

Human Perspective



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*Note: Every section title in the main body of the document
is a link to the corresponding Mysearch website page,
which may contain more information and quotes.*

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1.1 Human Perspective

In the current context, the idea of a human perspective is being used to suggest a mode of objective thinking, based wherever possible on empirical evidence, rather than the acceptance of some super-natural deity based on either unsupported scriptures, superstition or even simple falsehood. As such, this discussion will start by making reference to an earlier discussion of 'theological belief' that was part of a wider 'worldview' discussion for reasons that will be outlined below. However, before embarking on this discussion, it is possibly necessary to explain the premise of the 'human perspective'.



"I didn't know secular humanists had missionaries!"

If you reject the idea of miracles, unless supported by extraordinary empirical evidence, as yet absent, then almost all religious belief has to be questioned, at least, in terms of its many miraculous events. However, while this perspective might also question the 'historical truth' of almost all religious belief, it does not necessarily reject or attack the reasons as to why so many people believe in so many apparently different and contradictory religions. This said, from an agnostic position, all religious beliefs are open to critical questioning, which might then be rejected on the grounds of both scientific and historic evidence, while leaving the door open to the larger issue of whether there is purpose in the universe. However, this position does not pre-suppose that a purpose exists, simply that it cannot necessarily be proved or disproved at this stage.

Over the years since the first Mysearch review of theology, as cited above, many more people are publishing video material via YouTube, which may either support or challenge previous conclusions, although the proliferation of so many different views via this media has to be considered with care. For, today, we are possibly more conscious of the issue of 'fake news' and our susceptibility to simply accept information because it confirms an existing worldview - see confirmation bias. In this context, the return to this topic was triggered by a video entitled 'Religion-The Shocking Truth' that appear to suggest that many religions have a common history that might be linked to astrology and the mythology surrounding the constellations of the zodiac. At face-value, this video appears to forward a compelling story that the myths of the Egyptian sun-god 'Horus', as underpinned by the astrology of the zodiac constellations, has many parallels with later religions, e.g. Christianity. A subsequent search, then highlighted a similar video 'Zeitgeist Part 1: The Greatest Story Ever Told' that pretty much repeated the claims of the first video cited above, which might also be reviewed in textual form via the following linked website. Of course, the acceptance of these videos at face-value also raises a question:

Do they only appeal to a certain confirmation bias?

While this is entirely possible, the rest of this discussion is an attempt to conform to the basic principles adopted throughout the Mysearch website based on William Clifford's essay entitled 'The Ethics of Belief', i.e. duty of inquiry, weight of authority and limits of inference. Therefore, in this spirit, it needs to be highlighted from the outset that many have questioned the accuracy of many of the claims in the previous videos, i.e. that religious

beliefs can be traced back to astrological events linked to the zodiac, both in terms of mythology and as a foundation of astronomy. However, while also being open to the criticism of confirmation bias, the following four videos might provide another introduction of the scope of the discussion to follow for those who may be new to this debate.

- [The Mythicist Position](#)
- [Osiris: Pagan Origins of Christianity](#)
- [Jesus is a myth](#)
- [Are the New Testament gospels history?](#)

While the links above might appear particularly biased against Christianity, it is not the intent of this particular discussion as equal scepticism has previously been expressed about [Judaism](#), [Christianity](#) and [Islam](#) on the grounds of miracles that cannot be supported by known science or events that cannot be empirically supported by history. However, the role of the astrological zodiac in earlier religious beliefs has not previously been considered and will therefore be the first issues reviewed in outline.

1.1.1 [History of the Zodiac](#)

Some 10,000 years ago, humanity underwent a step-change in its cultural evolution as it transitioned from a nomadic hunter-gather existence into settlements founded on agriculture. This development would eventually spread around the world and might help explain why, in a historical context, there is often a common 'theme' underpinning religious belief based on Sun worship, which might be anchored to the primal belief that the Sun was the 'bringer of life' on which the agricultural revolution was so dependent.

Note: If we were to pick a fairly arbitrary figure of 100,000 years for the migration of homo-sapiens out of Africa and equate a human generation to 20 years, then 5,000 generations of humanity have existed in that time. In comparison, only 500 generations would have existing in the 10,000 years since the start of the agricultural revolution alluded to above. Therefore, in general terms, some 4,500 generations of humanity existed even before the earliest recorded history, such that we might only surmise what these people believed about the 'meaning of life' and passed to their descendants.



If we try to put ourselves in the position of those who lived 500 generations ago, we might realise that any stories about the creation of life passed to them by even earlier generations might naturally be considered in terms of the 'bringer of life', i.e. the Sun. Of course, today, most might readily accept that anybody directing a question about the 'meaning of life' towards the Sun, as a physical body in the solar system rather than as a deity, would probably not have received a direct answer, although this probably did not exclude some form of answer of being constructed by those asking this sort of question. It is known that the idea of some form of a Sun-god, or Sun Goddess, has been found throughout most of

recorded history in various forms and across multiple cultures – see '[List of Sun Gods](#)'. Of course, given the span of time under consideration, some care is needed in separating what may have only been myth from what might have had some factual basis in history. This may be especially true when considering the many conflicting '*histories*' associated with ancient Egypt and its many religious deities and semi-deities. For example, the story of '[Horus](#)' is often considered to be one of the earliest and most significant ancient Egyptian Sun-gods, which could be a merging of history and myth, where '*Horus*' may have originally been based on a real person, a pharaoh-king, who was later merged into myth as the name given to the rising sun, along with '[Ra](#)' as the noon sun and [Osiris](#), the god of the dead, associated with the dying or setting sun. In one form or another, these types of sun-god deities were worshipped from the late [prehistoric-Egyptian](#) period, i.e. 3100 BCE, until the time of the [Ptolemaic Kingdom](#), i.e. 323-30 BCE. However, as a basic premise, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that many other earlier cultures developed myths surrounding deities that lived in the heavens, which we might now assumed to be allegories based on anthropomorphic characterisations of the Sun, Moon and stars, although possibly originally based on real people in earlier history.

Note: Over a period of many thousands of years, [Egyptian civilization](#) developed along the Nile River, which supported the rich soil necessary for growing crops for an expanding population. However, the Egyptians also kept written records using a writing system known as hieroglyphics, which have been preserved on stone, clay and papyrus, although few papyrus documents have survived. From this recorded history, we know that Egypt was an important political and economic power at that time based on its agricultural production and other economic resources, which was supported by wide-reaching trade networks along the Nile, the Red Sea and Near East. This civilisation would have had a complex social structure ruled by successive divine God-king dynasties in which the Horus myth possibly developed over a period of some 3000 years, i.e. 150 generations.

While not necessarily being too accurate with a timeline stretching back some 3000 BCE, we know that various civilisations in the '[Middle-East](#)' region had started to emerge that were becoming increasingly sophisticated in terms of written language and mathematics. As a consequence, these early civilisations started to systematically observe the movement of stars and planets in the sky, not only as an extension of their mythical stories about heavenly Sun-gods, but also because it helped them track the passing seasons, such that the planting of crops could be planned. However, over time, a body of knowledge about the movement of the stars and planets began to be formalised into a system of '[astrology](#)' that divided the '[heavens](#)' into groups of '[constellations](#)' that forms the '[zodiac](#)'. The earliest evidence of a developing constellation map comes from inscriptions on stones and clay tablets found in [Mesopotamia](#), dating back to 3000 BCE, although the wider naming of the constellations probably took place much later between 1300-1000 BCE.

Note: Today, the [Babylonians](#) are often credited with the initial development of what is now called astrology, although for more than 2,000 years, astrology and [astronomy](#) were the same science. However, while the word 'zodiac' is derived from the Greek word meaning 'circle of animals' its development can also be traced to ancient Egypt that was subsequently developed further by the Babylonians.

In part, we might consider the earliest development of the zodiac as a response to the big question about the '*meaning of life*', which might have initially focused religious belief skywards to the various Sun-gods of antiquity.

However, aspects of what is now considered to be astrology would also later become the foundation stone of astronomical science in terms of the tracking of celestial bodies relative to the Earth.

Note: Each year, there are two solstices and two equinoxes, which signify a change of season in different ways. The word 'solstice' comes from the Latin word 'sol' meaning 'sun' and 'sistere' meaning to 'make stand'. In this context, a solstice describes the moment that the sun reaches its northern or southern-most point, where the Sun appears stationary at a point in the sky. This event occurs twice a year at the winter and summer solstice, i.e. shortest and longest days of the year. In contrast, the word 'equinox' comes from a Latin term meaning 'equal night' where there is an equal amount of daylight and darkness, i.e. 12 hours, which also occurs twice a year in the spring and autumn.

So, over time, the tracking of the stars led to the recognition and anticipation of events, which occurred over ever-longer periods of time, such as full moons and eclipses. Within this process, clusters of stars in the night were grouped into constellations that has developed into one of the oldest images in human history, i.e. the cross of the zodiac reflecting the passage of the sun as it passes through the 12 major constellations over the course of a year. We might recognise that the division in the zodiac also reflects the 12 months of the year, the 4 seasons and the positioning of solstices and equinoxes. However, overlaying this astronomical science was the possibly much older anthropomorphic imaginary, such that these early civilizations did not just track the Sun and stars from a scientific perspective, they also personified the heavens with elaborate religious myths anchored in the belief of a creator, often in the form of a sun-god. In this context, the 12 constellations might be seen as the domain of the Sun-god, where each constellation was also linked to elements of nature at certain times of the year, e.g. Aquarius, the water bearer, was associated the spring rains.



So how might we separate science and myth within the historical development of the zodiac?

The classical map of the sky, with the 48 Greek constellations, is said to have originated from at least two different pre-Greek traditions. One tradition comprised of the 12 signs of the zodiac and is assumed to have developed over the period 3,200-500 BCE. However, there is still much speculation about the origin of the constellations, as they appear to have evolved in-line with various adaptations of religious belief over centuries, although some research now suggests that they were also subject to some 'scientific' development in the sense that they created a useful pictorial coordinate system. Today, we might perceive a coordinate system as a set of imaginary lines from which position can be determined, i.e. latitude and longitude. However, it is possible that the zodiac constellations originally performed a similar function in the form of distinct and recognisable patterns in the night-sky, which possibly made it easier to identify groups of stars without the need of instruments. Moreover, today, reverse engineering this evidence points to a time and place in which the idea of a zodiac might have first originated, i.e. approximately 2700 BCE at about 36° north latitude, which can be linked to the early Sumerian civilization from which Babylon inherited much of its science.

Note: While it is traditionally claimed that the earliest reference to the zodiac originates with the Babylonians, the discovery of an 'observatory' in Metsamor, predating the Babylonian kingdom by almost 2,000 years changes the timeline of events of the first recorded example of dividing the year into 12 sections. Using an early form of geometry, the inhabitants of Metsamor were able to create both a calendar and surmise the curvature of the Earth. This discovery along with engravings suggesting 'zodiac creatures' has given support to the idea that the earliest forms of the zodiac may have been developed by ancient people living in the Euphrates valley as early as 4000 BCE.

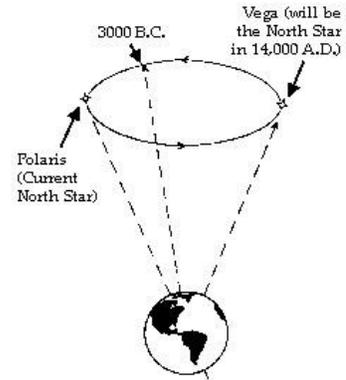
There is also evidence for a Hindu zodiac, and while the names differ from the Greek form, the symbols are essentially identical. For example, 'dhanu' means bow and corresponds to Sagittarius, the 'archer', while 'kumbha' means 'water-pitcher' and corresponds to Aquarius, the 'water-carrier'. As a consequence, it is assumed that there was a possible earlier exchange of cultural influences, which might be traced back before the Greeks linked to trading between the Sumerian and Babylonian cultures and the Indus Valley Culture millennia before the Greeks. There is also a Chinese Zodiac with a cycle of 12 years, rather than 1, where each year is represented by an animal. This difference is possibly correlated to a 'Jupiter Year' as it takes 12 years for Jupiter to complete one orbit of the Sun. The origin of the Chinese zodiac may also be based on the mythological story of Buddha, who is said to have invited all the animals to a race, where only the first twelve would be included in the Zodiac calendar. It is known from pottery artefacts that the animals of the Chinese zodiac were recorded in the Tang Dynasty, i.e. 618-907 CE, but are also seen on much earlier artefacts from the Warring States Period, i.e. 475-221 BCE. However, others have argued that the animals of the Chinese zodiac were brought to China via the Silk Road, the same central Asian trade route that brought the Buddhist belief from India to China. As such, some scholars have argued that the Chinese zodiac predates Buddhism and has origins in early Chinese astronomy that used the 12-year orbit of Jupiter, while others argue that the use of animals in Chinese astrology began with nomadic tribes in ancient China who developed a calendar based on the animals they used to hunt and gather.



So how might we separate earlier astrology from modern-day astronomy?

As a generalisation, while astrology was based on the study of the movements of celestial objects, i.e. it has an astronomical component, it also attempts to predict future events and overlay anthropomorphic characteristics onto various celestial objects. In contrast, modern astronomy is purely the scientific study of the properties, interactions and evolution of physical celestial objects. In astrology, the 12 signs of the zodiac are aligned to various [constellations](#) which lay along the path of the Sun over the course of one year, i.e. the time between equinox. In the astronomical context, the Earth orbits the Sun and the line of sight to 1 of the 12 zodiac constellations is blocked by the Sun, where in astrological terms the Sun is described as 'sitting' in one of the 12 zodiac signs. However, it has long been known that the timing of each equinox, and solstice, varies as the Earth slowly wobbles on its axis every 26000 years, which today is described in terms of the [Earth's Precession](#), such that the date of the equinox slowly shifts by about 1 day every 70 years.

The effect of this shifting is that the position of the Sun within different constellations has slowly change since the earliest zodiacs were developed. As such, the ages of the zodiac are linked to the Earth's precession about its axis and linked to the original perception that the Sun had an ecliptic path around the Earth. If we divide the 360° rotation path by the 12, then each of the signs of the zodiac corresponds to 30° segments within this elliptical path. Today, we know that the Earth's axis is tilted at an angle of approximately 23.5° to the plane of this ecliptic path, which then produces the seasonal variations within each year. The effect of the Earth's precession on its own axis can also be seen in terms of the 'North Star' where, today, the North Pole is aligned with the fixed star Polaris, although this was not the case 3,000 years ago and by the year 14,000 CE, the North Star will be Vega, not Polaris, as illustrated in the diagram right. While there is evidence that the Earth's 'wobble' and its effects on the timing of equinoxes was known to the ancient Egyptians, the official discovery of this mechanism is often attributed to the Greek astronomer, Hipparchus, who was born sometime around 190 BCE.



Note: In the context of the Zodiac, it was observed that the Sun appears in a slightly earlier position at each subsequent spring equinox, when measured against the fixed stars. Although, 1 day every 70 years may not appear to be an obvious change, it would amount to a shift of nearly 1 month, i.e. 28.57 days, over a period of 2000 years and would ultimately lead to variations in different Zodiac maps.

We might also understand that an ecliptic path, like a circle, has neither a start or end, such that some reference point needs to be established, which might be traced back to a spring equinox possibly over 2000 years ago. At this time, the spring equinox would have occurred when the Sun was in the constellation of Aries, such that the first sign of the zodiac is often described in terms of the 'age of Aries' which from the Earth's precession can be calculated. If we approximate the total time for Earth's precession on its axis to be 26,000 years, then each 'age' of the zodiac would align to 2160 years. If we also make a fairly crude but not necessarily ridiculous alignment for the age of Aries to end in 0CE, then we might list the following zodiac ages over the approximated 10,000 years of recorded human history.

Age	Start	End	BCE/CE
Leo	10800	8640	BCE
Cancer	8640	6480	BCE
Gemini	6480	4320	BCE
Taurus	4320	2160	BCE
Aries	2160	0	BCE-CE
Pisces	0	2160	CE
Aquarius	2160	4320	CE

The purpose of outlining the zodiac ages does not really have that much to do with astronomy but may be more significant in terms of astrology and the more mythical stories associated with these ages. Although these more speculative issues are not really the focus of this discussions, we might still outline some basic history that can be correlated to the ages of the zodiac listed above.

The Age of Taurus: 4320-2160 BCE

While there is little in the way of recorded history that extends much beyond this age, i.e. 4320 BCE, we might reasonably speculate that agriculture was being developed in many regions of the world by this time. By about 3500 BCE, it is also known that people were already settled in the Nile valley and, by 3100 BCE, hieroglyphic scripts was being developed and, by 2700 BCE, the first stone pyramids were being built. These pyramids appear to have both astrological and astronomical significance in their positioning and alignment, which might also reflect a significant development in terms of geometry and mathematics in general. The span of time within the age of Taurus also saw the building of wall cities in Babylon and Sumeria plus the rise of a Chinese civilisation and others possibly too numerous to detail.

The Age of Aries: 2160-0 BCE

Despite the obvious development in the previous age, the age of Aries possibly saw the first large-scale development of civilisations that expanded into the empires of the ancient world, i.e. Chinese, Persian, Greek and finally Roman. Each of these civilizations sought more land and territory by conquering the indigenous peoples of other lands as they expanded outward, such that they would have 'exported' their cultural stories and myths to an ever-widening population.

Note: While care is needed in assuming that biblical stories of [Judaism](#) always equate to actual history, we might highlight the biblical history of [Abraham](#), who is assumed to have lived around 2000 BCE, i.e. near the start of the age of Aries. Abraham would later become a patriarchal figure in three monotheistic religions, i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. While it is often assumed that Abraham was born in the city of Ur in Mesopotamia, there are considerable discrepancies in the timeframe indicated above, as with the life of [Moses](#), who is assumed to have lived some 500 years after Abraham. However, at this point, the main purpose of citing these biblical characters is to position the earliest development of monotheistic belief within the historic timeline of other developments.

The Age of Pisces: 0-2160 CE

While, at the start of this age, humanity had not necessarily embraced scientific enlightenment, aspects of the scientific method were beginning to separate astrology from astronomy. We might characterise this transition in the work of [Ptolemy](#) called '[The Almagest](#)' written between 100-170 CE, who was a Greco-Roman mathematician, astronomer, geographer and astrologer.

Note: While accepting that the timeline for each zodiac age cited above can be subject to many different assumptions – see [Astrological Ages](#) for more details, we might possibly see that there may be some inferred alignment between BC and BCE with AD and CE and the [biblical story of Jesus](#). One of the main symbols in earlier Christianity is the '[sign of the fish](#)', which some have argued is intended to link the birth of Jesus birth to the new age of Pisces, which in astrology has the symbol of two fish.

Finally, we might make some historic reference to [Islamic religion](#), which might be traced back to the recorded life of [Muhammad](#) between 570-632 CE. While many aspects of Islam reject the mythological predictions of astrology, it still embraced those aspects based on the science of astronomy and the earlier work of Ptolemy. In this context, Islam also needed to study the heavens as nomadic-desert tribes often

travelled at night, such that knowledge of the constellations might help guide their journeys. Later, as the institutions of Islamic faith developed, Muslims also needed to determine the time of their prayers, the direction of the Kaaba and the correct orientation of mosques. Equally, while possibly not a mainstream aspect of Islamic faith, many continued to believe that the 'heavens' might still influence Earthly affairs and even the human condition. So, from the perspective of this very cursory outline of astrology, we might still see how it came to influence the development of various religious belief across the world both in terms of earlier mythical stories, which in many instances were anchored in the astronomy of heavenly constellations.

1.1.2 [Myths versus Facts](#)

Let us start by clarifying the modern perception of a 'myth' as opposed to a 'fact'. At a basic level, we might consider a myth as a possibly widely held but false belief or fictional idea, which might be rooted in earlier beliefs or traditional stories. In contrast, a fact is something we now believe to be true based on some degree of empirical verification, which may be scientific in scope or possibly supported by multiple independent historical sources. Of course, we might also recognise a degree of ambiguity between myth and fact, when myth is rooted in known historical events and some facts are only subject to limited verification. As a consequence, it might be argued that all human perspective is subjective, i.e. it is based on limited senses, intelligence and factual information, such that we might only have a partial understanding of the full complexity of everything taking place within the total universe, i.e. infinitely small to the infinitely large.



But does this imply that myth and fact have to be given equal weighting?

While most people might accept that believing in too many fanciful myths, without any substantiated fact, is possibly not necessarily a 'good thing' for an individual, the issue of an entire society believing in a myth is literally a completely different story. This issue might be put into perspective by one of the main arguments of [William Clifford](#) in his 1877 essay entitled '[The Ethics of Belief](#)'

"The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them, for then it must sink back into savagery. It may matter little to me, in my cloud-castle of sweet illusions and darling lies; but it matters much to Man that I have made my neighbours ready to deceive. The credulous man is father to the liar and the cheat."

While Clifford's quote above highlights a danger to the individual, he is clearly concerned that society, as a whole, will be adversely affected if it simply believes in things without inquiry or testing in as much as it is possible. Therefore, while the previous discussion of the 'History of the Zodiac' might provide some evidence of a common theme underpinning many earlier religious beliefs, which found their way into today's monotheistic faiths, we also

need to distinguish between anecdotal and verifiable evidence. For a wider discussion of this issue - see link to [Comparative Mythology](#).

Note: The fact that earlier astrology was founded on a mixture of mythical stories and astronomical facts is probably accepted by most. However, it is not always obvious when myth might have originated in historical fact. Likewise, care is needed when accepting any Internet source as having the necessary 'weight of authority' for what may be little more than conjecture, e.g. the parallels between the life of Horus and the life of Jesus, as previously suggested in the links provided in the opening discussion.

Therefore, this discussion will consider more basic arguments. The first is linked to the issue that many religious myths appear to be predicated on miracles, which transcend any known science. The second is linked to the absence of substantive historical evidence to support the 'miraculous' claims being made. In part, we might reference a quote by Carl Sagan to summarise the approach being considered:

"Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence"

In the context of the Carl Sagan quote, the responsibility for providing proof for the many, and often conflicting, religious beliefs lies with those who believe in extraordinary claims, not with those who do not. If so, countering religious belief with possibly equally speculative theories about historical similarities between other characters in astrological mythology, which cannot necessarily be fully substantiated, may not be the best approach.

Note: Again, it will be reiterated that from an agnostic position, all religious beliefs are open to critical questioning and may be rejected on the grounds of a lack of scientific or historic evidence, while leaving the door open to the larger issue of whether there is purpose in the universe. However, this position does not pre-suppose that a purpose exists, simply that it cannot necessarily be proved or disproved at this stage.

While this discussion is arguing that all religious belief is open to logical questioning, where each claim might then be analysed in terms of verifiable evidence and even statistical probability, the rationale of humanity cannot always be defined in terms of this type of logic in isolation. So while there may be aspects of religious belief that may be questionable in terms of known science and verifiable history, it is possibly too one-dimensional to ignore the obvious need for some people to believe in something that puts our unlikely, precarious and finite existence into some larger perspective. We might attempt to illustrate this need in a hypothetical example, albeit one that many unfortunate parents have had to confront throughout history.

A child is dying and asks what is going to happen when they die?

Logical truth alone may point to the probability that the child may simply cease to exist as a self-aware sentient being and their physical remains disposed of in accordance to local health and safety regulations. While this may be a stark truth, it is unlikely that many people, even committed atheists, would share this 'stark truth' with the child, but rather opt for an explanation that might bring some degree of comfort to a dying child, irrespective of truth or logic. However, while accepting a possible emotional necessity in this case, if humanity as a collective whole is to continue to seek truthful answers, in as much as they might exist and be understood by the world at

large, then the emotional dilemma cited above cannot be forwarded as evidence for the existence of God, only of an emotional need to believe in one. So, as outlined, the separation of 'myths' and 'facts' may not always be black and white, such that it might be accepted that there are many 'grey areas' within this debate, which might then be subject to much philosophic conjecture as possibly illustrated in the next question.

Will some aspects of religious belief always transcend the ability of science to verify or contradict?

In part, we might consider the question as encompassing a philosophical issue, especially if we accept that all human knowledge may be limited and fallible. In this context, it has to be conceded that science does not have all the answers and possibly fewer than most scientists are necessarily willing to admit. However, again, this does not mean that, in terms of historical facts and scientific probability, we cannot make some valued judgement about specific tenets of any given religion. Therefore, an examination of the historical evidence contained within religious scriptures is both legitimate and open to critical examination, as is the probability of miracles that defy all the accepted laws of physics. However, as outlined above, an aspect of religious belief may be necessary for some because it fulfils a very human emotional need.

1.1.3 Religious History

We might reasonably speculate that from the very dawn of human history, mankind has struggled to make sense of its life and death existence and purpose in the universe. However, while philosophy and science has attempted to rationalise existence, there is a sense in which they have not really answered the key question that many people want to answer.

Why does the universe exist, what is its purpose?

At face value, theology is not constrained by logic or verifiable proof to underwrite its beliefs. However, while some might now see this as a weakness, various religious beliefs have given comfort and solace to countless generations, who may otherwise have perceived no purpose to their existence or any reason for morality. However, it is also in the nature of humanity to question and challenge, such that we also need to examine the answers provided by theology in order to make some judgement of the various, and often opposing, belief systems. While even a cursory examination of history suggests a multitude of beliefs, we might attempt to reduce this historical complexity by considering a general framework of different theological beliefs:

- Animism: A basic belief based on a spiritual existence.
- Pantheism: God(s) are everything and everything is God(s).
- Theism: One god, the creator of everything, allows miracles.
- Deism: A god based on reason, excludes miracles.
- Agnostic: The existence of God has not or cannot be proved.
- Atheism: Denies the existence of any supernatural God

While this list is obviously a much-simplified perspective of religious beliefs, we might still go further and suggest another simplification based on only two fundamental theological positions concerning the nature of the universe. The first considers the universe in terms of its material substance, which operates according to the laws of nature. The second, while accepting the reality of the material universe and its laws of nature, also believes in some form of metaphysical universe that transcends the physical realm. In this separation, a non-believer would probably reject the concept of `god or gods` and the notion of miracles that allow events to occur outside the normal laws of nature. Of course, nothing to do with religion is this simple, although any historic analysis might conclude that any specific religion has to be a minority view.



Note: It is estimated that there are some 20 major religions across the world, which are subdivided into over 250 large, and essentially separate, religious groups. In the case of Christianity, the `unity of the church` is split into more than 30,000 groups with over half having independent churches that are not linked to any major denomination.

On the basis of this introduction, we might conclude that while religion may indeed have `an` answer, there appears to be no consensus of one agreed answer. However, today, we might also attempt to simplify the historic debate in terms of [monotheism](#), i.e. one god, and [polytheism](#), i.e. many gods. Historically, polytheism predates monotheism, possibly reaching back into pre-history when mysticism and spiritualism had only just started to take form. However, today, monotheistic religions are dominant, possibly due to the zealous and missionary efforts of both Christian and Islamic faiths, albeit invariably underpinned by political and military power.

Note: Historically, many cities of antiquity had their own local god, although this earlier form of monotheism did not exclude the existence of other gods. In this context, the Hebrew Ark of the Covenant may have been an adaptation of a local deity for a nomadic lifestyle, which eventually paved the way for a stricter definition of monotheism within Judaism.

Within this historical development of religious belief, there are many variations of the nature of the deity in question ranging in form from anthropomorphic father figure to an ambiguous impersonal force. As such, this diversity of religious beliefs also had to reconcile the relationship between their god and humanity, which might be described in terms of devout celebration through to fearful appeasement. Equally, somewhere along this historic development emerged a subtle distinction between [`theism`](#) and [`deism`](#), where the former assumes that a supreme omnipotent god not only created the universe, but continues to sustain it, while deism only assumes god to be the creator.

What other historic developments might be taken into consideration?

Many religions have attributed their `god` with various degrees of omnipotence, omniscience and benevolence, although the concept of a benevolent god has not always been universally held. However, the characterisation of

god being both omnipotence and omniscience leads to a somewhat philosophical debate, whereby if god is responsible for all the 'good things' in the world, who is responsible for all the 'bad things'. Naturally enough, such a philosophical issue has generated many arguments ranging from the need for free-will through to the very probable assumption that any notion of god must transcend human understanding. In this context, some religions maintain that no true statements about the character of God can be made, while an agnostic position simply concede a limitation in human knowledge to come to a conclusive judgement as to whether there was any intelligent purpose behind the creation of the universe. However, we might also consider the idea of an anthropomorphic similarity between god and humanity, e.g. we are all made in the image of God, although the following quote from Nietzsche possibly reminds us of the reverse, i.e. humanity has made God in its own image.

*What if God were not exactly truth, and if this could be proved?
And if he were instead the vanity, the desire for power, the ambitions,
the fear, and the enraptured and terrified folly of mankind?
(Nietzsche, 1890)*

If so, humanity would have to face up to the possibility that all religions had developed more by way of socio-political institutions, which have proved highly effective in controlling society throughout the ages and into the modern era. However, there is still an aspect of the nature of all gods that reflect our oldest primeval fears of a universe in which our purpose and fate is essentially unknown. Therefore, in this respect, present-day humanity may not be so dissimilar from our ancient forebears in trying to come to terms with the dangers and mystery of the world. As such, it is possibly a natural desire to hope for an all-powerful, protecting and forgiving God with the promise of everlasting life. This said, we still need to face up to the prospect that religion may only be a solace, not an answer.

1.1.4 [Psychology of Belief](#)

As previous discussions have alluded, many have a need to believe in something that transcends this life and our scientific understanding of the universe, where we might try to rationalise the psychological need for religious belief in terms of [Maslow's hierarchy of human needs](#). In this context, it might be possible to construct an argument that the 'need' for some form of religious belief can mean very different things to different people, which effectively runs vertically across all of the definitions of needs within Maslow's hierarchy, i.e.

- Physiological: There can be a physiological need, which often emanates from emotional grief, to believe that the loss of a loved one is not permanent.
- Safety: There is an implicit sense of security in the belief that a god will look after you.



- Social: Even before the formality of organised religion, spiritual belief manifested itself in ceremonies that socially bonded groups of people in a common belief.
- Esteem: As the formal structure of religious organisations grew, esteem was bestowed on those who rose within the hierarchy of the organisation.
- Self-Actualisation: Might be described as a sense of power or the ability to influence, which has clearly manifested itself in the history of many religious organisations and their influence on socio-politics.

While it is accepted that the bullets above are somewhat speculative, they might provide some insight as to why belief in some form of religion is still such an important issue today, albeit for different reasons to different people. We might also perceive in Maslow's hierarchy a separation between 'needs and wants' that we might initially characterise in terms of an indirect example, e.g. the dilemma of what a child needs and what a child wants. At an emotional level we want our children to be happy, but at a logical level, we recognise that simply giving into all our children's 'wants' is not usually in the best interest of the child's long-term development. However, while we might initially understand, and therefore accept, a child's need for make-believe, it would become a matter of concern if it persisted into adulthood. However, it is clear that all our 'wants and beliefs' do not simply disappear with the transition into adulthood, although they are undoubtedly transformed in scope and sophistication by this process. For our beliefs are no longer simply childish wishes, but rather become a more fundamental need to address the apparent uncertainty of a life that some claim has no other purpose than what you make of it. While many of us can rationalise this logic from the comfort and security of our own position in society, we often have little experience of the despair and fear that life can inflict on others. In such cases, the need for a belief that transcends the limitations and injustices of this world is not illogical; it is simply a psychological necessity, which cannot be dismissed by any atheist philosophy. However, while we may have to accept the necessity of this emotional belief in an individual, there is a wider implication on the future of humanity if it is assumed this future will be secured by some deity, who in all probability does not exist.

1.1.5 [Probability of God](#)

It is realised that the inference of the title of this discussion may strike many as odd for a number of reasons. First, many people are often polarised towards a given view about God, usually due to varying degrees of cultural indoctrination, before they can weigh all the evidence for themselves. Second, people also come to hold their beliefs about God's existence, or non-existence, through an emotional need or experience in their lives. As a result, very few people ever sit down and rationalise the probability of God's existence based on logic. Somehow, for many, considering the probability of God's existence just does not seem to be an appropriate way to come to any conclusion about God, even though the whole idea is surrounded by uncertainty. In essence, God is often thought to be a matter of the heart, not the head. This said, the following discussion will try to let the head guide the heart by splitting the debate about the existence of God into 2 facets:



What is the evidence for God's existence?
And if God does exist, what is the nature of God?

However, for the purposes of this discussion, we are going to disregard all circumstantial evidence, which basically rules out all human myths, scriptures and the emotional need to believe in a God. For it would seem that the existence of God has to be considered in the widest context possible, i.e.

- Life
- The Universe
- And Everything

OK, the list is a cliché, but it serves as a reminder that the totality of any discussion about the creator of everything, e.g. God, cannot really be constrained by what amounts to little more than the unsubstantiated, and conflicting, beliefs of a minority of the inhabitants of a small and insignificant planet, circling one of 100 billion stars within one of 100 billion galaxies. However, this apparent wholesale dismissal of all religious evidence is not a denial of the reasons why so many people are led to believe that the cosmic grandeur of our universe could not have come about by chance or without some guiding intelligence. As such, it is not necessarily illogical to reject the 'belief' of science, which seems to forward the idea that the complexity of our universe, with all the perceived diversity of life contained within it, emerged out of nothing some 13.7 billion years ago with no creator and no purpose.

So does God exist?

We know that we cannot really answer this question directly in a yes-no manner, for it is often a matter of faith, but this does not mean that we cannot consider the probability of God's existence. If we simply accept this position for now, we can then turn our attention to the second issue by asking the question:

What might we infer about the nature of God from what we know of the universe?

It needs to be clarified that this is essentially a philosophical discussion, not a mathematical one, which starts with the premise that God might exist and then tries to ascertain the nature of a God, who is capable of creating the universe. It then tries to follow a line of logical thought through which we might then return to the more fundamental issue surrounding the probability of God's actual existence. So, proceeding with this line of approach:

Does God exist outside of time and space and therefore questions relating to God's existence prior to the universe or how God came into existence are meaningless?

While this statement might appear to sweep many key issues under the carpet, let us initially accept that the nature of God, by definition, transcends our finite understanding of the universe. As such, we might proceed by simply accepting that it was part of God's nature to want to create the universe and within God's ability to do so. This said, it is not clear that this position can avoid the next question:

What was God's purpose in creating the universe?

While any answer to such a question has to be more than a bit speculative, it might still be argued that the only option open to us is to try to pursue a line of logical reasoning. Based on logic and our own perception of human intelligence, it is difficult to imagine any sort of rational intelligence creating something, as complex as a universe, without any thought or purpose. If so, we either proceed by assuming that a thoughtful purpose existed or question whether God conforms to our idea of a rational intelligence. On this note, let us just stop to list the assumptions we shall pursue for clarity:

If God exists, it is an intelligence that exists outside the constraints of our perception of the physical universe and is therefore not constrained by the laws of physics. However, if this intelligence is rational, it must have had a purpose when creating the universe.

However, having got to a point, which is not really so far removed from the doctrines of many of today's religions, our goal is to now try to gain some possible insight into the nature of God. One of the implications of the description above, i.e. that God exists outside the physical universe, is that our universe may not be the only universe and therefore God's purpose may not be solely defined by our human perception of the universe. This leads to the issue, which in theological terms might be defined as either [theism or deism](#), although we might crudely scope this issue in terms of the next question:

How much attention would God give each universe, if more than one can exist?

Again, given that we cannot really address this question head on, let us try to take the line of questioning in a slightly different direction:

Are there any limits to God's ability?

This seems to be a central point of both theological and philosophical debate, because if God is infallible and all-knowing, it then raises the issue as to what purpose is served, in the act of any creation, for an intelligence that already knows the answers to everything that will happen after creation. In essence, this argument has an analogous parallel to the idea of a [deterministic clockwork universe](#) in which all outcomes can be predicted in advance. Of course, if God is fallible, at least, in the sense that the outcome of the universe, and the life within it, is not deterministic, we might gain a small in-sight into the nature of God by pursuing this line of thought. In many ways, the first option appears to suggest that there would be no purpose to life within a universe in which every outcome is already known from the start and so, based solely on what may amount to a personal preference, the probability of a fallible God will be pursued by refining the previous question:

If God's abilities are limited, does God seek to learn?

We have already assumed that a rational God must have had some sort of purpose, when creating the universe. So, let us try to rationalise the purpose behind the creation of our universe:

If God has no peers, what might God seek to gain or learn from the universe?

In mathematics, it has been recognised that even deterministic systems can generate what appears to [be chaotic or random outcomes](#). So, within the context of the current discussion, we might liken the universe to numerous deterministic systems, which although described by the laws of physics, ultimately yield unforeseen results. Again, before proceeding, let us keep track of the growing list of assumptions. Essentially, we are following a line of logic that God, if existing, is both rational and intelligent, but not all-knowing and therefore created the universe with the purpose to learn.

If so, what might this tell us about the nature of the universe?

Given that we obviously threw caution to the wind, almost from the outset of this particular discussion, we might consider the notion of the universe being analogous to the most complex [computer simulation](#) that could ever possibly be imagined, at least, by humanity. While this may seem a ridiculous idea, either the universe has no purpose, being the outcome of some form of quantum probability devoid of purpose and God's presence or it has purpose implying some sort of intelligent design. While either may, or may not, be true, we shall initially speculate on the latter:

So, if the universe has purpose, what is its purpose to its creator?

In human terms, we recognise the power of computer simulations to teach us about the outcome of events that would otherwise be impossible to predict or even understand. Equally, while we may perceive the universe as having near infinite physical dimensions in both time and space, this may be illusionary from God's position outside the universe, where it becomes analogous to the virtual space and the arbitrary rate of time within a computer simulation. If so, we might also have to consider how many '[multiverse simulations](#)' could be in existence at once.

So, again, what might God seek to learn?

While realising that the mind of God might not be within our grasp to understand, the issue of intelligence seems to be an attribute that we might still reflect on. Almost by definition, a universe subject to intelligent design implies some sort of intelligent awareness, where intelligence without any prospect of inquiry and expansion of knowledge would seem a fairly pointless and unimaginative existence.

So, what might God wish to learn from the universe?

It is realised that this concept of God is possibly acquiring far too many anthropomorphic overtones, but it seems that all manner of religious belief proclaim to know the '*will of God*' or '*speak in the name of God*' and, by so doing, make inference about God's nature. It is recognised that for many, the idea of some sort of after-life is a solace, especially for a life often filled with sadness, but history shows us that religion has all too often been manipulated by the powerful as a means of controlling the wider populace. So, while we might wish to reject the notion of an

anthropomorphic God, let us continue for the moment in the attempt to rationalise the nature of God based on the key characteristic of intelligence:

Was life in the universe a planned act of creation or an unforeseen event?

While the concept of time may be meaningless within the present discussion, science forwards the idea that our specific universe came into existence some [13.7 billion years](#) ago. However, our solar system was only formed some 5 billion years ago, and subsequently life, [in single cell form](#), appeared some 3.8 billion years ago. However, it would take [another 3 billion years](#) or so for multi-cell lifeforms to become established and start to diversify, followed by another 500 million years before the appearance of homosapiens signalled what we now consider to be sentient intelligent life. However, despite the apparent enormous size and age of the universe, science has found no obvious evidence of any other intelligent life within the close proximity of our position within the Milky Way. Of course, various religions might not accept this timeline, but let us just accept that in a galaxy with 100 billion stars, and a universe with 100 billion galaxies, there may be some reasonable probability of other intelligent life. So, we might want to add to the previous question:

Does intelligent alien life also have a special place in God's creation?

Now you do not often see the subject of God and aliens raised in the same sentence. In fact, you might be forgiven for suggesting that God seems to have a very parochial outlook on life, at least, according to the scriptures underpinning most religions. For not only does God not seem to have much interest in any alien life or have anything significant to tell us about the wider universe, God also appears to be equally parochial about cultural groups here on Earth, having an apparent preference for a 'chosen people'. However, let us put this character trait to one-side and try to clarify what might actually be implied by a 'special place in God's creation':

Would the emergence of intelligent life, no matter where or how feeble, attract God's attention as its creator, which we have assumed to possess an inquiring intelligence?

It is the contention of most major religions that God is still actively involved in human affairs and some scriptures even suggest that we are made in God's image. Of course, this might presuppose that all intelligent alien life either has to look like us, or has little resemblance to God. However, there is some confusion around this inference in the scriptures, as theologically, the monotheistic God is assumed to have no physical form. Therefore, let us just assume that the nature of our likeness is simply a pale reflection of God's intelligence.

So, can any inference be made about the nature of God's intelligence?

While accepting that too much emphasis is being placed on the anthropomorphic nature of God, we are really only trying to ascertain the nature of God's intelligence. For example, what might we infer about the nature of God, who appears to have 'ordained' that humanity must offer up prayers 5 times a day in order to show continued loyalty, gratitude, modesty and love towards God. Again, even if we decide to put this dubious character trait to one side with the others, we cannot really avoid the next thorny character issue:

Did God deliberately create pain and suffering, if so, why?

If God does not exist, we can explain pain as an evolutionary survival mechanism from which physiological and psychological suffering can manifest, i.e. it is an unfortunate by-product of survival and not an act of cruelty. However, the presence of a God, aware of all the suffering in the world is more difficult to reconcile with the religious idea of a caring God, even if we throw in the ambiguity of freewill. For example:

What sort of intelligence would deliberately create a system, by design, in which one species needs to kill and eat another in order to survive?

At one level, it almost seems easier to accept the indifference of the universe to pain and suffering because there is no cruel intent; rather than the idea of a God whose nature reflects either an inability to comprehend the suffering, an inability to do anything about it, or worse still, a callous indifference. Of course, some will wish to counter this negativity by citing all the beautiful things in the world along with the cosmic grandeur of the universe as a whole. However, this seems to be analogous to only looking at the skyline of a major city, while totally ignoring the poverty of the inner-city slums.

Why does God have so much trouble in communicating its wishes to humanity?

On the basis of logic alone, it seems difficult to explain why an all-powerful, all-knowing God would have so much trouble in making 'his/her/its' existence known, if God's wish and requirements for humanity was to follow certain rules. Therefore, we might question the apparent ambiguity that seems to always surround the unsubstantiated proclamation of the prophets of antiquity. You would think God either wants its existence within the universe to be unambiguously known or wants to remain 'incommunicado' outside the universe. Therefore, some might conclude that the ambiguity that does surround the existence of God in today's world is probably a reflection of human delusion rather than being attributable to some introverted cosmic intelligence. Possibly we can put the implications into some alternative focus:

If God did not exist, would humanity still have created a god?

This is not intended to be a frivolous sound-bite for it would appear that humanity has perceived the need for all manner of gods since the beginning of civilisation. One of the first requirements placed on the existence of a god, or gods, was to provide solace at the death of a loved one. Another need manifests itself in the need for reassurance that all the hopelessness, pain and injustice, so often found in this life, will be swept away in the after-life. Another, more [*Machiavellian*](#) need is the realisation that religious belief was a useful means of maintaining political power over an impoverished population. Of course, to start with, these needs were not addressed by the God of present-day Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but rather the many older gods that predate the idea of a monotheist god.

So why did the 'real' God not simply establish its existence from the outset?

In some respect, we have probably taken this discussion as far as needed. As such, it might simply have to be accepted that some people will always need the solace, reassurance or power of belief. Even so, this belief is primarily based on an emotional need and constitutes no proof of God's existence. However, because there are so many belief systems with so many conflicting descriptions of the nature of god(s), it becomes impossible for 'probability' to favour any of them.

But what about the probability of the existence of a God as a rational intelligence?

Because this has hardly been a rigorous analysis, any opinion has to be declared as subjective. This said, it does appear difficult to reconcile the nature of God as the intelligent designer of the universe based solely on the argument that '*the universe is here, so somebody had to have made it*' school of thought. However, the attempt to second guess the nature of God, as a rational intelligence, has also proved to be problematic, not only in comparison to our own perception of what is rational, but from the idea that God is not only active within the universe, at large, but within the daily lives of people on planet Earth. You might rightly point out that the line of logic adopted was far too anthropomorphic to be taken too seriously, but in many respects, this has always been the dichotomy for all accepted religions. Either God possesses some human-like qualities, which it is perceived forms a special bond between God and humanity or God is such an alien intelligence that it must appear too much of an abstract concept with little relevance or interest in the lives of mere mortals on an insignificant planet within the totality of the universe(s). However, we could have pursued a more metaphysical idea of God in which philosophers and scientists alike have tried to describe God, not as a separate intelligent entity outside the universe, but more in terms of God being the substance or logos, of the universe.

But does such a God provide humanity with any solace or any better answers?

As indicated, for many, God appears to hold the promise of an eternal afterlife and a reunion with loved ones previously lost. Belief in God also offers the hope of redemption and absolution from past sins, pain and suffering for those basically good of heart, where finally the strife of human life disappears into the light of eternal salvation. While it is an idea with obvious appeal, we are still left with one final question:

Is it true?

Probably not. However, despite my personal views, it has to be recognised that not everybody wants to, or is equipped to, look into an abyss created by scientific logic, which some may argue is also only based on probability, not certainty - see Quantum Perspective. Equally, from a psychological perspective, we might realise that '*believers*' will never know if they are wrong, while '*atheists*' will never know they are right. Of course, given the opposite is not true, belief may seem the safer bet, although not necessarily in the best interest of humanity.

1.1.6 Life after Death

Jannah is often compared to the Christian description of Heaven, although there are differences. Jannah is the Islamic idea of paradise, which might be interpreted as simply the '*Garden*'. According to Islamic belief, after death, one will reside in the grave until the appointed resurrection, after which Muslims believe that an individual will be judged according to his or her deeds in the worldly life. In-line with Muslim belief, everything one longs for in this

world will be there in Paradise, although there appears to be some level of 'segregation' in that the highest level of Paradise is where the prophets, the martyrs and the most truthful and pious people will dwell. In contrast to Jannah, the word [Jahannam](#) is often used to refer to the Christian idea of hell. Of course, on a more sceptical note, one might question whether the description of Heaven or Jannah has better served a more-earthly purpose rooted in political and social control. For it would seem that you might more easily convince somebody to serve, and even die, for a common cause, if they profoundly believe in an afterlife, as described above. Clearly, such ideas were, and remain, a powerful motivation for many people. So, the first question is:

Can we ever consider the implications of an afterlife in more logical terms?

While it would appear that we can take few things in life for granted, it would seem that there is one important exception, i.e. we must all die at some point in the future. For while science may come to address a degree of longevity, immortality probably remains an unrealistic and possibly undesirable goal. Philosophically, most people come to accept this outcome as inevitable, but contrary to the scientific evidence, many people preferred to put their faith in some sort of theologically inspired description of a life after death. While accepting that this is not a cheery subject, it does seem to be one of some importance within this overall discussion, where it would appear there are no absolute guarantees that any human perspective can be certain of its facts. However, we might start based on what we do know, which relates to life before death. Medical science has acquired a lot of information about the human body and the functioning of the brain over the last hundred years or so. As such, we might crudely describe the human body, for the purposes of this discussion, as a life support system for the brain in which our consciousness resides. For all evidence suggests that any damage to the brain can seriously affect our personality and that death of the brain is a terminal event. So, as a simplistic, although possibly unsettling starting point:



What do you think happens to somebody in the afterlife, who has always been mentally disabled in this life?

This is somewhat of a rhetorical question, as science possibly has little to say on the subject of an afterlife that is invariably described as transcending the physical realm. However, philosophically and theologically, it is a question that raises the profound issue of our perception of any continued existence in the afterlife.

What underpins the idea of an afterlife?

Clearly, many people have witnessed death and will accept that the physical body and brain simply decay after death, such that life based on our physical form, would appear to end when we physically die. Therefore, as suggested, the concept of an afterlife remains essentially a matter of philosophical debate and theological conjecture that requires some aspect of life to transcend our physical existence, which is often referred to as the 'spirit' or 'soul' of a person.

What is the nature of the soul?

It is suspected that there are as many different descriptions concerning the nature of the soul as there are religions and schools of philosophy. However, it might be suggested that the idea of the life of a person continuing on into some form of transcendent spirit world has been around as long as humanity has grieved over the loss of a loved one that appears in most cultures. As such, the idea of the soul may have originated as a natural response to an emotional need to alleviate grief through the idea that the life of a person, who has just died, continues on in another realm that is also thought to be 'a better place'. In this context, the soul is not just a theological belief; it is a psychological [human need](#), which later became a central theme of the myriad of philosophical and theological doctrines that not only sought to explain death, but the very meaning of life as well. In this context, the logic of science may often appear cold and without compassion, unable to explain the purpose of life or death. However, the goal of science is only to reflect how the universe really is, not how we would like it to be.

What, if anything, might we say about the existence of a soul?

Well, despite much soul-searching, science has found no substantive evidence that supports the existence of a soul that survives death. So, despite the millions of claims people have made to having seen the ghost of a person, presumably in some sort of afterlife, all controlled attempts to verify such claims have either failed or proved to be inconclusive.

But surely science is not in a position to verify events that transcend the physical realm?

While possibly true, this argument has to work both ways. If science cannot prove the non-existence of the soul, theology must be no more able to prove its existence or speak with any authority on such matters. As such, we might return to Carl Sagan's argument that it is the extraordinary claim that needs to provide the extraordinary proof.

If we cannot prove the existence of the soul, one way or the other, can we still expand the discussion by speculating on the assumed nature of an afterlife?

It is clear that the idea of an afterlife has become a central belief of most religions. What is possibly more of an issue is how most religions feel able to speak with such apparent authority on the nature of heaven and the concept of eternal salvation given the apparent uncertainty that implicitly surrounds such concepts. However, this apparent authority does not mean that all religions share a common vision of the afterlife, far from it, for it would appear that virtually all religions have developed their own descriptions of the afterlife based on their own interpretation of ancient scriptures. However, history suggests that most theological ideas of an afterlife have also developed since the writing of these scriptures, which might also suggest the views currently espoused are essentially modern extrapolations of much older ideas, which were written by essentially unknown historical figures who presumably had only a limited understanding of modern science and the functioning of the human brain. Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable that we should continue this discussion by considering some of the wider implications that come along with the idea of an eternal afterlife.

In what form will 'you' exist for all eternity?

The key word here is 'you' because it might be argued that the metamorphosis that must overtake us on the death and decay of our body, and more importantly our brain, must be a fairly traumatic experience, if we somehow survive it. However, despite the implications of such radical change, it would seem that there is a common belief that some sense of our personal identity is retained by which we might recognise ourselves and other people after death.

Is it reasonable to assume that we continue to exist as essentially the same person after death or is the word 'person' even applicable?

Many people seem to envisage the afterlife as some continuation of their self-awareness, as an individual, because if this were lost, they would cease to be and therefore will have effectively died, even if some spiritual soul continues to exist. As such, it would seem that many people prefer to believe that the afterlife will preserve some aspect of their sense of self, which would appear to be rooted in the memories of their life before death:

So, what makes you 'you' and not something else?

Clearly, our sense of self is based on an outward perception other people have of us and an inward perception of ourselves supported by all our memories that have helped define our lives. However, before pursuing this line of thought, let us consider this question from a slightly different perspective:

If you woke up in the afterlife, what are you expecting to find?

For many people, the idea of an afterlife often holds the hope of being reunited with loved ones who died before them. However, there are also some negative implications associated with this idea that do not often get discussed, for fairly obvious reasons, but are none the less relevant to this discussion. Initially our thoughts may focus on a partner in life, e.g. husband or wife, or equally a child lost too early in life. By way of a sad example, in 1851, Charles Darwin lost his own beloved daughter, Annie, of whom he wrote:

*"We have lost the joy of the household and the solace of our old age.
Oh that she could now know how deeply,
how tenderly we do still and shall ever love her dear joyous face."*

It is known that the death of Annie affected both Darwin and his wife deeply, albeit in different ways due to their opposing beliefs. However, while it is pure speculation you cannot help wonder, after reading the words above, as to whether Darwin would have gladly been proved wrong in his own beliefs, so that on his death he might have been reunited with his daughter. For it would seem that logic cannot always override the emotional need to believe in an afterlife. However, this said, it does not really change the fact that we often wish for many things that in reality never come true.

Where does the list of the people associated with our lives end and are they all locked in time, waiting for us, as we remember them?

At one level, there is simply the ambiguity of a person's age being constrained by our memory of them, and presumably they of us. However, there is also the more distressing idea of a mother's sincere desire to be reunited with a baby lost in childbirth. It is distressing, not just because of the nature of the loss, but because it is so difficult to resolve the meaning of the continuance of an afterlife of a baby that did not have time to form any identity prior to death. Of course, if the baby's soul does develop after death, would the mother still recognise her baby's soul and would the soul of the grown baby still want the love of an aged mother to which it had never had the chance to bond. So, with these sad thoughts in mind, let us return to our earlier question:

What makes you 'you'?

Certainly, within the context of our physical life, our identity as a person appears to be linked to both our physical form and our mental abilities. However, with this said, we must also recognise that we undergo much change during our lives, to the extent that the person we were once, aged 7, will bear little resemblance to the person we will become, aged 70.

Is it possible to retain our sense of identity in the afterlife?

While some vague notion of an incorporeal existence might be suggested at this point, it hardly seems to address the wider implications of an eternal existence without form. For it would seem that our identity is predicated on our human form and this form, for better or worse, has defined the scope of the physical senses through which we have experienced life and has helped underpin our memories, our likes and our prejudices.

Can we really even begin to imagine an existence without form lasting for eternity?

Without spelling out all the implications of an eternity spent with countless generations of family members who you may have never met, and possibly had no particular desire to meet, even in life, we come to what might seem to be a flippant question:

What are you going to do for the rest of eternity in the afterlife?

OK, if we skip over the mundane inference of this question, there is still the logical consequence of what we do within the eternity of an afterlife. Of course, before we even attempt to answer such a question, we need to realise that according to many religions, the nature of the afterlife is not just about our wishes, as it would appear that God places some fairly specific requirements on who gains entry to heaven or hell. However, in practice, most religions seem divided on the actual '*terms and conditions*' imposed by their beliefs, although most appear to subliminally allude to the need to have lived a '*good life*' as a prerequisite to entering heaven. However, there is often an escape clause for the sinner who genuinely repents and embraces the beliefs of a particular church, assuming that it really has the endorsement of the '*one and only*' God. Therefore, on this point, we might wish to question how some theologians, schooled in the beliefs of a certain religion, have come to speak with such

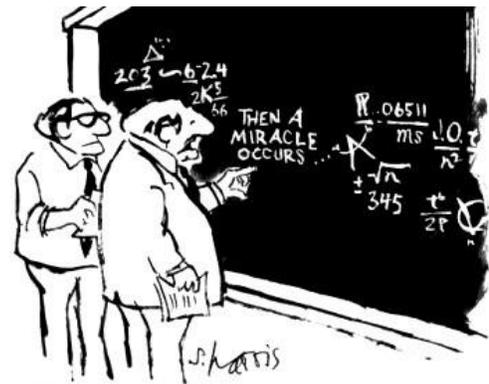
authority and certainty on such matters, as certainty does not appear to exist in the conflicting spread of their ideas. For example, many religions simply imply that those who do not believe in God must go to a place without God, which might be described as [Hell](#) or [Purgatory](#). In contrast, others are slightly more benign in the suggestion that everyone will go to [Heaven](#), eventually, no matter what they have done or believed on Earth, although they are often vague on the timeframe in some of these cases. While yet others simply contend that Hell corresponds to the 'termination' of the soul.

If we were to reject an afterlife based on religious doctrine or, equally, one fraught with the problems of an eternity getting to know all our long-lost dead relatives, what alternative might we wished for?

If we overlook the emotional anguish of losing somebody close to us, many people may not really be looking for immortality for themselves, but rather to fulfil a much simpler desire for answers and a resolution of injustices and wrongs committed by them or against them in life. In this context, most of us would like to think that there was some larger purpose to our own lives and the lives of those we have loved and lost. Of course, in this sense, the atheists must go to their grave knowing that there is little probability of this being the case. However, they possibly have the solace of knowing that they looked at the wonders of the universe in a spirit of honest inquiry, while the theists may have the solace of their firm belief in life everlasting, irrespective of whether they will ever have to come to terms with what that might actually imply.

1.1.7 [Final Retrospective](#)

In many respects, this discussion has not really been about religious belief in isolation, but rather an attempt to consider a more 'human perspective' of the world in which we find ourselves. However, this perspective is invariably shaped by the time and place into which we are born, such that personal perspective cannot help be influenced by the culture in which we develop towards adulthood. Whether you described this 'influence' as education or indoctrination might also be a matter of perspective. Of course, as history attests, the issue of religious belief can easily become a dominating factor within any culture for the different reasons outlined in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This said, this discussion has been positioned at the end of the '[Perspective](#)' section of '[Website-2](#)', such that it might also be seen as an introduction to the '[Development](#)' section, which then attempts to consider some of the other factors that surround the issue of human development, i.e. past, present and future. For, in many ways, what humanity has become is reflective of its past beliefs, which will undoubtedly continue to have some influence on the future.



I think you should be more explicit here

So, how might we try to understand the human perspective?

At one level, this perspective is often 'externalised' as a '[worldview](#)' that might reflect our understanding of the world, as an individual or as part of a collective society. However, we invariably have an 'internalised' or private perspective that we often do not always want to 'advertised' in the public domain, which is possibly more

reflective of our personal experience of life. Of course, while much of our life experience can be taken up relatively mundane issues, we still occasionally reflect on the more profound purpose of our existence. Of course, as the years pass, the cycle of life and death may become increasingly real to us as we face up to the idea of our own eventual non-existence, which can be a disconcerting thought for many. While the term '*non-existence*' may seem a strange choice of words, it is used deliberately because it may better convey the potential finality at the end of life in the absence of any religious belief.

But is the idea of non-existence really the central concern?

While it is difficult to generalise, it is possible that many may have a simpler desire based on the hope that their life has some purpose, as the idea of a universe, and the life within it, evolving without purpose can appear profoundly depressing. If there is an element of truth in this position, it may explain the development of so many different worldviews, anchored in religious belief, which has undoubtedly biased the way many prefer to understand the nature of their existence. However, we might attempt to characterise the purpose of existence in a number of different ways.

1. Purpose is a result of mechanical laws:

This position assumes that any purpose within the universe must result from the laws of physics. Therefore, it may also imply that the purpose of our existence is merely a transitory by-product of these mechanical laws. However, many may reject this position on the grounds that it provides no real explanation of the complexity of life and seemingly requires the universe to begin as an '*effect without a cause*'.

2. Purpose is a result of intelligent design:

Alternatively, some may prefer the universe, and the life within it, to be the result of some intelligent design, e.g. a deity of some description. However, this position may then imply that the purpose of existence be constrained within some preordained design of this deity and, on the scale of any universal design, life may have limited freewill.

3. Purpose is subject to evolution:

Finally, based on the evidence that exists, we might assume the universe, and the life within it, is subject to constant evolutionary change. So, while life may have initially only had one simple purpose, i.e. survival, the evolution of life towards conscious self-awareness has also allowed the purpose of existence to evolve.

To generalise further, we might label option-1 as a '*non-believer*' perspective and option-2 as a '*believer*' perspective. While both these options aspire to explain the '*true*' nature of the universe, one appears devoid of human purpose, while the other requires a leap of faith unsupported by evidence. Therefore, an '*agnostic*' position might be best reflected in option-3, which rejects the certainty of any fundamentalist position, i.e. both believer and non-believer, in preference of an on-going examination of the observable evidence of evolution. Within this option, the issue of the ultimate purpose of the universe remains unknown and the issue of life after death extends beyond any known means to verify, i.e. both remain speculation. On this basis, it is argued that the only pragmatic option left open to humanity is to take responsibility for its own future, even though this approach may lead to many unforeseen consequences – see '*Brave New Worlds*' for examples.

How as the human perspective of reality changed?

Putting aside any belief in a transcendent reality, few of us now grow our own food and most of us prefer not to think about the millions of animals that are bred and led to slaughter every year in order to feed a growing global population. In this respect, and many others, it might be argued that most of humanity already has an abstracted perspective of reality, based on the last 10,000 years of cultural development. However, evolutionary genetics suggests that humanity is still much the same as it was when it embarked on the process we now call '[civilisation](#)'. The reason for raising the dichotomy between this abstracted reality and the underlying physical reality of the world is that it leads to a key question that future generations need to consider:

Is it important that the collective human perspective remain anchored in truth?

The apparent simplicity of this question belies the scope of its implications; for it questions the continuing need to believe in things that the physical world does not necessarily support. For a retrospective [review of history](#) suggests that essentially all human worldviews have been based on earlier false assumptions given that all knowledge is fallible or, at least, subject to correction. So, while some fundamentalists may cite the infallibility of the word of God in support of their specific worldview, history, science and the human condition would appear to cast serious doubts on such claims. However, this position does not reject the need for all belief systems, for to do so would be to misunderstand the underlying nature of humanity and the emotional necessity for some to believe in a higher purpose. However, there is an inherent danger in belief that disconnects humanity from both logical and physical evidence, which might again be expressed in the words of [William Clifford](#).

"The danger to society is not merely that it should believe wrong things, though that is great enough; but that it should become credulous, and lose the habit of testing things and inquiring into them, for then it must sink back into savagery. It may matter little to me, in my cloud-castle of sweet illusions and darling lies; but it matters much to Man that I have made my neighbours ready to deceive. The credulous man is father to the liar and the cheat."

While the various [socio-political models](#) of today's world may continue to survive for some considerable time, in evolutionary terms, it is difficult to see how global stability can be maintained long-term without [radical change](#). Of course, if nothing is done, there is always another global model that may still return to transcend all our abstracted worldviews and institutions. It is called '[survival of the fittest](#)' and it is both brutal and without compassion. None the less, it is known to be very effective in addressing excessive [population growth](#) across the entire animal kingdom. Whether humanity can claim to have fully transcended the definition of an animal may well depend on what responsibility, and action, it is prepared to accept for its own [future evolution](#), i.e. natural or man-made. Clearly, based on what has been predicted elsewhere within this website, [technology](#) in the form of AI and genetic modification could come to profoundly change the world, especially if humanity is forced to adapt to even more radical environmental change.

So where is all this blasphemy leading?

Let us first define [secularism](#) as simply an argument by which the public institutions of society are separated from religious belief. In this context, secularism does not deny the human need for religious belief, although it does want to ensure the freedom of the individual from the imposition of a religion by the state or by the church. Again, as another generalisation, we might define the principles of secularism as follows:

- Humanity has to improve life by its own efforts.
- Science reflects the acquisition of human knowledge.
- Humanity is capable of defining its own moral code.

Whether humanity in the form of all its cultural diversity, underpinned by economic and political self-interests, is capable of 'acting' morally as collective whole is another matter. Of course, this line of thought may only lead back to the issue of Maslow's survival needs rather than any implicit need for a deity to tell us what is right and wrong. However, while we might recognise all the flaws and weaknesses in the human perspective, it is argued that humanity will ultimately have to decide whether it wants to simply wait around for some form of 'divine intervention' to solve all the problems of the world or recognise that the future of humanity lays in its own hands - probably!

'Sir,' I said to the universe, 'I exist.'
'That,' said the universe, 'creates no sense of obligation in me whatsoever.'
Douglas Adams