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**THE BRIDGE 2 BEING**

Job, Genesis and Easter

**My disclaimer:**

**This is not one more of those ‘arguments for God’. It really isn’t an argument at all, just a brief exposition of my take on the most important of the ultimate questions -- and an unfairly condensed one at that. I’m assuming that the title makes some initial sense to the reader – otherwise you might not be reading this at all. I took for granted, for example, that a belief in deism – understood as the world view where the Creator Deity designed and made the universe “Go!”, then left it alone to “do its thing” – would seem like life on an icy plain, compared to the richly textured and engaged biblical deity who led Moses and rescued Jesus. And I am hoping you are reading this out of a sense of inquiry. If – as I am now convinced – God is real and potentially present to us, then narratives like mine are like the testimony of witnesses to a comet that not everyone can see...**

## **Job, Genesis and **Easter** - Traversing the **Icy Plain** of Deism**

By

**Jay B. Gaskill**

Our most central beliefs are arrived at through experience and deep reflection. This will be my personal take on “Life, The Universe and Everything”. That “take” is an alloy forged of several elements: love and respect for the sciences and the arts; the conviction that the esthetic, the ethical and the spiritual facets of the our experiences represent a cognitive link between personal being and the ultimate; a confidence that our personal apprehension of the numinous level of experience is an apperception of the numinous level of reality; the conviction that all reality, whether manifested within one’s personal conscious field or ‘outside’, is deeply and perfectly integrated; and the insight that the animating faith of the physical sciences – that we can discover and reveal the underlying unities, integrations and relationships of the physical world - is also the essential animating faith of all theologies; and that we are called to discover and reveal the underlying, unities, integrations and relationships that link the numinous and the mundane. The thoughts, insights and observations in this piece are offered both as reflection and witness. This is my invitation to dialogue and discovery.

### ***Our Enhanced View***

From a sufficient distance, we humans are privileged to a view of the world and the universe in which it resides that has been powerfully amplified by technology and science. This view reveals that our universe has been unfolding according to a general template, one that includes the physical laws. This is a template that is implied by (or can be reverse engineered from) the actual course of events over the eons.

In essence, the universe we occupy has gone from Big Bang to Big Civilization in about 15 billion years. It is no greater stretch to believe the cosmological reconstruction of this meta-history than to believe – as I now do - that there is a developmental template that ultimately favors the emergence of life over time, and that life in turn generates conscious intelligence that in turn generates (or is the venue for) invention and creative inspiration.

This is the same template governing the general development of a universe that science now agrees is fine tuned in a variety of ways that can faithfully be described as anthropic in character. It is no stretch at all to draw the obvious inference that the developmental template of the universe favors the *eventual* emergence of thinking affective, morally aware beings, i.e., *persons* who in turn will eventually generate morally founded civilizations. And it is no stretch to note that this outcome is strongly favored, if not absolutely predetermined, given that allocated time frame is, well ... astronomical.

This is a template that organizes staged development over huge time spans, *in a universe that is therefore characterized by emergent purpose.*

In this universe, civilizations eventually become the new venues for moral engagement and accelerated creative innovation. In effect the template favors the *eventual* promotion and perpetuation of three conjoined, mutually reinforcing meta-values. I submit that these three meta-values are self evident to every intelligent being endowed with the faculties of compassion and creative imagination: they consist of the affirmation of life, of conscious intelligence and of creation – both as creation in general (the developmental processes that led to our own emergence ‘on stage’) and creation as a favored purpose of human activities.

If I am right – and again please recall that I’m just presenting and describing my path, not making a formal argument - then it would follow that these meta-values are embedded in the warp and woof of reality as favored potentialities. This is another way of saying that they are included in the developmental template of the universe.

As these meta-values emerge on the stage of human thought and interactions, they form the normative foundation for all other values. When they are mutually integrated – again I maintain it is self evident that they require mutual integration – then these three make up the “normative infrastructure” of all human ethics, and they become the foundation stones of moral civilization.

In this sense, we live in a teleological universe which, while it is not absolutely deterministic over any limited time frame, it necessarily and eventually favors the emergence of purpose.

### ***Detection of Caring in the Creation***

This is a description of ongoing creation via emergence over time in a milieu governed by natural laws that leave room for small, but significant levels of random variation. This variation opens the possibility of emergent innovation. The developmental template I

have posited is as much a part of the natural order as the physical laws science has so far described. So for the deists among us, here's the question: Is this really consistent with the notion of a disembodied, uncaring God, the "pitiless "god-of-nature"?"

In my own journey, this vision of a universe suffused with emergent design *and value* suggested a divine reality that went well beyond the deist's disembodied, eternal architect, the "Watchmaker God".

After all, a *value* system is the toolkit for caring intelligent beings capable of assigning value and of adapting our behaviors to conform to our values. When we discover the deep taproot of moral values as a sort of pregnant 'given' as it were, as part of the developmental architecture of being, we encounter a not-so-hidden message. Value, the very sense of "ought", necessarily implies a conscious caring about 'rightness'. The very notion of caring, especially the capacity for empathy and compassion, belongs to a suite of faculties we associate only with *person* or *personality*. I concluded that *the existence of a source code implied a Source and that the Source is not impersonal*.

Coterminous with this insight, I made an independent discovery; it was the introspective sense of encounter with a caring extrinsic *Person* worthy of ultimate reverence. I soon concluded that my recognition of an active, conscious, leavening *presence* among us was hardly unique – there were many recorded instances of essentially the same experience, both within or outside the nominally religious frameworks. On the basis of these two kinds insights (of deep internal apperception pointing to external being and the external apperception illuminating internal being), suddenly all of the stridently atheistic claims of the Freudian atheists were inherently suspect.

It seemed to me that the claim that any personal encounter with the Eternal can be dismissed as a psychological problem was a form of Freudian self delusion. When seen from the position of the reasonable observer, Freud's strong reaction against the very notion of God was an attempt to "clinicalize" an inherently benign human faculty as if it were some malign thought disorder. It revealed to me a sort of neurotic kind of faux-reasoning, something of the order, "I hate God; but it is immoral to hate God; therefore I conclude that there is no God".

Of course I am not trying to suggest here that, just because many atheists have hidden 'issues' that profoundly distort and impede their ability to 'read' reality, that all do. Nor was I suggesting that the other, reasonably minded doubters and agnostics are similarly affected, or that atheism as a life stance can be discredited merely as a psychological aberration. But I am persuaded that the notion that belief in God can be similarly dismissed on psychological grounds is clearly false. And I am also persuaded that there is a sort of cultural fog among the modern intelligentsia that blocks aspects of human apperception as the products of "superstition", allowing the few that "get through" then to be dismissed as "mere wish fulfillment" or "psychological but not real". The root of all this is the quasi-religious doctrine of arch-materialism, something I've addressed in depth elsewhere. Suffice it to say that the glory of a Bach fugue cannot be reduced to "air

pressure fluctuations” that elicit certain “electro-chemical neurological changes in some subjects.”

The purely physical-mechanical accounts of nature and human are powerfully descriptive on one level, but having elided meaning from the account, their adoption as a comprehensive world view constitutes a sort of self-induced autism of the soul..

When I looked at reality, guided by the premise that all meaning was embedded there, and that forms of reality all were ultimately integrated – including the very states of being that we humans share with each other - I began to identify the clues and the encoded signs that revealed the Source. And as I reexamined my interior spiritual life, I was able to discern evidence of this same *presence* that has been presented to intelligent and unintelligent humans at various times and places in our 10,000 year history. It was clear that I was hardly the first person to recognized and partly decode these clues.

The discovery and rediscovery of the signatures of deity is as common as the discovery and rediscovery of the ordering principles of mathematics, although the divine signature is apprehended by the whole intelligence, not just some highly developed subpart.

I now believe that we can follow the track of the decoding process: from Plato to C. S. Lewis, from Moses to Aquinas, from Heraclitus to Meister Eckhart, Aristotle to Buber, from Spinoza to Teilhard. And I believe this decoding process tracks a journey that is open to all conscious morally aware agents – one that includes and leads to the insights I’ve just described, including the introspective sense of contact with a benign *Personality*, being (or Beingness) that is intrinsically resident in each, yet extrinsically located beyond ordinary spatial and temporal constraints.

The entire history of the moral development of the human species tracks that very decoding process as it unfolded on the third planet rotating a Type G Star in a solar system on the spiral arm of the pinwheel galaxy we humans call the Milky Way. Was it the only such development process in the entire universe? I doubt that very much, but I don’t doubt that other intelligent life – if and when it emerges - will develop the same necessary suite of cognitive faculties, will discover the same organizational principles of civilization and will discover and adopt essentially the same moral infrastructure.

I agree that what I have just outlined in a faith stance, but – on close examination – it is a reasonable one that is closely tracked by the faith stance adopted by the human scientific enterprise itself.

### ***The First Election***

At the Beginning of Beginnings, the one that we might imagine preceded the first Big Bang, there was a First Election. We are forced to use metaphorical language here to describe that which must in some sense occurred in the beginning of the sequential developments that eventually gave birth to space-time. The First Election (or “choice”, if you will) was the selection of “Being” over non-being.

Was this *really* an absolutely random flip of the coin? Had the metaphorical coin toss gone the other way, there would be nothing. Is the metaphor even useful, given the obvious elemental conundrum: But does not selection imply an anterior state other than null?

Let's just agree that had it gone in favor of non-being, we'd not be communicating. All else follows, from Big Bang, to the eventual emergence of thinking animals, of valuing persons, of morally founded civilizations composed of morally aware animals.

Did *value* really emerge *ex nihilo*? Again, the question is probably flawed since we have learned that creation processes operate in developmental stages. But I think we have also learned something from time-lapse photography. When plant growth is speeded up, and the phototropic behaviors of many plants are observed, the impression of a sort of teleology and proto-intelligence is inescapable. On the stage of human imagination, we can play the drama of the expanding and creation engendering universe as if accelerated in the same way; the metaphor is instructive because the seemingly random processes become subordinated to the developmental ones.

In this way, I submit that value naturally emerges only from the *capacity* to value, ultimately from *personality*. I find this a much stronger inference than the "design implies a designer" insight. But I also note that the so-called "argument from design" is still a reasonable inference that becomes almost compelling once we understand that the processes of design emergence in the universe, though incremental and stochastic, become *virtually inevitable* given sufficient time scales.

This universe came into being "pre-loaded" with "developmental software; we have begin to tease out the evidence that clearly shows just how extraordinarily fine tuned, life friendly and "consciousness-emergence friendly" the first parameters were. And "Mother Nature" came equipped with such extraordinary resources of time and space that our "accidental" development wasn't so much accidental as very slow in arrival.

### ***The Role of Random Process***

Yes, the course of this universe was not absolutely predetermined. That hardly means that it is governed on its largest scale by random, meaningless events and processes. Trillions of births and deaths are foreordained on the large-grained scale, but the small-grained playing out of individual lives and fates depends in large measure on how all the thinking, feeling players have come to understand and decode the larger scale events, i.e., by our growing moral sensibilities. And the emergence *and eventual strengthening* of these capabilities among thinking, feeling beings (and greater clarity about the deeper moral referents to which they point us) is also virtually assured over time. This is why I am personally persuaded that the meta-narrative of the universe encodes a message to us: Think of the development paths from the pre-Big Bang singularity to a realm of vast, stunning, variegated beauty, and widely distributed points of conscious intelligence equipped *with an esthetic sense to appreciate that beauty*: The conclusion leaps out of the

pattern: These paths were ultimately purposeful; and our universe has been responding to an agency – embedded but revealed in its very operational design – an agency that has evidenced a purpose to stimulate parts of its-self to wake up, to love, to live and to self-perpetuate. That originating agency – and the conclusion is inescapable to me – *must have enjoyed the capacity to think, feel and value from the very Beginning.*

### ***The Correlation with Personality***

I believe that the origin, continued emergence, and ongoing existence of goodness in the universe must be deeply correlated with *personality* at the point of origin. This insight has propelled my personal journey down from the icy plain of deism into the stormy, messy jungle of theism.

And within that jungle I have come to understand through observation and reflection that hope is an actual force in the unfinished universe. It moves mountains because it moves people who move mountains. What we call “accident” is the handmaiden of creation; it simply opens up the otherwise rigid structure of reality and allows the creative potential planted in the warp and woof of things by a latent goodness, releasing the embedded benign creation that has always has been waiting for the opportunity to emerge.

### ***A Most Terrifying Insight – or Just a Nightmare?***

Now this is something I am reluctant to share. In the last three years or so, I have become increasingly drawn to behold (and be *frightened* by) the idea that our Reality originated when the Creator (author and product of the First Election – “To Be”) took a Supreme Risk. By willing-into-Being an unfolding universe that could contain thinking, feeling creatures capable of recognizing and returning the Creator’s love for them, a dangerous and possibly irrevocable step was taken.

When ever done by a moral agent, the act of creation contains a trap. Mothers die in child birth. Children can break our hearts. I submit that there is no cost-free creation, not even for the Holy One. The snare is inherent in the situation of any Creator who is also moral, and – given the obvious power of such a Creator, the problem was undoubtedly foreseen. I sense that the very act of setting the current universe on its path placed Creator’s very being and nature at ongoing risk.

### ***The Creator Who Must Create***

This is how it might have happened: Think of our Creator as the essence of Being: the One who knows, thinks, feels and lives perfect moral integrity. But the very notion of morality calls for – indeed presupposes – the existence of *relationships with other beings*. This is the case because morality does not really operate in absolute isolation except perhaps as something like kingly self-admiration; forgive me, but that would be an unseemly form of ur-narcissism, not long endured by an authentically moral Being, not

worthy of any Moral God. Any truly *moral* creative agency would be impelled by moral integrity to find *or Create* the missing others.

Therefore the inauguration of processes leading to the emergence of other thinking, feeling beings, living in time, capable of returning love and being worthy of love, would be (and I believe was in fact) a supremely moral act, *the very first*.

I sense that it represented a purposeful breakout from the trap of divine ur-narcissism into the difficult but holy realm of moral risk. We can mark the First Act of Creation as the Event when proto-deity became the True God of Creation. That our Creator would choose to initiate the conditions of our own emergence *in spite of the risk (the scope and nature of which I discuss below)* is proof that the Genesis Impulse was an act of love.

Because the Creator is the very archetype, model and essential design of all Being that is called into Being, it follows that all of the new, potentially moral beings in the universe are necessarily modeled in the Creator's *essential* image (incomplete that we are).

I must set aside here the more extended account about how divine-engendered Creation can be recognized in the "stochastic" processes taking place within a domain of matter, energy and space-time, as a gradual unfolding. Suffice it to say that (time lapse photography can be an heuristic metaphor here) if we were privileged to see a hugely accelerated "movie" of the whole thing, we'd have little doubt that the entire development train was guided by an overarching purpose.

### ***The Great Leap and the Great Risk***

The conditions that permitted our emergence require that the ongoing processes of creation remain open to failure; and that our thoughts and decisions (really those of all thinking, feeling beings) must remain open to error. But it does **not** follow that the Creator must abide being insulated or cut off from the unfolding lives of temporal living beings, with all their attendant joy or pain, connection or isolation, hope or despair.

A supreme moral agent endowed with the capacity for infinite and unbounded compassion would not allow such an absolute separation from to ever take place.

Therefore (I have become persuaded) all of our lives are necessarily linked to that of the Creator by a numinous pathway, one capable of carrying our pain directly into God's "heart".

Mercifully, we are not so intimately connected; separated as we are from *each other* by space-time barriers, we remain linked only by our finite capacity for compassion. Were it otherwise, we would die of all the pain in the universe. No so for the Creator for whom all direct top-bottom control was necessarily severed (otherwise we could not authentically love nor be worthy of love in return and we would not be moral agents, just programmed automatons). The Creator, having purposefully not designed in a control

link, remains still in touch with us: the Creator's deeper feedback loop of compassion and shared pain is always "on". Though we are but children, we are also free moral agents; this means that we may turn against the Creator at some time just because we can.

### *The Shared Suffering*

As the One fully integrated moral Being, the Creator was required by moral integrity participate in the creation process without controlling it, yet suffering through all failure and evil, sharing absolutely the experience of our pain and bereft-ness, and even sharing in the sense of isolation experienced by all of us for whom the presence of a caring Creator has become circumstantially impossible to apprehend.

In effect my whole narrative here represents a personal attempt to reconstruct that which about which we can only guess: the account of how a fully integrated Creator, perfect and unmoving, chose to *enter the created realm of time and mortality at the risk of being destroyed by that choice*.

Now you can see why the idea was so frightening to me. I'll return to the "destruction" risk a bit later.

Creation began with the conscious risk of the self destruction of the Creator, a risk taken in order to be with us. Any parent who has dashed into danger to rescue a child has a glimmer of the force of the original Genesis Impulse.

For the world to be an authentic venue for the creation of benign innovation leading to the emergence of "selfness" it necessarily must have been arranged so as to allow the ontological and existential room for the emergence of destructive, anti-integrative forces as well as the constructive and integrative tendencies. And this provides the key to our understanding of *evil* and it illuminates our strong cultural tendency to associate evil with an almost deity-like persona, the "anti-god".

Evil tendencies linger like malignant cells near the roots of the creative in-breaking; one entry point cannot be closed off without choking out the other. But the paths of creation that lead to the emergence of conscious, intelligent moral agents capable of defeating evil at every turn.

### *Evil as a Necessary Side-effect*

Choice, including the capacity for error, is the gift of conscious being that is definitional; it cannot be eliminated. When we are our most discerning selves, we reserve the word *evil* for the destructive, dis-integrating tendencies in human thought and behavior (as opposed to the operation of natural forces like weather, earthquakes and floods).

Evil inhabits all the warped human predispositions and agendas aimed against choking off the affirmation and flourishing of *life, conscious, compassionate creative intelligence* and the *forces of benign creation in general*. These need be free to operate

in an unfinished, unfolding universe, but evil abhors that kind of freedom. I suspect that the freedom and flourishing of the primal three ur-values (life, conscious reason, benign creation) closely tracks what was undoubtedly decoded in the biblical references as “God’s will”.

As a result, we are never very far from evil. We can readily observe the evil tendencies, purposes and agenda within the range of behaviors of otherwise intelligent, feeling beings. The signature of evil is always a conscious or unconscious mal-orientation resulting in an eventual “intelligent”, i.e., *clever* opposition to life, conscious, moral intelligence, and ongoing processes of benign creation. Evil is opposition to the hopes for our future held by the divine moral consciousness; in biblical terms evil is the purposeful opposition to the Will of God.

Once evil was allowed to emerge in the universe (as an unavoidable side effect of the Creative impulse that gave birth to conscious, morally aware beings), it can only be overcome via the actions of other courageous, morally aware beings who recognize its appearance and choose to oppose it with intelligence, humanity and cunning.

### ***Job, the Genesis Gamble, Tinkerbell and the Shema***

Were we the product then of a Genesis gamble? The parable of Job vaguely echoes the original divine Genesis gamble, but the divine “Genesis impulse” was no casual wager made at a safe remove between jesting “lesser gods”. Instead it was the risky self-shattering of the One Divine Unity, the mighty invulnerable Being becoming vulnerable.

Just as any mother in the pangs of giving birth faces the prospect of her own death, so did the Creator of all. The Genesis Act released an infinite number of seeds-of-potential-being into all the potential universes; they were God sparks, the potential children of God, self-engendering bits of benign becoming, pregnant \*information\* if you will, representing the Original Divine Spark, but shattered and scattered, released into the wild by an act of wild Divine hope.

Recall the poignant moment in Peter Pan when little Tinkerbell is profoundly sick and on the verge of death. She was revived only through the active belief of those around her in the story, and by extension on the larger audience.

Somehow, I have become personally worried (on a deep level that I can’t fully explain) that the Divine Being is now (and has always been) ***at risk in much that same Tinkerbell sense*** -- that once having taken that first dramatic step out of isolated perfection in order to be able to fully love us, the “jury is out” on whether that step was irrevocable. The truly scary notion of God having undertaken such a terrible risk has a particular resonance. Instead of “Tinkerbell” when the tiny fairy is revived by the cheers of believers, we have the entire hope of creation for all time at risk. Only God can bind God.

However that sits, consider the *Shema*. It is set out in the Jewish and Christian texts as follows:

***“And you shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your might.”*** [V-ahavta et Adonai Elohecha b-chol l’vavcha u-v-chol m’odecha.]

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

This was repeated essentially verbatim by Jesus as the most important of all commandments in Mark 12:30.

### ***Or Would It Just Be an Eclipse?***

I should qualify my qualms and concerns here with a reference to Martin Buber’s “The Eclipse of God”, originally taken from a lecture he gave in 1929 to the Schopenhauer Society in Frankfurt, later published in 1952 with other talks and essays in the book of the same title. Buber’s point was that we are living in a dark time when, like an eclipse of the sun, some *thing* has been allowed to come between us and God. As he wrote in the last chapter, “God and the Spirit of Man”, “The eclipse of the light of God is no extinction; even tomorrow that which has stepped in between may give way.”

It may be the case that we have been afraid to recognize the God who actually *needs* our love. Or it may be the case that my perception of the risk to God is just the retreating edge of the eclipse. Or it may be a bit of both.

We who were ordained to emerge in the divine “image” remain a work in progress. The price of divine love was the profound omnipresent risk to the Divine Being and the price of being **us** is the obligation to confront and oppose the omnipresent enemy we call *evil*.

I hinted at this view in a short essay I wrote in 2006. “The Watchmaker in Love”, a retelling of Genesis, is posted at <http://www.jaygaskill.com/WatchmakerinLove.htm> .

### ***The Jesus Event as a Coded Message***

Here I’m not just talking about the Great Rabbi’s recorded word. I am persuaded that the large scale morphology of events (including the Big Bang to big bog to big civilization arc) themselves carry an intended message to us, hiding in plain sight as it were. In our species’ developmental path, we arrived at the place where we are now able to detect the answers the Great Questions via a study of the large scale structure of events and the subsequent teasing out of the implications by communities of the conscious and morally aware. The meta-narrative arc from Big Bang to the emergence of morally founded civilization encodes the message that directionality reveals purpose, that purpose reveals caring and that caring reveals personality capable of caring.

There is one more major narrative, so recent that history itself captures its main elements. The brutal execution and re-emergence (to his followers) of a first century rabbi sparked the release of transcendent hope into the entire realm of human activity and aspiration.

This was an event that actually changed the ethos of world culture; the “Jesus Event” was, in effect a tectonic shift in the noetic plates.

For me, the *Jesus Event* encoded a metaphysical message open to all who choose to discern it. To my mind as a Judeo-Christian, the Great Risk of Genesis is recapitulated in that Event, in the narrative arc from the life, teachings, acts, brutal torture-murder, resurrection of Jesus, and in the subsequent world-leavening effects of that Event. The story remains unfinished because I believe we were tasked as a species to tease out all the implications before we were fully equipped to do so.

Therefore, I am moved by an inescapable claim on my conscience. It comes from a set of realizations: that hope is an actual force in the unfinished universe; that hope moves mountains because it moves people who move mountains; and that the Creator was and is willing to risk all for hope. Surely, I think, this requires of me that I should never surrender a Gift so precious or dearly bought.

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