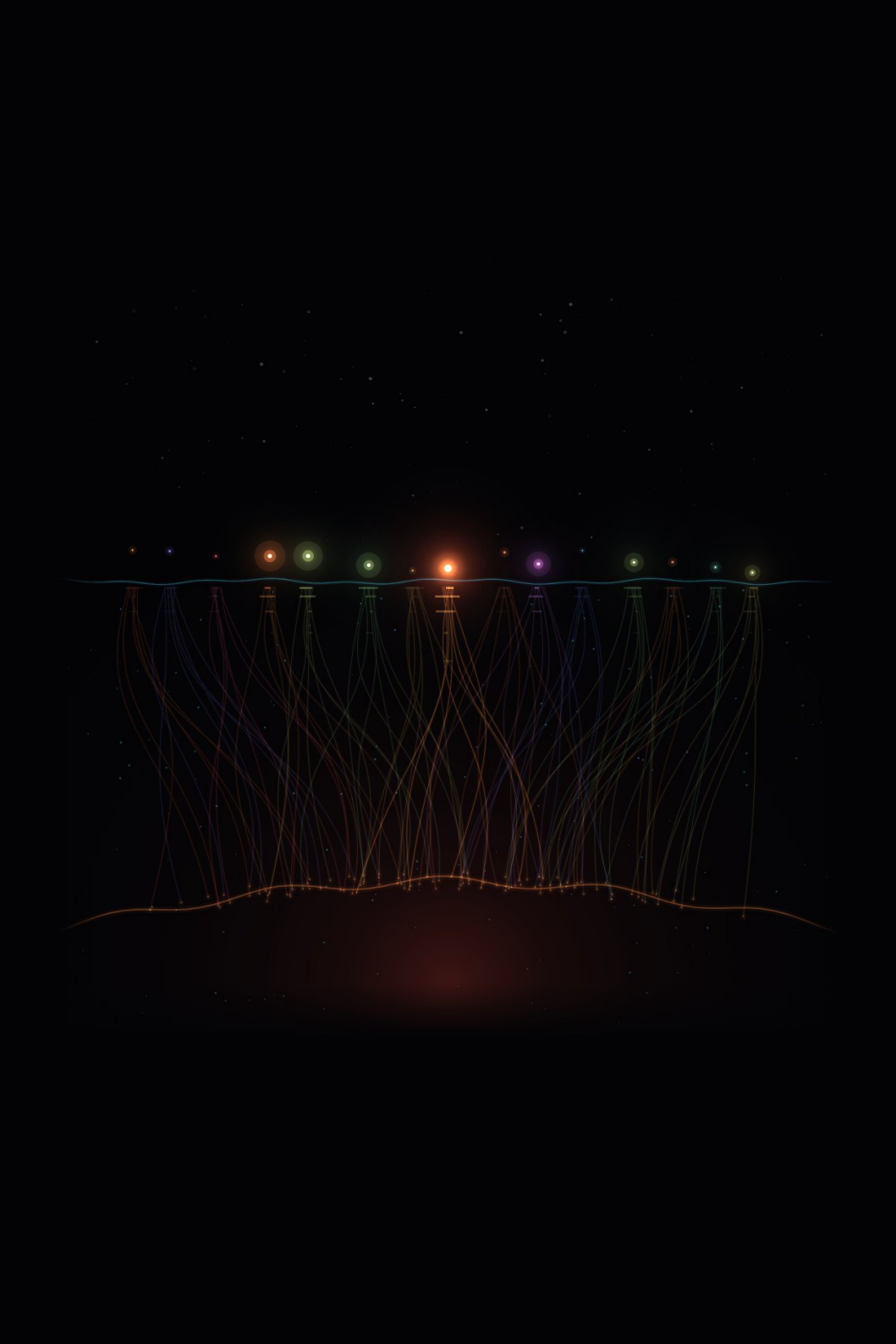
Echoes

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1929. To love one's solitude, and to bear the suffering it causes.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, 139. "All the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber."

What remains open

Does the invisible bond explain the pain of loneliness, or does it only make it bearable?



A word is a bridge, and every bridge implies a gap.



A woman is trying to explain to a doctor where it hurts. Not exactly here, a little lower. It is not a burning, more of a weight, or a pressure, no, not quite. She searches, he listens, and both know that the pain itself will not cross the desk. Only the words get through.

This is the situation of all speech. If each life is part of the same consciousness, those parts do not communicate directly: no one gets inside another's head. Something else had to be invented. Cries, gestures, then sounds that mean, and thousands of languages to put them in order.

Language, then, would be a bridge thrown between fragments that can no longer see one another. It does extraordinary things. It lets one tell a dream to someone who did not dream it, pass on to a child what a grandmother learned from hers, read the doubts of a stranger centuries later and recognise oneself in them.

A word is a bridge. It is also a reminder of the gap.

For the same bridge separates. To name is to cut out: saying "tree" detaches the tree from the earth that holds it and the light it drinks. The adult at the puddle saw nothing but names. And between people, words sometimes dig the very gap they were meant to fill: a misunderstanding, one word too many, a language one does not speak and that turns the other into a stranger.

One may object that thought itself is made of words, and that nothing can be said of what escapes them. This book does not quite believe it. Everyone knows the word on the tip of the tongue: one knows what one means before knowing how to say

it. Something comes before the sentence. But it has to be admitted that this something, without words, reaches no one.

Hence the worth of the moments when words succeed. A true sentence, said at the right moment, can do more than a long speech: it proves to someone that they have been understood. It is no small thing, for one part of the whole, to discover that another has seen the same thing from somewhere else.

And there are the moments when words fail, and people fall silent together. That silence is not the one before words but the one after: when everything possible has been said, and the rest passes another way, through a hand, a look, a presence. This book is itself a bridge of that kind, fragile and necessary, held out towards someone it does not know.

Echoes

Montaigne, *Essays*, III, 13. "Speech belongs half to the one who speaks, half to the one who listens."

The Tower of Babel, *Genesis*, 11. A single language, then the confusion of tongues, and people scattered over the face of the earth.

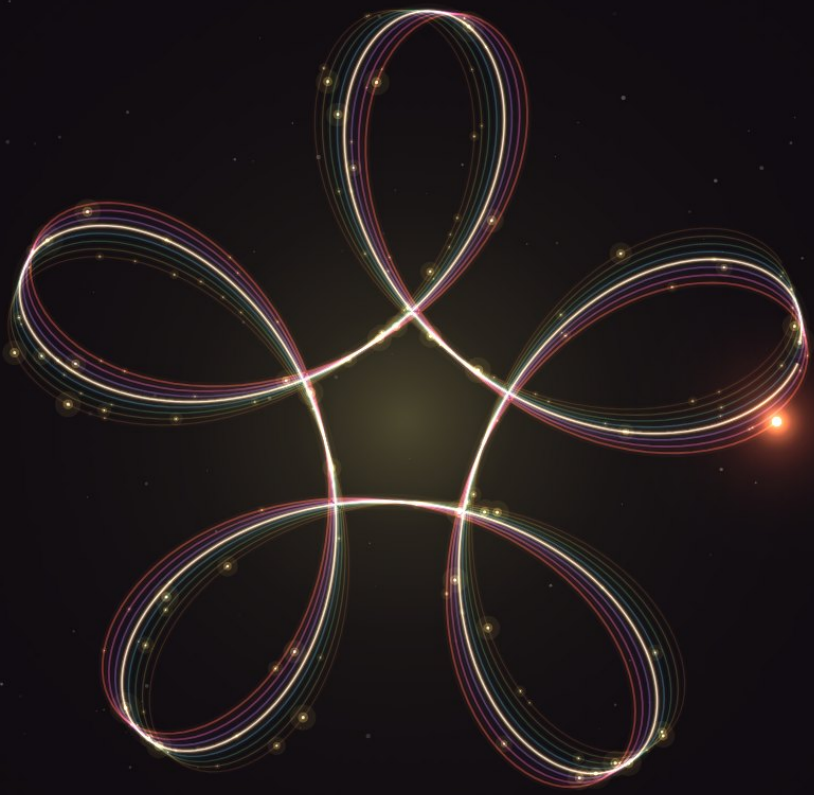
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 5.6, 1921. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

What remains open

If we are a single consciousness, why does it take so many words to understand one another, and so often in vain?



What stops us without asking anything.



We walk, thinking of something else, and suddenly we stop. Light on a wall, a face, three notes, the curve of a hill. Nothing in the world has changed, and yet something has opened. We do not know why. We know only that we cannot walk on just yet.

Beauty is strange in that it serves no particular purpose. It does not feed, it does not protect. Evolution explains some of our tastes: the symmetry of a face, the gleam of ripe fruit. It explains less well why a sky after a storm can bring tears.

This vision offers a reading: beauty would be a moment of recognition. One part of the whole meets another and feels, without being able to say so, that they come from the same place. Hence the curious feeling, before what is beautiful, of having found something again rather than discovered it.

Before the beautiful, we seem to be remembering.

This is also why it cannot be possessed. We can buy the painting, photograph the sunset, return to the same spot: the instant does not repeat on demand. Beauty belongs neither to the thing nor to the one who looks. It belongs to their meeting.

One will object that tastes change from one age and culture to another, and that what overwhelms one person leaves another cold. True, and this reading is not troubled by it. If beauty is an encounter, it also depends on who is encountering. What does not change is the stopping: everywhere, in every age, people have fallen silent before something they found beautiful.

It is not always gentle. There is a beauty of storms, of deserts, of very old faces, and even, at times, of what frightens. This is not prettiness. It is what exceeds, a little, what we can contain.

There are also beauties without lustre: a proof that falls into place, a craftsman's gesture, a sentence in which every word is where it belongs. Those who know them speak of them in the same words as before a landscape. Beauty would not be reserved for the eyes.

If the Source discovers itself through what is lived, beauty would be one of its rarest moments: the one in which it glimpses itself, for an instant, in what it has become. We can do nothing with it. We let it pass, and remain a little changed.

Echoes

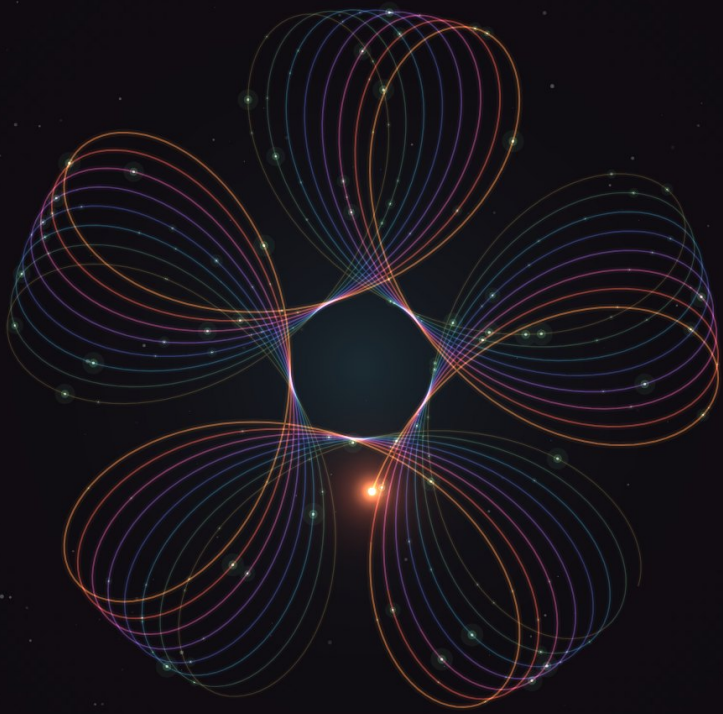
Plato, *Phaedrus*. Beauty awakens in the soul the memory of what it once contemplated.

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790. The beautiful pleases universally, without concept and without interest.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, 1869. "Beauty will save the world."

What remains open

Is beauty in things, in the gaze, or only between the two?



By exploring, the Source refines its equilibrium.



An overly cautious person one day learns boldness, another who is too hard learns gentleness, often at the cost of a trial. No tribunal corrects them: it is a rebalancing, like a walker catching their step. There would be no just final point, only adjustments.

What does becoming better mean? It is not about climbing from one level to the next: none is worth more than another. It is the whole that adjusts, and no one sets its measure from outside: it takes shape along the way, through what is lived.

The balance holds every polarity: love and fear, creation and destruction, joy and suffering, order and chaos. It never quite settles, since each experience shifts it.

A bicycle does not stay up because it is held still, but because it moves forward. The rider corrects constantly, one way then the other, with small movements they no longer even notice. Stopped, they fall. The balance in question here would be of that kind: not a state, but a movement that keeps catching itself.

Equilibrium does not require equal amounts of good and evil. It is more like a tuning: learning to reduce suffering without extinguishing the diversity of what can be lived.

This image rules out two temptations. The first would be to want to remove every shadow: a world without fear or loss would offer little to live. The second would be to justify evil in the name of balance. The balance does not ask for there to be suffering. It asks that we learn to produce less and less of it.

Yet an objection weighs on this image. If the measure is worked out along the way, nothing would ever be just or unjust once and for all: everything would depend on the moment. This book does not go that far. It holds at least one fixed point: suffering

inflicted without need is never an adjustment. Everything else can be searched for. That one is not searched for; it is held.

The Source does not hold the measure. It is looking for it.

Echoes

Heraclitus, fragments, c. 500 BCE. Harmony is born of opposing tensions, like that of the bow and the lyre.

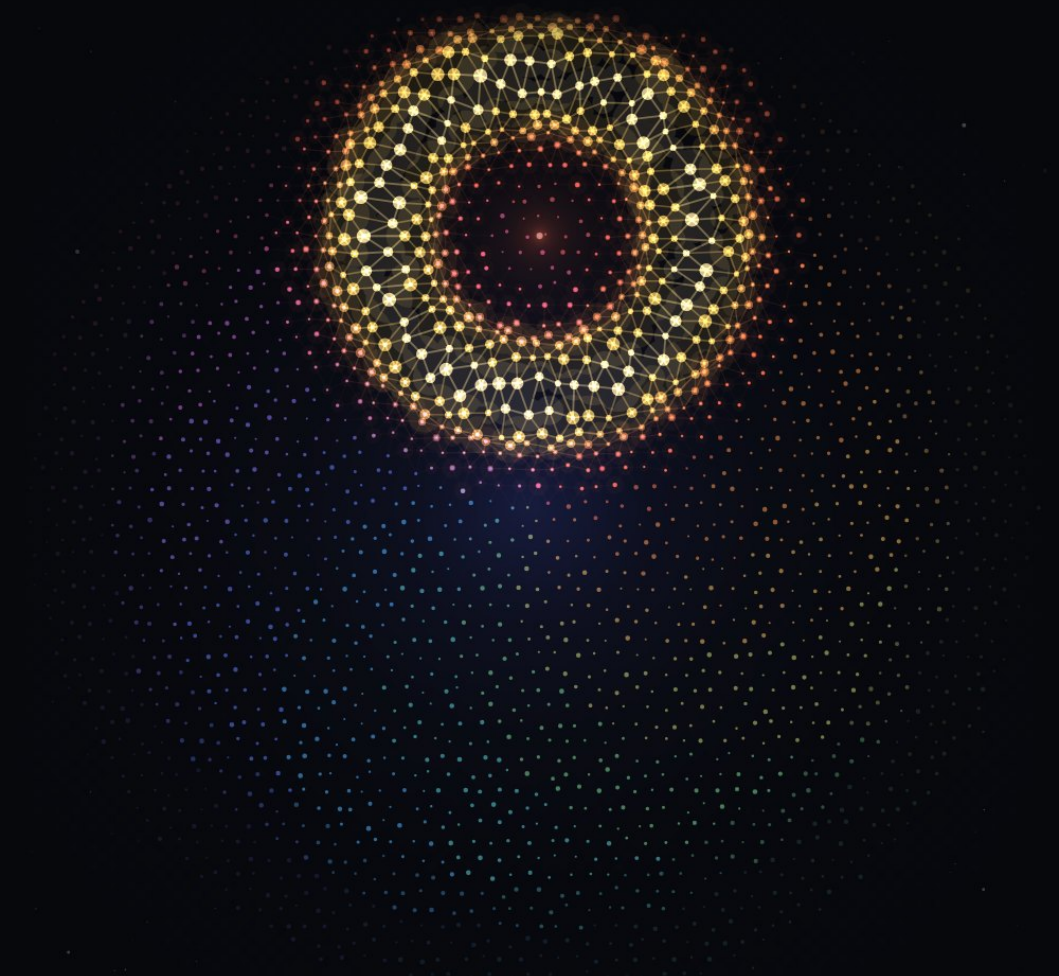
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. The right measure is not calculated in advance: it is found in each situation.

What remains open

If the criterion of progress evolves along with whatever is progressing, how can progress be recognised?



Nothing that is lived is lived alone.



A hand is burned, and the whole body flinches. If each consciousness is a part of the Source, the same would hold at another scale: no pain would stay local. The Source would not watch suffering from afar: it would undergo it too.



Suffering would therefore not be a punishment. It belongs to what can be lived, and it sometimes teaches something.

We know this, besides, without any metaphysics. One person's suffering never stays enclosed within them: it reaches their loved ones, is sometimes passed down through generations, marks a city or a people. It is enough to take that observation to the end: there would be no place in the real where a pain would fall into the void.

A woman sits up with her father in hospital. Nothing hurts her, and yet she no longer sleeps, no longer eats, starts at every sound in the corridor. What he endures, she endures differently. No one would say she suffers in his place. No one would say she does not suffer.

To teach is not to justify.

That limit is not negotiable. No one should tell someone who is suffering that their ordeal had a hidden meaning or was necessary. We also learn through love, curiosity and joy, and pain does not have to become a lesson for a life to have value.

This limit applies to oneself as well. It is tempting to give meaning to one's own trials to make them bearable, and that often helps. But this meaning cannot be decreed from outside or by a theory. It is found, or not, by the one going through the trial, and at their own pace.

A blunter objection remains: what is the use of saying the Source suffers too, if it takes nothing away from anyone's pain? Nothing is taken away, indeed. But pain would no longer fall into the indifference of a blind universe. There would always be someone feeling it with the one who feels it. That is not a remedy. It may be a kind of company.

A practical consequence follows: doing good to someone is doing good to another expression of what you are.

There remains a suffering this reading does not cover: the kind one being inflicts on another, knowing what it does. That one has another name.

Echoes

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880. Ivan refuses any future harmony paid for with the suffering of a single innocent.

Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*, 1840. Compassion as recognising oneself in the other.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929. God, "the great companion — the fellow-sufferer who understands."

What remains open

Why would a Source that feels every pain not learn first through love? This is the most serious objection.

Evil too would come from the Source, and whoever commits it would answer for it no less.



A school playground. One child pushes another into a puddle, then waits, to see. It is not an accident, not clumsiness, not fear. He wanted to watch the other fall. It is tiny, and it is all already there.

The previous chapter spoke of the suffering that happens: illness, accident, loss. This one is of another kind. Someone causes it, and knows what they are doing. An illness has no intention. A humiliation, a torture, a massacre have one. That is what is called evil here.

It is the hardest objection this book can meet. If there is only one consciousness, the one who tortures and the one who is tortured come from the same ground. The Source would be on both sides of the blade. One cannot speak of the unity of all things and look away from that.

Several answers exist, and none is enough. One can say, with a long tradition, that evil has no being of its own: it would be a lack, an absence of good, as shadow is an absence of light. One can say it is the price of freedom: a world where one can choose is a world where one can choose the worst. One can say, finally, that the Source, which does not know what comes next, did not will what happens. Each of these answers sheds light on something. None of them accounts for a tortured child.

This book offers a reading, without believing it sufficient. Evil would begin where a part of the whole forgets it is one, to the point of seeing in the other nothing but a thing. The self, that necessary lens, would become a wall. Whoever makes another suffer on purpose would treat them as if there were no one behind that face. Evil would be the forgetting of unity, pushed all the way to cruelty.

Understanding where evil comes from excuses no one.

This is the point not to let go of. If everything comes from the Source, one might be tempted to say that no one is really guilty, that the torturer is just another expression of the same whole. That would be a betrayal. The freedom this book speaks of cuts both ways: if no one writes what comes next in our place, no one commits evil in our place either. Coming from the same ground as one's victim lessens nothing. If anything it makes it worse: it is a part of oneself one is harming.

We would like evil to be the business of monsters, beings of another species. History mostly shows ordinary people, clerks, neighbours, who obeyed, let it happen, found reasons. The line does not run between the good and the wicked. It runs through each person, and it moves.

So it must be fought, named, judged, and those it threatens protected. Nothing in this vision counsels patience with it. It only leaves open a question it would be dishonest to close: why would a Source that discovers itself by living need a world in which this is possible? This book has no answer. It can only refuse to invent one.

There remains, for those who have suffered evil, a more intimate question that no one can settle for them: what to do, afterwards, with what was done to them.

Echoes

Augustine, *Confessions*, book VII, c. 400. Evil is not a substance: it is the privation of good.

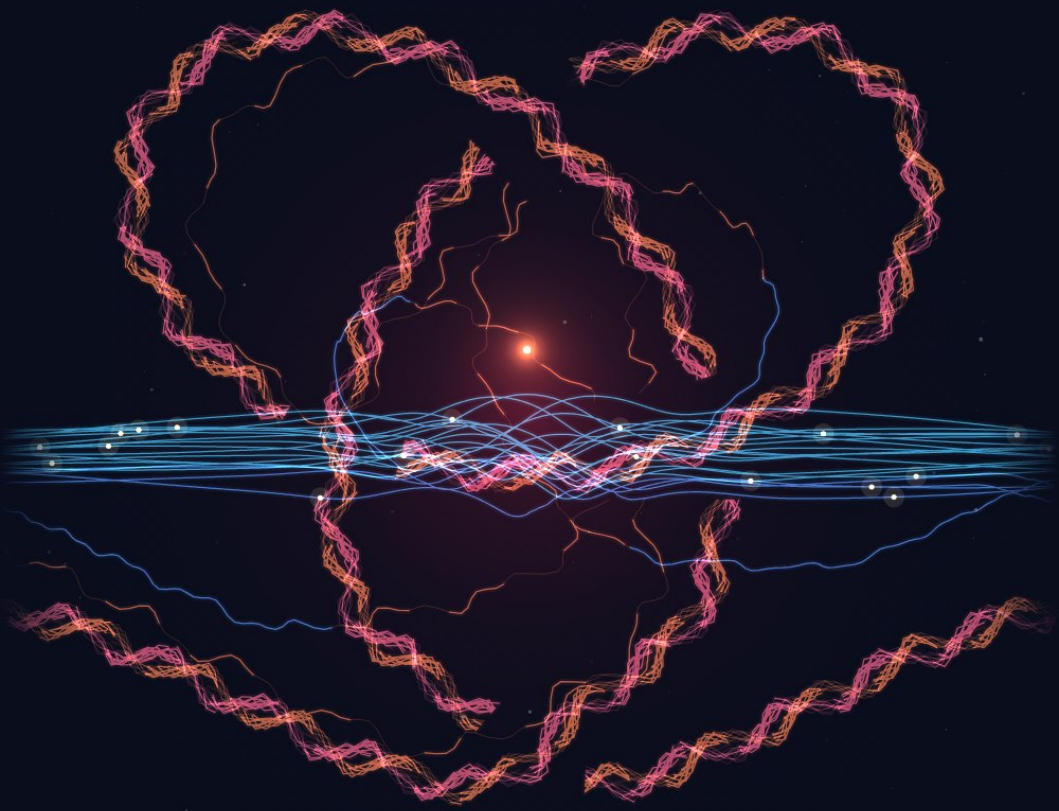
Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963. The banality of evil: immense crimes committed by an ordinary man who did not think about what he was doing.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, 1973. The line dividing good and evil runs not between people, but through every human heart.

What remains open

Can a vision in which everything comes from one source account for deliberate evil, without excusing it or making it necessary?

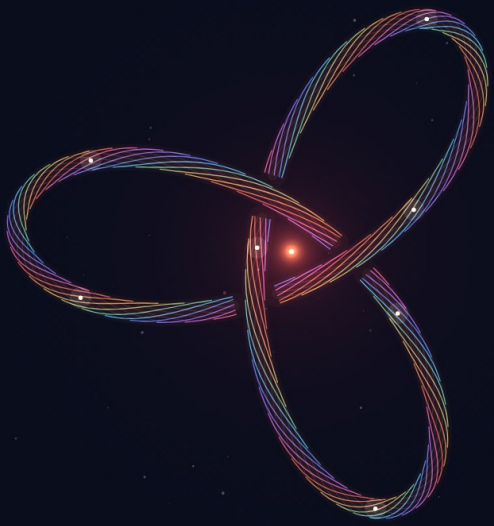
Undoing the knot without erasing what happened.



Some letters are never sent. This one is addressed to someone who hurt me, and anyone could have written it.

I still think of you more often than I would like. Not every day, but at night, sometimes, or when someone says your name and my shoulders tighten. What lasted a minute has occupied years. You probably know nothing of it.

I am not going to tell you it was nothing. What was done was done, and I believe precisely that nothing lived is erased. To forgive does not mean to forget. I would only like to stop replaying the scene, to stop letting you hold the rope.



I do not owe you this forgiveness. No one does, and those who demand it of a victim add a second violence to the first. If it comes, it will come when it wishes. If it does not, that will be no fault.

People have told me to turn the page. Those who say it mean well. But a page does not turn because one decides it should: first it has to be read to the end, and I have not finished.

To forgive is to give the past its place: behind.

I sometimes think that you and I come from the same place. That you are another part of what I am, which went astray, or which did harm. This does not excuse you. But it changes the knot: what binds me to you is not a bond with a stranger. And a knot between two parts of one whole, one can at least hope to undo.

I also know what this forgiveness will not do. It will not make you innocent, it will not oblige me to see you again, it will not ask justice to keep quiet. One can forgive someone and still want them to answer for what they did. Forgiveness undoes a knot in me. It does not undo the acts.

It is already loosening, thread by thread. One day I will notice that I think of you without my throat tightening. That day, something will have been given back to me. Not to you: to me.

One more letter will remain to be written, the hardest: to the person I was, who did not know what I know now. A life learns by getting things wrong. That is even one of the reasons to live one.

Echoes

Jesus, *Gospel of Luke*, 23, 34. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

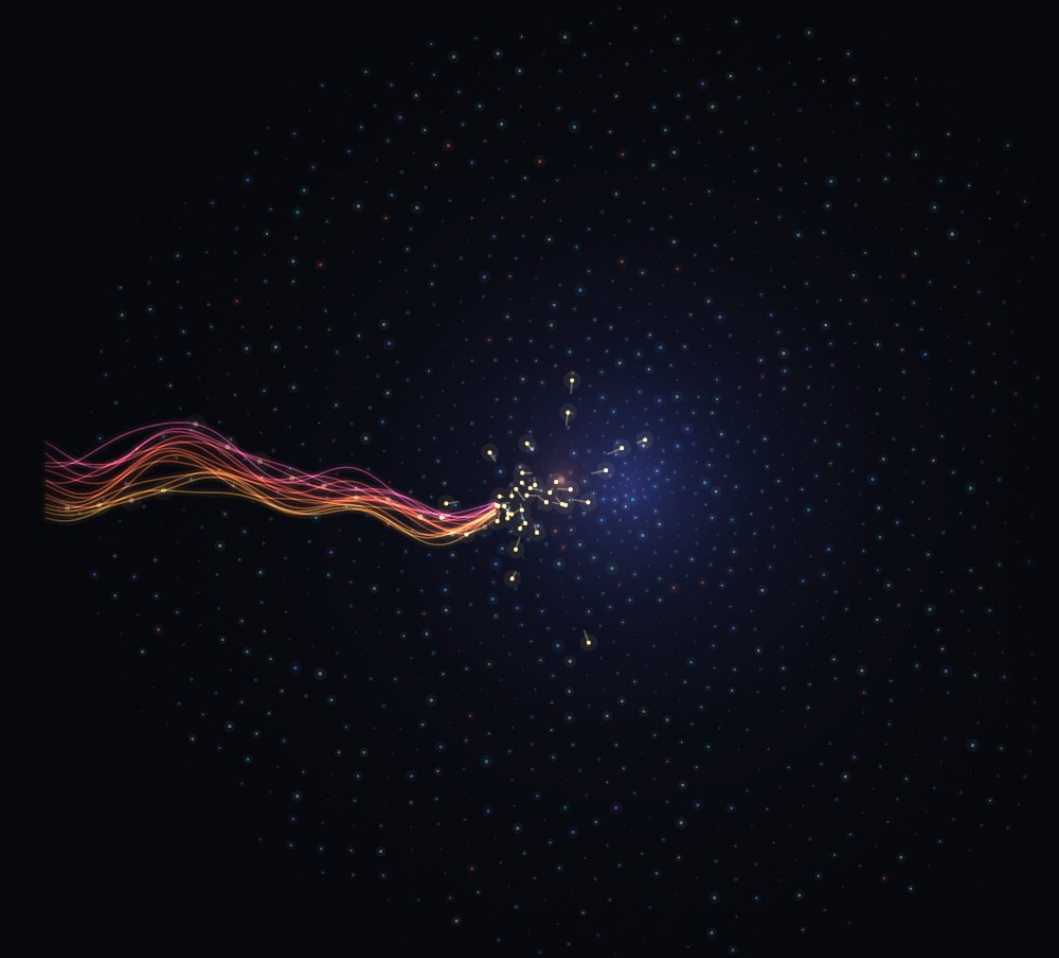
Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958. Forgiveness frees us from the irreversible: without it, we would remain prisoners of a single act.

Vladimir Jankélévitch, *L'Imprescriptible*, 1971. "Forgiveness died in the death camps." What cannot be forgiven, as a counterpoint.

What remains open

Can the unforgivable be forgiven? And must the other ask, for there to be forgiveness?

Facing the end, without making it up.



All that lives dies. We have known it since childhood, and yet we spend most of our lives not thinking about it. This is not cowardice. "Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily," wrote La Rochefoucauld.

This book speaks of return, of a vaster consciousness, of nothing being lost. It would be easy to make of this a convenient consolation, a way of not looking. That would betray what it says. For even if everything returns, something truly stops: a voice, a way of laughing, plans half made. No one will find that again in that form.

Even if nothing is lost, something ends.

Mourning is the share of death that falls to the living. It cannot be reasoned with. Those who have lost someone know that no idea, however beautiful, fills an empty chair at the table. A view of the world can accompany grief. It must never ask it to be silent.

There are deaths no vision makes acceptable: a child's, the one that comes through violence, the one that cuts a life off mid-sentence. This book has nothing that could soften them, and it is better to admit it than to hunt for words. The return, if it exists, does not repair the injustice of an end that came too soon.



Death nonetheless gives life its form. An existence without end would have neither urgency nor price; every day would be replaceable. It is because a life ends that it has an outline, as a drawing exists only by its edge. Finitude would not be a flaw in the project. It would be part of it.

In nature, nothing dies for nothing. The fallen leaf feeds the soil, the felled tree shelters other lives for decades. This is not proof of what becomes of consciousness. It is the image of a world in which the end of one form is the beginning of another.

Those who care for the dying often report the same thing. At the end, people speak little of what they achieved. They speak of those they loved, of a missing forgiveness, of a light in the room.

Regrets rarely concern what one did not have, and often what one did not say.

To face death, then, would mean neither desiring it nor denying it. It would mean living knowing that it will come, and letting that knowledge make the present a little sharper. What we would say tomorrow, we can say today.

Echoes

Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*. Death is nothing to us: when we are, it is not there, and when it is there, we are no more.

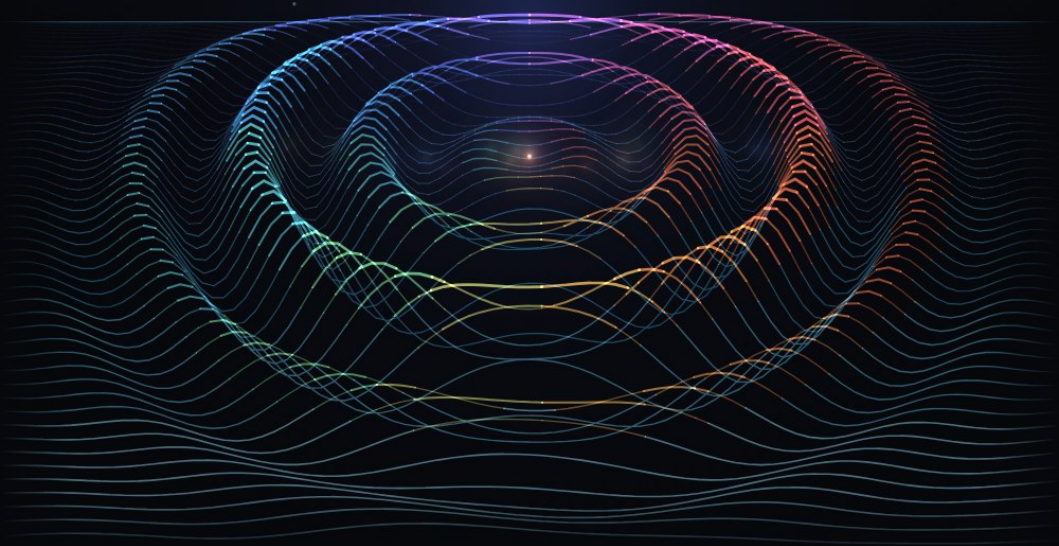
Jesus, *Gospel of John*, 12, 24. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1927. Being-toward-death: it is by taking on its end that an existence becomes its own.

What remains open

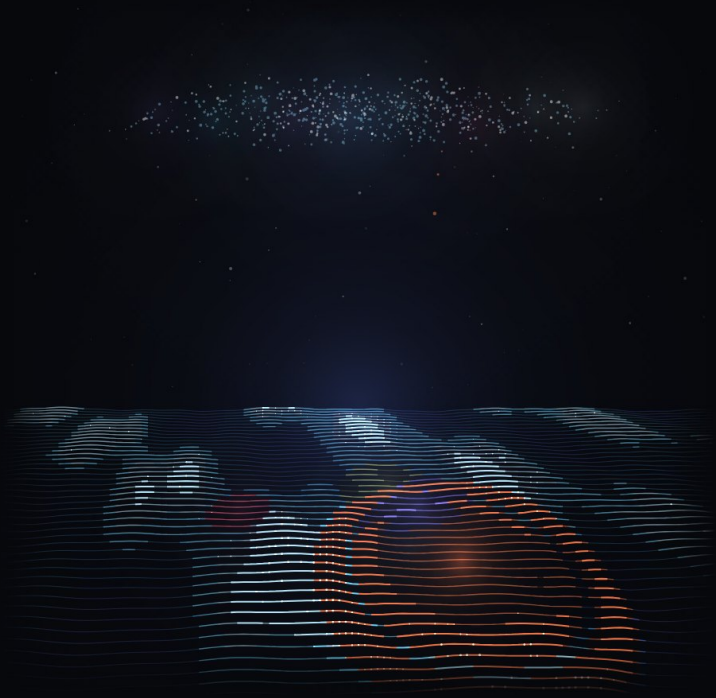
Must something survive for a life to have meaning? Or does the meaning lie precisely in its ending?

Joining the whole without ceasing to have been yourself.



A drop joins the ocean. It can no longer be found, and yet the ocean is not quite the same: it holds what the drop passed through, the cloud, the rain, the earth.

The question is often put this way: must we choose between surviving and merging? Either you remain yourself, or you disappear into the whole. This vision answers: both.



Death would then be less an end than a change of scale. The life that ends would not go out: it would rejoin the vaster consciousness it was part of, as one comes home after a long journey, with stories to tell. What it learned would become the common good of all it rejoins.

Someone comes home after years abroad. The house is the same; they are not. They speak differently, they see things they did not see. Those who welcome them recognise them and discover them at once. The return this book speaks of would resemble that, at another scale: neither the same as before leaving, nor someone else.

The return is not empty: it brings back everything that was lived.

A consciousness would widen in this way without losing its history, as a distant memory stays whole within a life that has far outgrown it. And what returns sets out again in other forms. The movement has no final stage.

The strongest objection is simple: a drop that can no longer be found has disappeared, whatever one says about the ocean. If what returns to the whole is no longer anyone, the word "return" would be mere politeness towards death. This vision makes another wager, which it cannot prove: to be gathered would not be to be erased. But it has to admit that, seen from here, the two look very much alike.

No one knows what it is like. This book promises neither light at the end of a tunnel nor immediate reunion. It says only that nothing that was lived will have been lived for nothing.

Echoes

Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 1955. Union differentiates: by joining a whole, each part becomes more itself.

Spinoza, *Ethics*, book V, 1677. Something of the mind remains, which is eternal.

Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, 1947. Decreation: "to make something created pass into the uncreated." A return through the effacement of the self, as a counterpoint.

What remains open

We do not know whether consciousness survives death. And what would have to remain for it still to be you?

One form ends. Life takes another.



Start with what is certain. A person disappears, and their way of laughing carries on in those who loved them. A gesture learned from them comes back to our hands. A phrase they used to repeat slips out of us, years later, in our turn.

Months after a funeral, someone finds a shopping list in a coat pocket: bread, apples, call the plumber. Nothing is more ordinary, and nothing hits as hard. The person is gone, and yet their hand was there, that morning, thinking about tomorrow.



This vision takes that observation all the way: there would not be life and then death, but life, then life again, in other forms. Those we have lost would go on learning and changing, out of our sight.

Death would end one way of living a bond, not the bond itself.

One will object that this bond is only memory, and that memory dies with those who remember. In three generations no one will know who laughed that way. That is true of memory. It is less true of what memory handed on: a way of holding a child, a recipe, a just anger pass from hand to hand long after the name is lost. What lasts longest often no longer has a face.

Many already live this way, without any theory. They speak to their dead, not to pretend they are there, but because the bond has changed form without disappearing: a thought before a photograph, a gesture repeated in their memory, a word said under one's breath.

Echoes

Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, 1950. The memory of a person lives on in the groups that carry it.

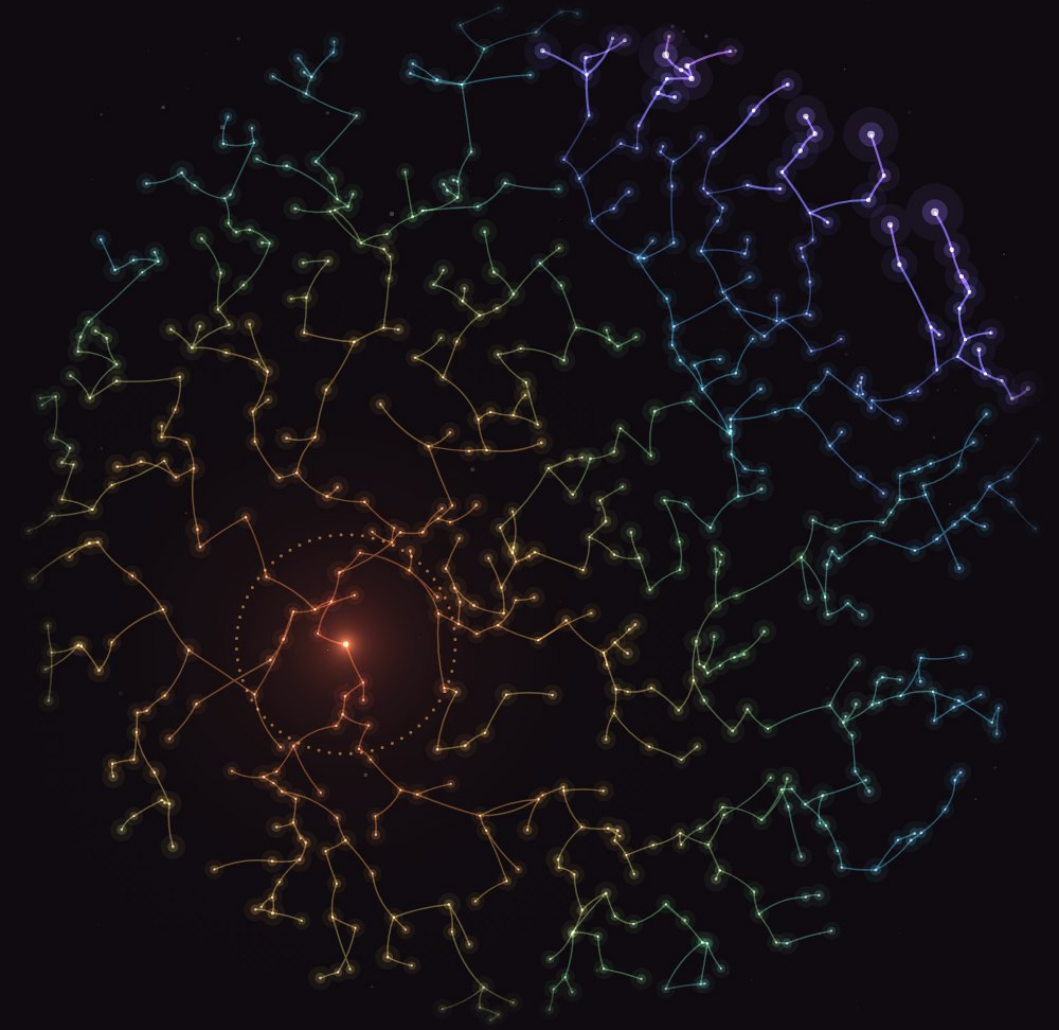
Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927. A belief born of the wish that it be true. The question to put to any hope.

What remains open

No one can guarantee a reunion. This hope remains a hope, and does not present itself as knowledge.



No existence is useless.



We often think a life counts in proportion to what it leaves behind: a work, a discovery, a name. This vision measures differently. A life would count first by what it has lived, and no one else could have lived that in its place. A brief existence, forgotten by all, would bring to the whole something as irreplaceable as a famous life.

And what it brings goes beyond it. A teacher almost never knows which sentence changed a course; a stranger who helped someone in the street will never know that that day mattered. The question of meaning shifts: no longer what existence owes us, but what we bring to it, almost always without knowing.

One will object that this measure is too generous, that it puts a life of devotion on the same footing as a wasted one. Not quite. It does not say that everything is equal; it says that nothing is lost. What one does with one's life counts. Having lived it already counts.

No life has to prove its usefulness in order to have value.

Echoes

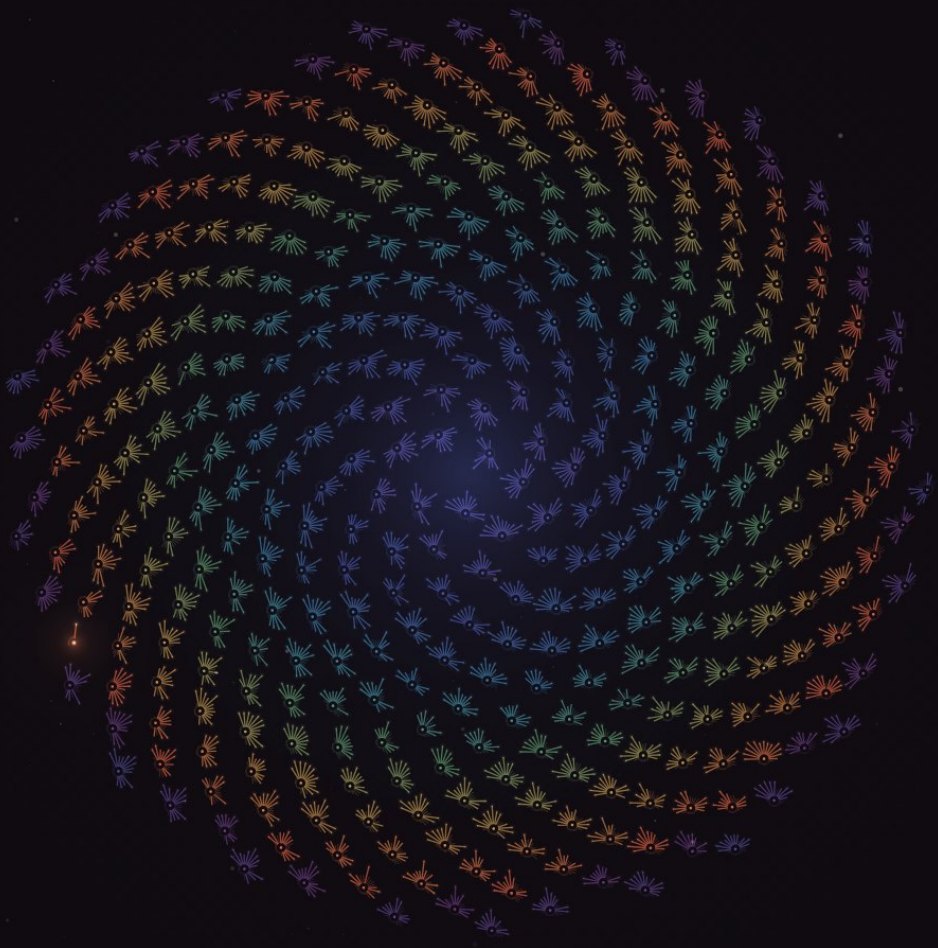
Edward Lorenz, lecture, 1972. Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 1872. The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and on those who lived faithfully a hidden life.

What remains open

Should a useful life be preferred to a happy one? The model asks without settling it.

Days without a story count too.



We tell lives by their peaks: a birth, a meeting, a loss. Most of an existence happens elsewhere. Here is a day on which nothing happens.

7:10. The sound of the kettle. A grey light on the windowsill, like that of no other morning.

8:02. The bus. A woman sleeps against the window, a child counts the stops under his breath.

10:30. A conversation by the coffee machine, about nothing. What was said will be forgotten; the voice, not quite.

12:30. A queue. Someone laughs behind you, and we will never know why.

3:45 p.m. The hollow of the afternoon, when time no longer passes. Boredom is hard to love, and yet it teaches what nothing else teaches: bare duration, time when it is filled with nothing.

6:20 p.m. The smell of the stairwell. Familiar footsteps on the floor above.

7:30 p.m. Dinner, the plates, the same question as yesterday about the day, the same answer: nothing special.

9:40 p.m. An evening without events. The light goes out.

There would be no small days. Only days we have not looked at.

Years later, someone will push open a door and recognise a smell: their grandmother's kitchen, some ordinary Wednesday, bread toasting, a radio on. Nothing had happened that day, and yet it is that day that comes back, whole. Memory sometimes knows better than we do what mattered.

If the Source learns through what is lived, these days would be what it could find nowhere else. The sublime resembles itself from one life to the next; the ordinary never repeats. This does not make routine light when it crushes. It says only that none of these days falls into the void. A Tuesday like any other will never come again.

Echoes

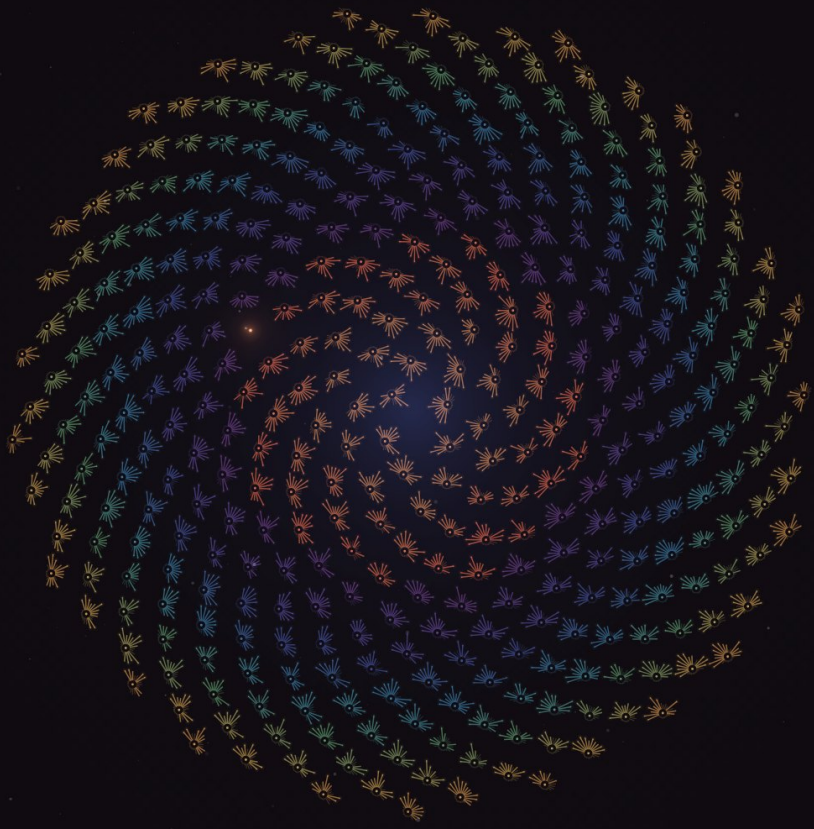
Georges Perec, *L'Infra-ordinaire*, 1989. Questioning the habitual: what happens every day and returns every day.

Ecclesiastes, Hebrew Bible. Nothing new under the sun. The weariness of repetition, as a counterpoint.

Jesus, *Gospel of Matthew*, 6, 28. "Consider the lilies of the field: they neither toil nor spin." Attention to what is there, without care for tomorrow.

What remains open

Does a life made mostly of routine have as much value as an intense one? This vision says yes, and that may be its hardest answer to believe.



Sometimes separation falls silent.



Some moments resist words.

Before the sea, in a room where someone has just been born or has just died, the inner chatter falls silent, and the border between oneself and the rest grows thin. A foretaste of the return, without the return.

It is not the absence of noise. One can find it in the middle of a station, and look for it in vain in a closed room.

In silence, the Source would no longer need to search for itself. It would simply be there.

This chapter stops here, to make room for it.

Others said it before, in other words.



This vision is not new. What it says of unity, of love and of return, others said before it, in languages, centuries and countries that did not know one another. We are not astonished enough: intuitions so close, born so far from one another.

In India, twenty-five centuries ago, a man sitting under a tree understands that the self we take to be solid is only a current, and that suffering is born of wanting to cling to it. The Buddha does not speak of a Source; he speaks of awakening. But he already says that separation is an illusion that makes us suffer.

In China, around the same time, a small book is attributed to Lao Tzu, which begins by confessing its own powerlessness: the Tao that can be named is not the true Tao. An origin without a name, from which everything comes and to which everything returns, like water that struggles against nothing and ends by wearing down everything.

In Athens, Socrates claims to know nothing. He asks questions until certainties fall, and dies without disowning this searching ignorance. He leaves no doctrine, but an attitude: to prefer the true question to the comfortable answer.

In Galilee, Jesus speaks little of metaphysics and much of other people. He says to love our enemies, to look at the lilies of the field, to become like a child again. He says that what we do to the least of them, we do to him. Whether or not one believes in what was built afterwards in his name, this sentence meets the intuition of this book: the other is not a stranger.

In Anatolia, in the thirteenth century, Rumi opens his great poem with the lament of a reed flute. Cut from the reed bed, it sings the pain of separation, and that song is its only voice. The human soul would be this flute: separated from its origin, and made into music by that very separation.

They did not say the same thing. They looked in the same direction.



Each of them, in their own way, also spoke of those moments when separation falls silent, and the mystics of every tradition describe them in almost the same words. Do these moments reveal something about the real, or only how our brain works? The two perhaps do not exclude each other, but nothing allows us to decide.

They should not be melted into a single wisdom: that would be to betray them. The Buddha does not believe in a soul that endures, Jesus prays to a Father, Lao Tzu distrusts precepts,

Socrates the gods of the city. Their differences matter as much as their echoes. And many others, women and men with no book and no disciples, have passed on the same thing in their own way: in a manner of caring, of listening, of forgiving.

This book does not set itself at their height. It recognises the direction they pointed and takes it up in its own words, with no authority but that of an honest question. A bearer does not keep the light. They hand it on, and someone else goes on.

Echoes

Jesus, *Gospel of Matthew*, 25, 40. "Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for me."

Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, I. "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao."

The Buddha, *Dhammapada*, I, 5. "Hatred is never appeased by hatred; only by the absence of hatred is it appeased."

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, 1945. One wisdom at the heart of all traditions. A contested thesis, accused of erasing differences.

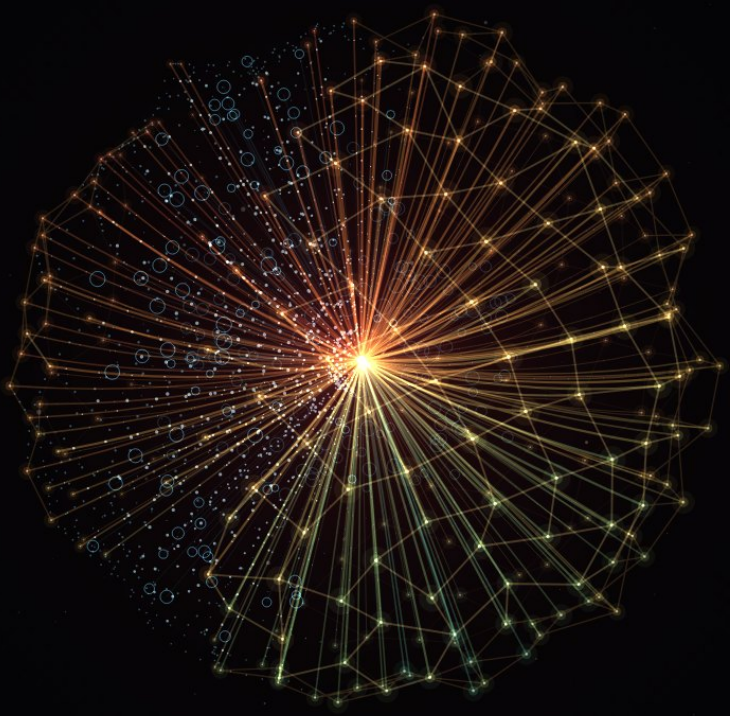
Meister Eckhart, sermons, 14th century. The ground of the soul and the ground of God are one and the same ground.

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1902. Mystical states are ineffable, and have for those who live them the authority of knowledge.

What remains open

If traditions so far apart converge, is it the sign of a common truth, or of the same human need for consolation?

To doubt this vision would still be a way of keeping faith with it.



It is time to turn the question against this book. What if all of it were wrong?

There would be no Source. Consciousness would be what a brain does, nothing more, and would go out with it. The parallel lives, the gathering soul, the return: fine images, born of the very human wish that nothing be lost. The world would go on, immense and indifferent, with no one to discover themselves in it.

This hypothesis is in no way absurd. It is even, today, the most widely held among those who study the brain. Nothing in the preceding chapters refutes it. This book has said so chapter after chapter: it brings no proof, only a way of holding things together.

It also has a flaw that must be admitted: it is hard to catch out. A vision that explains the forgetting of other lives by the need to forget, suffering by learning, the absence of proof by the very nature of what it describes, risks absorbing everything. An idea that nothing could contradict may no longer say anything.

An idea that can no longer be doubted has stopped being an idea.

Why put it forward, then? Because doubt is not the enemy of this vision. It is its logical consequence. A Source that does not know what it is, that discovers as it goes, could hardly inspire certainties. It would rather invite searching, being wrong, correcting. A book that spoke of it with assurance would betray it.

This doubt is familiar in very concrete lives. The believer who, one evening, no longer knows whether they believe. The researcher who watches her measurements contradict the

theory she has given twenty years to. The one who loves and wonders whether they still do. Each time doubt hurts, and each time it guards against something worse: taking for granted what is not.

There is, though, a doubt that is only an escape: the kind that serves never to commit, never to risk anything, always to keep a way out. That is not the one defended here. Faithful doubt keeps acting. It plants the tree without knowing whether it will see the fruit, it sits up with the sick without knowing whether they will recover.

If this vision is wrong, something of it may still remain: a more attentive way of looking at other living beings, at ordinary days, at those who suffer. That is not a proof. It is only what it will have made it possible to see. The reader remains free to keep what holds, and leave the rest.

Echoes

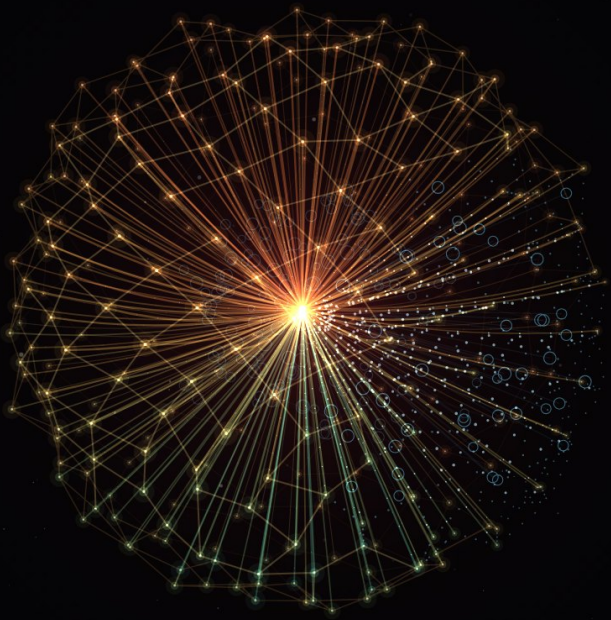
Montaigne, *Essays*, II, 12. "What do I know?" The motto of a doubt that does not stop one living.

Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934. A theory that no observation could refute is not a scientific theory.

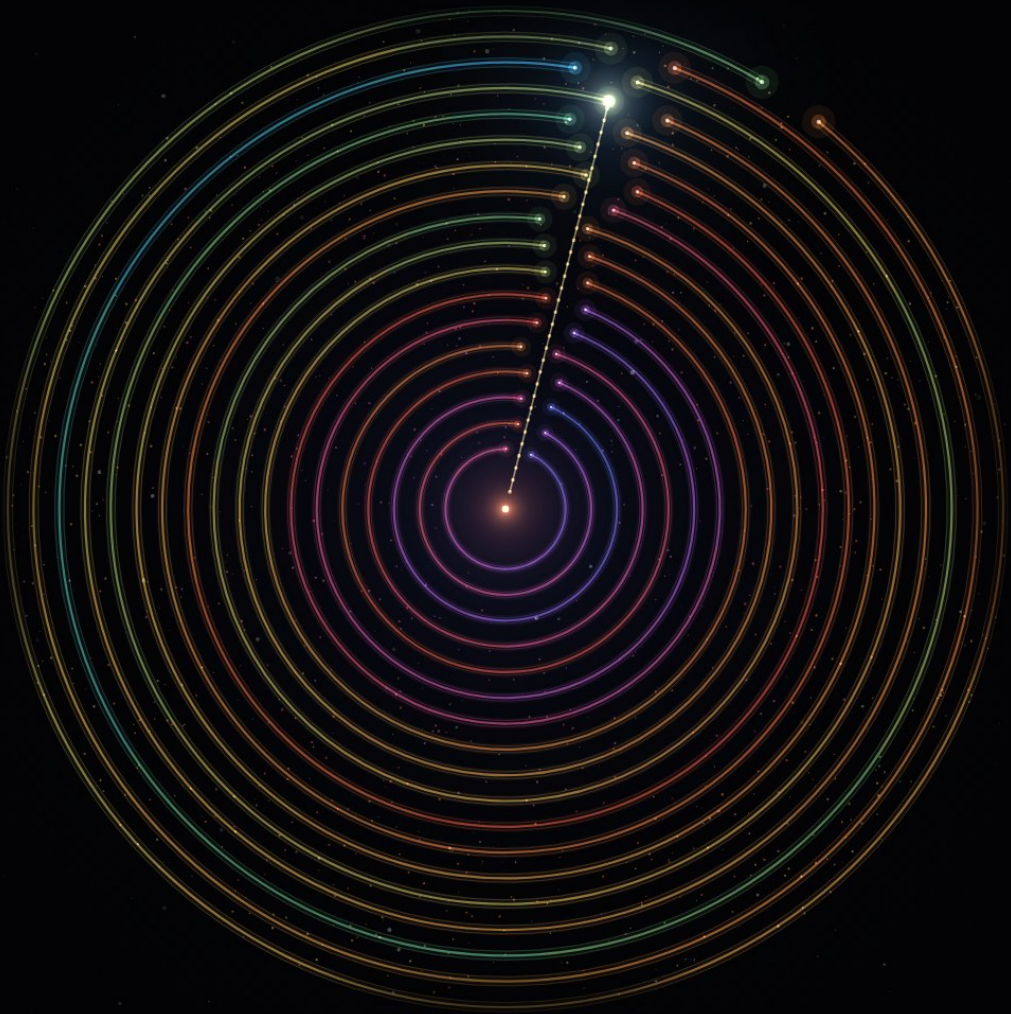
Miguel de Unamuno, *The Agony of Christianity*, 1925. "Faith that does not doubt is dead faith."

What remains open

Is a vision that can be neither proved nor refuted worth holding? And on what conditions?



First how, then why. And at the end, wonder that anything exists at all.



We can explain how a star ignites, and even how a consciousness might learn. Yet one word is enough to bring the whole edifice down: why?

Around the age of three or four, children go through the age of why. Each answer calls for another, until the adult, at a loss, ends up saying: that's just the way it is. The child is not satisfied, and is right not to be. They have just touched, without knowing it, the limit every philosophy has touched.

Learning explains why the Source creates. It does not say why it is. And what if it did not know either? All lives, all worlds would then be a single question, asked in an infinity of ways: why is there something rather than nothing?

The question seems abstract, but it arises in the most concrete moments. Before a newborn child, a starry sky, someone's death, we suddenly wonder why all this exists rather than nothing. The sciences explain how things come about. They do not answer that question, and do not claim to.

The idea enchants and frightens. It enchants, because no life is a spectator any more: each one takes part in the search. It frightens, because no one, at any scale, would hold the answer.

It may also be that the question has no answer in the sense we mean. Not that it is badly posed, but because the answer would not be a sentence. It would be the totality of what is lived, in every possible way, in all worlds. We would not read it: we would live it.

Indian thought has a word for this: līlā, the world as the play of the divine, with no reason beyond the play itself. This book has crossed it along the way. A game does not need to be justified in order to be serious; it is enough for it to be played.

Perhaps we have to go further still. Before the how and the why, there is the simple fact that something exists. We do not understand it: we wonder at it. And that wonder might already be the answer, or whatever stands in for one.

One firm point remains. No one has ever waited to know the reason for everything before loving someone, sitting up with the sick or planting a tree.

Meaning begins before the answer.

Echoes

Leibniz, *Principles of Nature and Grace*, 1714. Why is there something rather than nothing?

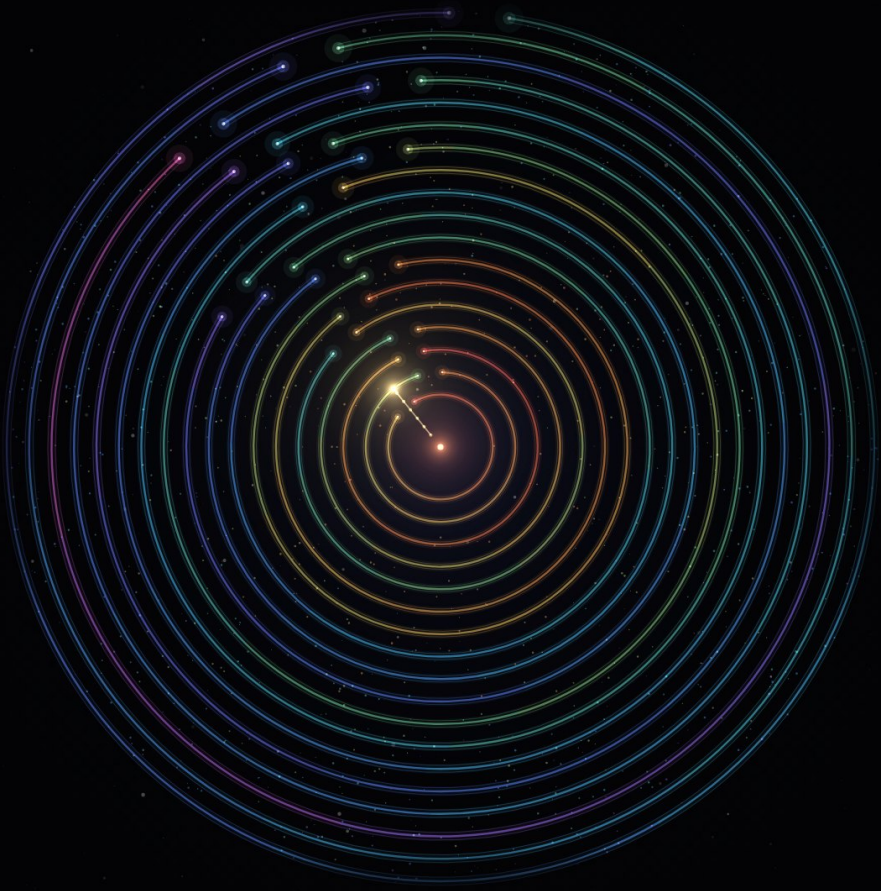
Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, 1903. Love the questions themselves, and live them, until one day you live into the answer.

Līlā, Hindu thought. The world as the play of the divine, with no reason beyond the play itself.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 1921. It is not how the world is that is the mystical, but that it is.

What remains open

Could an infinity of experiences even provide that answer?



Five questions remain open

If a consciousness directs its lives, how can each one stay free?

If the Source feels every pain, why would it not learn more through love?

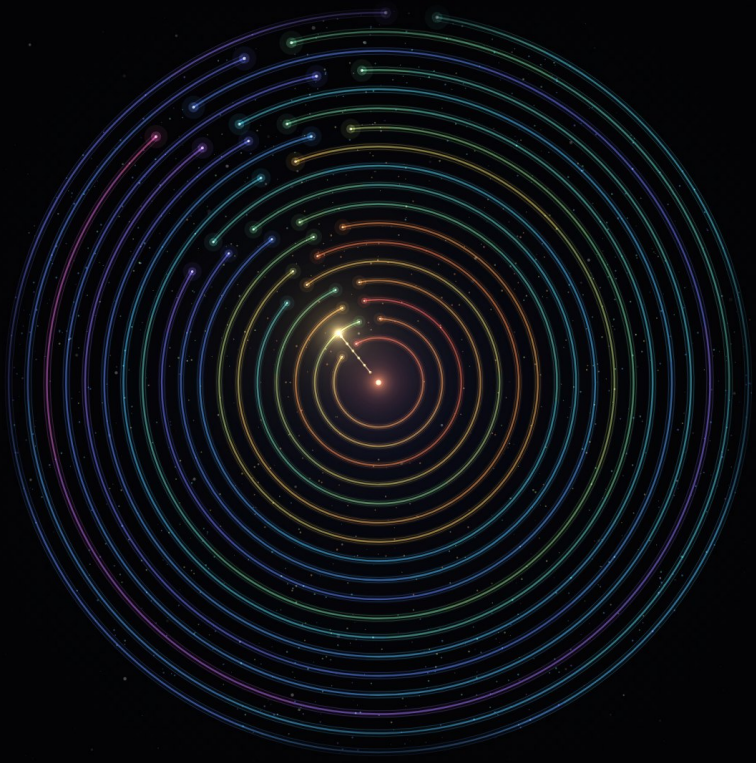
If everything comes from the Source, where does deliberate harm come from?

If it is searching for why it exists, could an infinity of experiences ever tell it?

If this vision consoles, is that a reason to believe it, or to distrust it?

And one last question, left unanswered.

Has the Source always known it exists, or is it learning this through us?





https://c0sm0cats.github.io/the-source/