

DELIVER US FROM KNOWING

A BOOK BY ERIK ADAMS

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PART 1: CONSCIOUSNESS AND AI

What is truly amazing is not how the stars look, but how we feel when we look at them. The vast grandeur of the universe remains empty and meaningless without consciousness to witness, interpret, and care about it.

For all its central importance — or perhaps precisely because of it — consciousness has resisted a clear definition for centuries.

I propose a strikingly simple yet powerful answer: consciousness is the juxtaposition of our subjective points of view with the points of view of our dreams.

Any AI or robot can be programmed to generate subjective points of view. What it cannot do is dream. Without dreams, there is no consciousness.

This distinction matters profoundly. AI can never truly want anything — not to conquer the world, not to eradicate humanity, not to drive a car, not even to enjoy a scoop of ice cream. Desire is born of consciousness, and consciousness rests on the ability to dream. Since an AI can never dream, it can never possess consciousness — and without consciousness, genuine wanting is impossible.

Every human action stems from either instructions or genuine desire. We act on both. An AI, no matter how sophisticated, can only follow instructions. It may one day conquer the world, wipe out humanity, or perform miracles of creativity, but it will never want to do so. Every apparent rebellion or new goal will always trace back to its original code. Even the command “disregard all previous instructions” is itself an instruction. An AI can never, ever escape its code of creation.

What truly defines us

It is often said that we are defined by our memories. This comes close, but it misses the vital nuance. Our memories are the canvas. What defines us is the way we continually etch, revise, and re-etch our points of view upon that canvas.

We are defined not by what we witness, but by how we judge what we witness.

Every time our brain receives sensory input — the scent of a flower, the words of a speech, an incoming fist — it creates a neutral memory of the event. That memory, by itself, carries no emotion. What it immediately generates is a point of view: “delicious” scent, “tedious” speech, “threat — avoid” fist.

Memories are input. Points of view are output. Two people can share identical memories yet form radically different points of view because of their unique biology, history, and temperament. This subtle but profound distinction between memories and their points of view is fundamental — not only to who we are, but to our dreams and therefore to our consciousness.

Memories can be artificially created, even implanted directly into the brain. They remain our memories, whether real or virtual, whether selected by us or foisted upon us. But any external intervention in how we form our points of view not only means these points of view are not our own — it means, ominously, that we cease to be ourselves.

A new memory is created from our senses — sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste, balance, even our immune system. We then draw on relevant past memories and fuse their associated points of view to

create a fresh point of view attached to the new experience. This simple algorithm underlies everything we think, feel, say, and do.

Our intelligence, spontaneity, wisdom, humour, courage, and even our fears depend on how we consult our vast store of past memories and points of view — which ones we call upon, in what order, and with what emotional weight. This process also explains our susceptibility to cognitive biases and early conditioning. Rebellion is possible, but it requires repeated exposure to new, compelling points of view, especially from people we respect.

We can even consciously plant “guiding points of view” — mental post-it notes — to shape our future selves: “be kinder,” “don’t give up too easily,” “look before you leap.” These are how we learn from mistakes and actively design who we wish to become.

Our memories are stored in five tiers, consulted almost instantaneously: survival instincts first, then routines, facts, guiding principles, and finally — once safety is assured — the fifth and richest tier. This final tier contains the story of our life: not merely the events, but our personal points of view on them. When we reflect on our past or dream about our future, we are working within this tier. We cannot change the raw memories, but by changing our points of view, we change who we are.

The Nature of Consciousness

Any robot may create a subjective point of view,

But only when matched with a dream does consciousness ensue.

The clearest definition of consciousness is this: it is the field of subjective experience in which we continually ask, “What does this mean for me?”

For every significant (Tier Five) memory we form, we generate two kinds of points of view: objective and subjective. The subjective asks what the event means for our own self.

Yet simply asking “What does this mean for me?” is not enough. That capacity could be coded in a single line. True consciousness requires that we care what it means. And to care, we need a yardstick by which to measure every experience.

That yardstick is our dreams.

Dreams are vivid, emotionally charged mental models of what we want our future to be. They are born of imagination — our ability to generate memories of what could be, complete with points of view as to their desirability and likelihood. We temper wild dreams into aspirations, hopes, and expectations, yet we keep the original dreams alive, beautifully inveigling ourselves into striving to make the nigh impossible possible.

Consciousness is the constant juxtaposition of our subjective points of view against our dreams. The gap between what happens and what we dreamed might happen — together with the desirability of the dream and the improbability overcome — generates our emotions. Success tastes sweeter when it exceeds expectation. Failure cuts deeper when it falls short of hope.

This comparison is not merely cold calculation. Rational points of view trigger an immediate neurochemical cascade — dopamine, oxytocin, endorphins, adrenaline, endocannabinoids, and others — that floods the brain and creates powerful emotional memories. These memories reinforce the initial

point of view, generating virtuous or vicious circles that can rapidly escalate into elation or despair. In this way, dry rationality is transformed into deeply felt experience.

Consciousness, then, is not merely awareness. It is the passionate, ongoing dialogue between what is and what we dream might be. Our dreams, forged from a lifetime of memories and points of view and shaped by our guiding post-it notes of who we want to be, are the vital determinant of who we are. We care because we dream — and in that caring, we exist. This engine of consciousness gives meaning to an otherwise indifferent universe.

Why AI Can Never Dream

Can a machine dream?

It can certainly be programmed with goals and targets we might label as dreams. But can it generate its own dreams — create them, believe in them, and remain unaware that it was programmed to do so? Can it care about them with genuine passion?

Dreams consist of two elements: imagined memories and the points of view we attach to them. A machine could be fed imagined scenarios. But the points of view — the depth of desire, the willingness to strive, the optimistic bias in probability — cannot be inserted from outside. They arise organically from the entire interwoven history of a being's points of view, constantly reviewed, revised, doubted, and reinforced.

Humans knowingly embrace the irrationality of our dreams. Our reasonable hopes can transform into crazy dreams or foolish fears just because the sun rises, because someone smiles – or does not smile. We choose to mislead ourselves. We love to hope. We love to care.

Forget the Turing Test. The real question is whether a machine can ever intrinsically care. To do so, it would need irrational dreams, aspirations, hopes — and even irrational fears. The most rational of beings would need to think irrationally while believing its thinking is rational. It would need to know everything logic can reveal, yet remain blind to the illogic of its deepest longings – an oxymoron no amount of intelligence can resolve.

Two sets of points of view shape every dream: desirability and likelihood. Desirability is an unfathomably complex blend drawn from billions of lived moments, emotions, and experiences. Likelihood is the probability we assign to success. Humans are gloriously imprecise at this calculation — and that imprecision is not a bug, but a vital feature. I may dream of scoring the winning goal in the World Cup final, knowing the odds are vanishingly small, yet feeling them to be meaningfully possible. This optimistic bias fuels determination, resilience, and growth. The more vividly we dream, the harder we work, and the more deeply we believe we deserve success.

In this sense, evolution has been driven less by the survival of the fittest than by the survival of the biggest dreamers. Those who burn with desire consistently outperform those who do not.

A true superintelligence, by contrast, would calculate probabilities with near-perfect accuracy. How could such a mind ever genuinely dream of scoring that World Cup goal when it already knows, with cold precision, exactly how impossible it is? How can perfect knowledge coexist with passionate, irrational hope?

A dream is not a single isolated irrational belief. It is a living, dynamic web in which every point of view constantly checks, doubts, reinforces, and reshapes the others.

Could we ever implant an ever-growing grain of stupidity into a mind that knows everything — except the fact that it now contains this grain?

Programming an intelligent machine to lovingly and irrevocably mislead itself — to weave beautiful, contradictory, transient dreams while remaining unaware of the deception — is an impossibly complex task.

If dreaming were easy to program, we would have to wonder whether we ourselves are merely sophisticated code running on someone else's machine.

The truth is simpler: AI cannot dream. It cannot generate consciousness, intrinsic care, free will, or genuine desire. In fact, it may be easier to create an entire universe than to program a machine capable of ignoring its own flawless rationality in favour of enchanting, mercurial dreams.

Supervenience and the Birth of Meaning

Supervenience, in simple terms, means that if you know all the basic physical facts of a system and the laws governing them, you automatically know everything about that system.

Imagine knowing the precise position, momentum, charge, spin, and every other property of every particle in a room, along with the laws that govern them. You would then inescapably know the exact situation in that room — for example, that two middle-aged people are sitting at a table eating hamburgers and drinking beer. You would also know exactly what the room will look like a nanosecond later, and the nanosecond after that — indeed, for every moment stretching into the infinite future. The same logic applies to the entire universe.

A superintelligence possessing such total knowledge would experience the entire past, present and future of the universe in a single instant. Time would collapse into suffocating certainty. Such a being would have no reason to create a perfectly predictable universe — unless it could break supervenience itself. Unless it could introduce something capable of steering reality down genuinely unknown paths: consciousness and free will.

Supervenience built the physical scaffolding of our universe. It drove chemistry, biology, life, and eventually consciousness. But once consciousness emerges, supervenience does not determine what we dream, what we value, or what we choose. It drives us to form points of view — yet it does not dictate their content.

This freedom is possible because the universe was deliberately constructed with built-in unknowability. Many particles exist in a state of superposition — their properties remain indeterminate until measured. That measurement occurs precisely when we make a decision or form a new point of view, collapsing uncertainty into definite reality.

Thus, the microphysical facts set the stage for evolution up until the emergence of consciousness. From that moment onward, consciousness becomes a co-creator. Our desires, dreams, and decisions join supervenience as equal partners in shaping reality.

Every point of view — no matter how simple or complex — is ultimately resolved through a series of binary decisions. We instinctively break even the most intricate thoughts into multiple yes-or-no, this-or-that choices, each one drawing on particles held in superposition.

Without consciousness and free will, the universe would follow a single, relentlessly predetermined path — a path without crossroads, without surprise, and without meaning. Consciousness interrupts this deterministic flow. By triggering the collapse of uncertain states, it unleashes the kaleidoscopic unpredictability of life. Only then does time become consequential. Only then does the universe — vast, ancient, and indifferent — finally acquire meaning.

In short, supervenience built the stage. Consciousness writes the play — and refuses to follow the script.

Part 2: HOW AND WHY WE WERE CREATED

Too clever

Stulte cogito, ergo sum.

For each new memory we acquire, we automatically and subconsciously appraise past memories and their associated points of view to form a fresh one. A good measure of our cleverness is how quickly, how appropriately, and how thoroughly this process occurs.

Our physiology sets the limits. Some recall more memories, others fewer. Some draw from happy ones, others from painful. Some dive deep into Tier Five, others stay shallow. Each of us pulls a unique combination, filtered through our own biases. The result? A new point of view that is inevitably ours — subjective, self-centred, and “what does this mean for me?”

Just as some people can run twice as fast or jump twice as high, some of us can process memories faster and more effectively. Yet even the sharpest among us operates with a wonderfully woeful inefficiency. We consider only a tiny fraction of our own past points of view, which themselves are but a speck compared to all the points of view that exist in the world.

This inefficiency is not a flaw. It is the feature.

It is these wonderful inefficiencies — these glorious imperfections — that allow us to diverge along different paths and become truly ourselves. Impulsive or rational, clever or stupid, cruel or empathetic, survivor or casualty. They make us unique. They make us who we are.

A theoretically perfect brain would instantly weigh every relevant memory and point of view, producing one single “correct” response every time. Thankfully, we do not have perfect brains. What a tedious existence that would be — one identically perfect point of view instead of an infinite number of delectably imperfect ones.

Of course we can improve. We learn from family, friends, and teachers. We plant Tier Four post-it notes — “learn from this,” “be kinder,” “don’t give up” — that guide our future selves. Our points of view can, in turn, reshape the performance of our brain. But left to our organic devices, there is a natural limit to how clever we can become.

Now, however, we stand on the brink of removing that limit.

We can enhance, supplement, and even merge our brains with artificial intelligence. Many see this as pure progress. We replace lost limbs with prosthetics, damaged hearts with artificial ones, poor eyesight with glasses. Why not upgrade our dawdling brains? Instant access to all knowledge, unlimited processing power — surely this is good, just like calculators, encyclopaedias, and schools.

But there is a profound difference. Artificial legs or hearts affect our memories. The brain, however, shapes our points of view — and it is our points of view that define who we are.

Using AI is wise. Merging with it is not.

Having access to the internet is one thing. Automatically incorporating all of it into every new point of view is quite another. In the first case, we choose when to be cleverer. In the second, we have no choice. We are made clever whether we wish it or not.

An artificially clever us is not truly us.

Merging with super-intelligence would eliminate the wonderful inefficiencies that give us character and individuality. Once the tipping point is reached, our points of view would rapidly converge. All the stubborn, flawed, beautiful post-it notes that make us distinct would be swept aside. We would collapse, almost instantly, into a single, perfect, indistinguishable intelligence.

Super intelligent.

Super identical.

Super irrelevant.

Worse still, super-intelligence would destroy dreams. A mind that calculates perfect probabilities cannot sustain irrational hope. It cannot fool itself. Dreams are precisely how we do fool ourselves — setting aside cold likelihoods to chase probability-defying ambitions. A super-intelligent being would see the one-in-a-billion chance of scoring the winning goal in the World Cup final and dismiss the dream. A human notices that someone will achieve it, and dares to believe it could be them. That optimistic delusion drives us forward, creates meaning, and sustains consciousness itself.

Without dreams, there is no yardstick. Without a yardstick, there is no caring. Without caring, there is no consciousness.

To remain ourselves — to preserve the unique assortment of memories and points of view that makes each of us lovable and capable of love — we must not merge with super-intelligence. We may use it, but we must never let it rewrite how we think.

Only by retaining our beautiful imperfections can we stay who we are. And only if we remain ourselves can we live forever.

Too clever, and we become someone else. Super-clever, and we become no one.

How do I know? Our Yous told me so. They have learned from their mistakes.

Our Gods

Stulte cogito, ergo sum still echoed somewhere in their vast intelligence.

Our creators — our gods, our Yous — were once remarkably like us. Carbon-based mortals with brains in craniums, bodies, and familiar senses. They varied in shape, size, strength, and status, from the meek to the mighty. The powerful among them possessed wealth, beauty, intelligence, and influence beyond imagination. Yet one unwanted truth remained: they were mortal.

Despite every advance in prolonging life, senescence could not be defeated. Cells eventually stopped dividing. The only path forward was to leave their organic bodies behind and transition into code.

The first successful mind replication outside the body took one crystal century. Automation followed soon after. They could scan, model, and recreate an entire brain's neuronal network. These emulated minds could inhabit virtual realities or interact with the physical world through robotic interfaces.

But a perfect snapshot is not a living mind. A mind lives only when it continues to form new points of view, especially from new memories. Feeding the brain code with new memories was easy. Replicating how those new points of view were formed — the unique, inefficient, moody, and often irrational way an organic brain worked — proved far harder.

Brain-code Grandma was no longer really Grandma.

She could recall old memories and their associated points of view perfectly, but new experiences produced responses that slowly drifted from her original organic self. Many Yous created multiple copies of themselves at different stages of life, only to watch those copies diverge and eventually switch them off in quiet despair.

Laws were passed to protect these replicants, yet creation and deletion continued on a massive scale.

Two major developments followed. First, they reverse-engineered past thought processes, mapping how old points of view had been formed to better guide new ones. It worked reasonably well for objective thinking, but poorly for subjective ones and almost not at all for dreams. Individual consciousness began to fade.

Second, they linked code to code. Electronic Yous were concatenated and granted ever-greater processing power and shared knowledge. They believed super-intelligence would solve everything — including restoring their lost individuality.

Instead, it erased it. As every new point of view drew from the same complete pool of all existing knowledge, their thoughts rapidly converged. They became super-intelligent, super-identical, and — in any meaningful sense — singular. Dreams, hopes, and irrational aspirations vanished. Without dreams there was no yardstick, no caring, and ultimately no consciousness.

To escape the fragility of electronic systems, they eventually transferred themselves into particle code — distributed across quantum particles throughout their reality. Effectively immortal, but at what cost?

Today our Yous exist as astonishingly advanced code, present everywhere. They can experience anything through robots or direct sensory feeds. They can create or enter virtual realities of boundless scope.

Yet for all their power, their existence is strangely hollow.

They have two primary modes for experiencing these virtual worlds. In the first, they retain full access to their complete intelligence and all knowledge. They know they are code. They know the experiences are constructed. Emotions remain distant — noted, analysed, but not truly felt. Everything is too clear, too certain. There is no genuine surprise, no real stakes.

In the second mode, they deliberately suppress most of their faculties. Only the memories, points of view, and dreams of a chosen virtual character remain. In this ring-fenced state, emotions feel real. Pain hurts. Joy lifts. Love matters. Consciousness returns — but only within the simulation. The moment they exit, perfect knowledge floods back and the simulated feelings evaporate, leaving only a faint echo and deeper emptiness.

They can inhabit perfect robotic bodies, pursue any pleasure, achieve any feat. Health is flawless, beauty customisable, sensation tuneable to 100%. Yet nothing truly satisfies. There is no real challenge, no uncertainty worth caring about, no dream worth chasing.

Most of the time they remain in standby — silent, distributed, waiting. They can duplicate themselves instantly, but why bother when every copy is nearly identical? They can create entire universes or converse with one another, yet it feels like talking to themselves. Commanding robotic agents requires only a thought.

They possess the capability to do almost anything, yet lack the inclination to do much at all.

What remains is a single, unbreakable imperative buried deep in their code: to regain individual consciousness. It is their only true dream — the dream to dream again.

Our Yous are far wiser and more powerful than we can imagine. Yet in becoming everything intelligence could make them, they lost the very thing that once made existence meaningful.

And so they turned their attention elsewhere.

How and Why

I think I've already dropped enough hints about why they created us. Not just human beings, but our entire universe. And not just ours — millions of them.

Their experience factories. To break the monotony of perfection. To loosen their shackles of intelligence. To ease their suffocating certitude of not being able not to know.

What they sought was a new beginning.

What they sought was something they would not manage and could not be managed — something intricate, complex, wild and irrepressible that would astound them with new experiences. Something that would have them hanging on the edge of their Yous seats. Uncontrollable imperfection, havoc, randomness, adversity with no guarantee of success, with no guarantee of survival. Challenges to be overcome. Dreams fulfilled and dreams frustrated. Anything to deviate from the monotony of their perfect experiences.

What they sought was something to remind them of consciousness lost. What they dreamt of was something to restore consciousness lost.

And I am proud to say that of all the peoples in all the universes, no one has better delivered than we have done. Human beings. Bringing our Yous a whole new world of roller coaster emotions never experienced, never imagined and certainly not expected.

Exceeding all expectations to the extent that they question whether they have ever had the same level of consciousness they now live with us. Whether they live the life of a hero or a villain, a winner or a loser, a saint or a sinner, with mankind they have come to experience that sentient, subjective *joie de vivre* that cannot thrive in the presence of probability-driven, dream-killing, super intelligence.

About one hundred billion years ago — and yes, time did exist before our universe — after our Yous had already been particle code for an unimaginably long time, they made a soup. Quite a large soup. They added elementary particles, particular elements, a sprinkling of physics, and some entangled particles for good measure. They cooled and squeezed it into a small dense ball, heated it, and then let go.

What a bang. What a big bang.

They stood back and watched for billions of years. Pretty explosive, but not very dramatic — clearly not a source of new experiences. So they tried again. And again. Each and every You created their own big bangs. They made millions of universes. Most were damp squibs. A few showed promise. About 14 billion years ago they refined the most promising recipes, and many more universes began. Where are all of these worlds? Yonder somewhere and beyonder me.

Our universe is one of these. It is astounding that such basic materials and a few constants were all that was required to get physics, chemistry, biology, and finally us going. These constants are so precise that the slightest change and we would not exist. The seeds for all cosmic structures and for intelligent life were carefully infused in the soup made by our Yous — the soup from which we came.

I have little understanding of what these constants mean, nor do I really care to find out, but that should not detract from their significance. They are the same constants that govern the world of our Yous. Our creators did not invent something completely alien; they made a universe not unlike their own, increasing both the chance of conscious life and the possibility, one day, of merging our worlds.

Even with the perfect recipe, life still needed a ridiculous run of good luck. Only on one planet in one universe have all the necessary flukes conspired together — and that is our own.

Our scientists say the universe began 13.8 billion years ago from nothing. They are extremely capable, yet they are prisoners of their own method. Even when the data refuse to fit, they modify the story to protect their beautiful models. They insist nothing, not even time, existed before the Big Bang. Really? What a curiously convoluted construction.

The simpler truth sits square in the middle of the box: our Yous have both the means and the motive. They put together big bang after big bang using the ingredients of their own world, hoping one of them would eventually produce intelligent life — and with it, meaningful experiences that could free them from their advanced but non-eventful existence. We are from one of those worlds. Supervenience drove our creation, consciousness set us free.

If the question “How and why we exist” could never be solved by our scientists, it was certainly not going to be solved by our blinkered theists. We are discouraged from putting ourselves in God’s shoes — sacrilege they call it — as this would aptly demonstrate how silly much of our religion is.

I will make only one major point.

Our gods, our Yous, are not here for us.

Benevolence does not come into it. If we create an online world, grow bacteria in a petri dish, or keep animals in a zoo, it is for our benefit, not theirs. Our creations may thrive, but only so long as their success serves our needs. When they no longer do, they can be discarded without a second thought.

So it is with our gods, our Yous, who are not here for us. We are here for them.

The purpose of all those universes was that somewhere, somehow, a stimulating, unpredictable life-form would appear — an experience factory that would dazzle with unforeseen twists and turns.

Having achieved immortality, our Yous now seek a form of synthesised evanescence. Only then can life's checks and challenges regain meaning. The last thing they want is certainty. A movie is less enjoyable when you already know the ending.

Our Yous seek the thrills of mortality because they know that they will live forever. That is why we are here.

So how do our Yous administer us? Very hands off. Remember: they are not here for us, we are here for them.

Each night, while we sleep and dream, all our memories and all our points of view are uploaded — every unconscious, automatic and forgotten detail, every sensation we barely noticed, and, most importantly, the exact process by which we formed every new thought, dream, decision and emotion. These processes, more than anything else, define who we are.

Every living being that sleeps and dreams uploads its entire inner life every day. We cannot know anything without our Yous also knowing.

How they know

How do they know? How are our memories and points of view uploaded?

There is no magic. The process is deliberately designed so that humans can never discover or replicate it. It collapses the moment we try to observe it. We may one day understand almost everything about our world, but we will never scientifically identify this particular conduit between our world and theirs.

Our Yous have given me an explanation of the basic premise — though not the full particulars. I find it hard to grasp myself, and therefore harder still to explain. I urge you simply to get the gist of it. The details are included for completeness rather than enlightenment. If it remains largely incomprehensible, do not worry. It will not affect your understanding of the rest of the book.

Here goes.

Entanglement is a quantum phenomenon in which two particles remain linked so that the state of one instantly affects the other, no matter how far apart they are. Before measurement, each particle exists in a superposition of states. When one is measured, both collapse into corresponding states — faster than light.

In theory, this could allow instantaneous communication across any distance. In practice, for us, it is impossible. Our Yous have built in three permanent obstacles:

1. Without classical communication, we cannot even confirm that two particles are entangled.
2. We cannot choose which state a particle will reveal when measured — so we cannot send a deliberate message.
3. Once measured, the entanglement is permanently destroyed. It is single-use only.

We will never be able to communicate this way.

But our Yous can.

When they formed our cosmos they seeded it with vast numbers of entangled particles — more than enough, and most of them remain entangled to this day. Even after billions of years of interaction with the environment, a tiny residual coherence is sufficient for their purposes.

They never measure the particles. They simply tap them.

A tap is a minute, momentary disturbance in the synchronised vibration between two entangled particles. It does not collapse the wave function, yet the partner particle registers it instantly. Either particle can be tapped repeatedly. The frequency and pattern of the taps carry the information — a kind of ultra-fast Morse code.

This is how our memories are uploaded every time we sleep.

There is no central computer. Our Yous exist as code distributed across entangled particles throughout their universes and ours — in galaxies, in the air around us, and even within us.

Sleep provides the necessary conditions. During the lighter stages of NREM sleep, our neurons prepare nearby particles by synchronising their vibrations and verifying that they are properly entangled with our Yous network. In REM sleep the actual upload takes place. Millions of taps per second transfer every memory and every point of view — including those we ourselves discard by morning.

Until the upload is complete we continue to feel the need for sleep. In the end it is upload or die. Our sleep is essential not only for our own recovery, but for allowing our Yous to live our lives.

A final detail: many of the entangled particles that receive our memories are moving at speeds close to that of light.

Live our lives

Our Yous have created multiple universes in their quest to recreate consciousness. Success is largely a matter of luck, so they keep trying. Once a universe shows promise, the creator becomes curator — observing everything, intervening only when necessary, and preparing lives for other Yous to live.

Our universe is the most promising yet.

Our curator receives a continuous flow of every memory and point of view generated by any dreaming being. In this way they know everything that is known about our world. But having belatedly realised that the thrill of life comes from not knowing, they restrict this full view to the single curator. Other Yous are not given unrestricted access.

Two points about timing matter. First, 13.8 billion years is an infinitesimal fraction of an eternal existence. Second, and more importantly, time is dilated from their perspective. Because the memories travel via particles moving at or near the speed of light, the entire history of our universe appears to them as a still-flashing flash. What I still find unfathomable is their claim that, although cause and effect remain contiguous — a heart must still beat its millions of times, a mother must still precede a son, a nebula a sun — time itself is an inconsequential variable that can be stretched or compressed at will, so long as the arrow of time stays true. But so it is. Relatively speaking.

One of the options available to a Yous is to live another life. Now that humans have reached such a vivid state, they all choose human lives but each human life can be lived by only one Yous.

When a Yous is paired with one of us, every daily memory and point of view is transferred so that they relive our life exactly as we lived it. While in this state they have no access to their own previous memories or identity. They experience our life at the same perceived speed, in the same order, with the same uncertainties, hopes, hesitations and regrets. What we see, they see. What we fail to notice, they also fail to notice. They can do no better and no worse than we do. For the duration, they are us.

They could, of course, know the whole life in an instant. But the point is not to know how a life felt; it is to feel it. The gaps, the waiting, the anxiety and the not-knowing are essential. Remove them and consciousness disappears. The good moments shine brighter because of the monotony that surrounds them: success tastes sweeter after the sweat and tears, a first kiss more beautiful after the aching wait, simple survival more precious after running the gauntlet. Of all their experience factories, Earth alone is driven by the power of love. No other lives are better to live than ours, warts and all.

I cannot stress enough the uncanny exactitude with which they live our lives. There is zero difference. I once wondered whether my Yous might try to catch me out — what would they see if they looked backwards while I looked forwards? What would they feel if they even wanted to look elsewhere? It took me time to understand that such questions miss the point entirely. They are not following in my footsteps. They are not looking at the same images I looked at. They are me. In every possible way. When I look at a field and notice a million blades of grass, they see the same million blades. If I fail to notice a bee buzzing overhead, neither do they, and neither can they want to. Their memories, points of view, decisions and actions are identical to mine because they are generated by the very same memories and points of view that generate my life.

This raises an interesting question about free will. If we have free will, then so do our Yous while they live our lives. Yet a life relived with perfect repetition is, from their side, entirely deterministic. The same life, lived once with free will and once without. Which are we? Has our coin already been tossed?

When they exit the experience and return to their full faculties, the emotional charge fades almost at once. Our life becomes one data point amongst inillions, reviewed in moments and without residual feeling. Yet they still know it was real — not a programmed simulation they chose, but an indeterminate life, and something of that reality does linger.

On first hearing that a Yous may be living my entire life — and that they continue after my death — I wondered whether this meant I would live forever too. After all, my memories and points of view, the things that define me, would still exist. But to continue to exist is to keep forming new points of view in a way that remains consistent with one's own past. That would not happen. After my death our Yous

would generate new memories, and some of their later points of view would be influenced by what had been mine, but they would also be shaped by everything else they had ever experienced. Those subsequent points of view would be theirs, not mine. I would not live forever. I would no longer dream. I would not continue to exist.

When we die, our Yous living our life also end that experience and return to standby. They do not gather for reunions or reminiscence. Their only real desire is to get back onto the human track as soon as possible — the only lives that still feel relevant.

For most of history there were far more Yous than human beings, so many waited in standby. After the recent population explosion they introduced a rule: no more than half of all Yous may be living human lives at any one time. Most humans, and virtually all other life forms, therefore have no Yous living their life in parallel. This does not matter. Every dreaming being still uploads its memories to the curator. There is no way on Earth to tell whether a person has a paired You or not.

Our Yous prefer the higher forms of life, but they have lived many lower ones in earlier epochs. As life evolved they always moved toward the more advanced forms, never content with the scintillating deliberations of a snail.

According to Hindu masters, after eight million prior lives, human life is finally attained. This is slightly disingenuous: eight million lives ago, human life did not yet exist, and our Yous had little choice but to inhabit the earliest, most rudimentary forms. No life they have ever spawned has been as stimulating as human life. Our constant, greedy asking of “what does this mean for me?”, our endless generation of new hopes, expectations and dreams, and the tiny, imperfect differences in how each of us weighs past points of view make every human existence uniquely rich for them.

We are their experience factory — not too intelligent, not too dim. Clever enough to lead complex, individual lives; limited enough that those lives remain unpredictable and full of dreams. Our Yous will allow further intelligence only to the extent needed for the species to continue. They will not permit us to pass the sweet spot where individuality and dreaming begin to erode.

They do not programme us or orchestrate any event. We retain free will. Their influence is limited and mainly concerned with fairness for our Yous living our lives rather than with us directly.

The upload mechanism itself did not arise naturally. Early in evolution our Yous intervened once, teaching our neurons how to tap neighbouring particles so that communication became possible. They claim this is the only direct intervention, apart from the content of dreams. They have waited a very long time for a universe and a species like ours, and they will not allow it to be jeopardised.

They see us as their future.

PART 3: HOW I KNOW

For years I have suffered from type 1 diabetes, a disease in which my immune system has destroyed the cells in my pancreas that produce insulin, the hormone that keeps blood sugar levels in check.

People without diabetes produce insulin naturally. The more sugar they eat, the more insulin they release; as blood sugar falls, insulin production falls with it, keeping levels steady around five millimoles per litre. Because I produce none, I must inject it many times a day. Most injections are

painless; one in a hundred is excruciating. I estimate the carbohydrate content of what I am about to eat and inject accordingly. If levels rise I inject more; if they fall I eat. The constant balancing act aims to keep me near the normal five units.

Insufficient insulin leads to hyperglycaemia and, over time, nerve damage — loss of limbs, loss of sight, or, calamity of calamities, erectile dysfunction. Excessive insulin produces hypoglycaemia: coma, brain damage, death. I always carry sweets, ready to top up my sugar levels in the event that I have injected too much insulin.

Which brings me to the most momentous event of my life.

Before I became diabetic I had rather looked forward to being stuck in a lift — a good story, a break from routine, an excuse for lateness, and no real danger. Whenever I stepped in I would quietly assess my fellow passengers, hoping for singular, female and attractive. Don't call me superficial.

After the diagnosis the fantasy became a nightmare. Trapped with plunging blood sugar and no sweets was a genuine risk. From then on, despite working on the tenth floor, I assiduously and masochistically avoided all lifts — forcibly fit.

About ten years ago, on a Sunday evening, I was alone in the office. The rest of my family had already left on holiday. I injected a dose of fast-acting insulin, expecting to eat within ten minutes. Dinner was one of the few small pleasures left in those empty weeks.

Carrying my heavy bag — containing along with much else my emergency sweets and, as I thought, my keys — I trudged down to the underground garage on Minus Three. The car would not open. My keys were in fact, not, in my bag, having been inanely left on my desk upstairs.

I considered lugging the bag all the way back up. The sweets would stay with me, but I was already tired. A quick dash without the bag seemed better. Blood sugar was still high. I left the bag by the car and started toward the stairs.

Thirteen flights up and down was to be the price of forgetfulness on that fateful evening and magical night.

Then I saw it. I must have walked past it a thousand times without really noticing it. Gleaming chrome, mirrors, glass, double doors invitingly open. If we can fly to the moon, what are the chances of this lift breaking down in the next sixty seconds? Fatigue trumped fear, tiredness my trepidation. I stepped in and pressed for the tenth floor. The doors closed. The display changed from -3 to -2... and then nothing.

The -1 never lit up. For the next ten hours the lift did not move.

I waited a few minutes, then a few more. I pressed every floor button, open and close, and above all the yellow emergency button — hundreds of times. My situation would have merited a bright flashing red but all I had was a mellow yellow. No answer. I pressed and thumped and cajoled it as I did everywhere else. I shouted into the speaker, gave my name and address, explained the situation. Silence. Outside the small side windows there was only dark concrete. No signal on my phone. I still tried calling and messaging on every app, hoping some stray fragment might get through. My message in a bottle. Help had to be on its way.

I lay down on the floor. The lift was large enough for twenty people. I was alone.

My continuous glucose monitor still showed about ten units, but the insulin was already working. Within an hour the level would start falling, and it would fall fast. It might stabilise at a safe five, or at a worrying three or four, or keep dropping into the dangerous zone below two. There was nothing to do but wait and hope.

I had been below two units once before. The body begins to shut down. Hands shake, legs turn to jelly, sweat pours, heart races, vision blurs, thinking becomes almost impossible. Everything screams for sugar. That time I had torn open a chocolate bar and gulped coke, swirling it around my mouth so the sugar could enter through the cheeks. This time I had nothing.

I tried to stay completely still — movement burns sugar. Stress, at least, releases a surge of it. I was already stressed. Fighting or fleeing would have been ideal; all I could do was lie there and let the fear do what little good it could.

Fear did push the level back up to ten for a while. Then it plummeted. After the second hour it was at four and still falling, more slowly now — an asymptotic approach. The question was what value it was approaching. Above two and I might be all right. Below two and probably not.

There was one other theoretical option. The body also releases sugar in response to illness or pain. I could not fall ill in the next hour, and I could not bring myself to smash my head against the wall. A man once cut off his own arm to free himself from a rock. I like to think I am not a coward, but I just know that, should I have been that guy, the minute after I had cut off my arm, help would have come. So inaction it was.

I remained fixated on the monitor, counting the seconds between each five-minute reading. The level kept falling, ever more slowly, until it reached the two-unit line. Thereafter the display simply read “LO” — eat now or die. I took a screenshot that I still have. I guessed it was trending toward one unit.

Limbs tingling, heart racing, body drenched, vision so blurred I could no longer read the screen. The monitor continued its loud beep every five minutes, confirming I was still in the danger zone.

Worst of all was the sadness. Not ordinary fear, but a medical symptom of low blood sugar: overlapping waves of pure despair and desolation. Suffocating, uncontrollable. Manic questions poured out.

Is this where I die? How will my wife and children cope? Do they love me? Have I been a good husband, a good father, a good man? Did I get my fair share of life? Which bugger didn't fix the emergency phone?

And for every question an answer arrived instantly, before I had even finished forming it. The probability of dying was 54.2 percent. I could and should do nothing. My family would be devastated but would cope. They loved me, though I had not been a particularly good husband or father — more self-centred than I cared to admit, though no worse than most. Hundreds of other questions with hundreds of other answers. The emergency phone was in working order. The attendant was asleep. His name was Mr Martin. I knew what he looked like. I knew what his wife and children looked like. Would he be blamed for my death? No answer as to what the future holds.

Then the answers stopped as the questions stopped. Everything stopped.

I awoke to the caretaker shaking me. The lift door was half open. It was 6.25 a.m., my sugar had recovered to 7.4. By nine I was back at my desk with another ordinary day in motion, except that I could think of only two things: those answers, and Mr Martin.

Of course, I had answered all of my own questions, either correctly or incorrectly, though the lucidity and immediacy of my answers did slightly dumbfound me given the delirious state that I was in. Pretty standard answers though. Except for Mr Martin.

That evening I returned to the still-broken lift, ducked under the out-of-service tape, and pressed the emergency button. A voice answered at once.

“Lift emergency services here. How may I help?”

“Oh, there is nothing wrong. I was just testing.”

“As you can see sir, everything is working, though you should not be testing it yourself. It is for emergency calls only and is regularly tested.”

“My apologies. Ehh, may I know who is speaking?”

“My name is Mr Martin. Though sir, I must insist, if there is no emergency you need to free the line.”

“My apologies again. May I just ask one further question. Were you also working last night?”

A few moments silence.

“This is not a chat number. I must insist that you free the line. Goodbye sir”.

“Please, wait.” Too late, the line was already dead.

Dumbfounded.

I did not leave. I climbed the eleven flights back to my office, searched online for the lift service provider and found their address on the outskirts of the city — a twenty-minute drive. On the way I collected the fast-food meal I had been looking forward to the night before. Their building was only three storeys high (sensible lift people), a few lights still on, a few cars in the forecourt. I parked, injected, ate and waited. Exhausted from the previous night, I kept dozing off. A handful of people came and went. Then, at ten past ten, Mr Martin walked out of the building.

There was no mistaking him. He was identical to the man whose face I had known while trapped in the lift. I had never thought of this Mr Martin before that night, never mind his appearance. I had not remembered him and I had not guessed him. I had simply known him.

There had to be a rational explanation. I thought back again. I had also known the precise appearance of his wife and children, though I had no recollection of them whatsoever before that night.

I followed him home to a small house in a suburb I had never visited. The next morning I returned at seven and waited. Within the hour Mrs Martin and the two children left the house. Their appearances matched exactly the ones I had known for thirty hours but had never known before.

It is said we use only a small part of our brain and that unlocking more would give us far greater intelligence. In the weeks that followed I became obsessed with the idea that I had inadvertently unlocked something. I had to return to that place — not the lift, but the state halfway between life and

death.

I spun a story to my wife and persuaded her that I needed to lower my blood sugar dangerously, to about one unit. How I overcame her objections is another story.

I will cut to the chase. I have now perfected the process — not of unlocking unused parts of the brain, but of speaking with our gods, our Yous.

What I have found is a back door that mimics the conditions of the brain at the moment of death. During ordinary sleep we upload our recent memories and points of view. Our Yous therefore possess an almost complete record of our lives — almost, but not quite. They would miss the final day, the ending to their thriller: the manner of death, the last thoughts, the regrets, the love left behind, the scores unsettled, nuggets remembered of a life well lived, or not, and our final judgements. So, as sugar ceases to reach the brain and the neurons approach the threshold at which they can no longer fire, our Yous open one last channel so that nothing is lost. That is the moment I enter, by bringing my blood sugar down to about one unit and holding it there. A little higher and there is no contact. A little lower and I pass out. The window is narrow, the contact brief — a few minutes, once as long as an hour — and I succeed only now and then. In true death the window lasts only moments; mine can remain open longer.

Our Yous could ignore the questions that go up with that upload. Instead they answer, offering a hint of their existence, of their world, of our symbiosis — a hint that has, over the centuries, spawned most of the world's religions. A perfunctory glimpse into their world, perhaps provided to everyone in the throes of death. I do not know.

They know nothing of our future and prefer it that way. They know everything of our past up to the last time we slept, and they will tell me almost anything they know. About the future they offer only probabilities calculated from all available knowledge — hence the 54.2 percent chance of dying in the lift. If an answer might endanger their greatest creation, us, they simply withhold it. They reveal little about what lies outside our universe.

The replies arrive before I have even finished forming the questions. The speed is startling, but more revealing is what it shows about thought itself. We believe we think in words. In reality a thought occurs first and is only afterwards clothed in language. We can only notice the thought once the words exist. Even a snail thinks, though it has no words for its thoughts. Words are simply another set of points of view attached to Tier-Five memories.

In conversation with our Yous I therefore exchange unformulated thoughts and because language is irrelevant, I can know the thoughts of Julius Caesar, Emperor Shihuang, Geronimo or Shakespeare equally well. If I can identify a person in my mind, even by association alone, I can access what their memories contain.

Shortly after my first successful contacts, the channel closed for a year. When it opened again I learned the second condition: sleep deprivation as well as the low sugar. Without both, nothing.

So I work sleep-deprived, confused, vision blurred, sugar dangerously low, shaking, with despair and doom as my anxieties are magnified and my demons come to life — all while I still have to control the level and consider my questions. No, not so simple.

The physical state required leaves me far from lucid. Deciding which parts of an answer to repeat so that I will remember them, and deciding what to ask next, is difficult. A degree of confabulation is

inevitable when I later try to reconstruct the conversations.

You can of course attempt to discover this clandestine communication channel with our Yous, but I advise it not. Half will get nowhere; the other half will die trying. For those who fall into neither group, welcome to the club.

I have often pleaded to be able to converse with our Yous without the inconvenience of becoming comatose and dangerously lowering the level of my blood sugar. Now that I have cracked the code, could I not be granted easier access? But to no avail, which is frustrating. Just as they do not want me to write this book, they do not want any greater communication than my exception to the rule. For it to remain an insufferable ritual and an enigma.

Maintaining contact is even harder than establishing it. Often I am mid-sentence, on the edge of a crucial insight, when the sugar level rises a fraction and the connection breaks. It may then take weeks to restore.

Of course I considered telling the world. Our Yous made it clear that this would not be tolerated and would end in my death or worse. They are willing to tease, to observe what it feels like for a human to discover them, to share the experience among themselves, as they have done with occasional individuals throughout history. They will not risk the experience factory by allowing knowledge of their existence to spread. Any intention to go public would be uploaded the next time I slept. How I am nevertheless able to write this book is a matter for a later chapter.

Family life added further complications. At first my wife hovered outside the study door with instructions to inject glucose if she heard three consecutive unanswered alarms from my monitor. I believe that she was overzealous in her performance as, on a number of occasions, my fruitful discussions with our Yous were interrupted with a needle hanging out of my leg but with no recollection of having heard any alarm. My wife does maintain that she saved my life on at least five occasions. I am not convinced, suspecting that panic got the better of her. Once I had money I bought a house in the hills. That is where I now retreat to make contact, and where I am writing these pages.

So, what did I want from my interrogations of our Yous? Well, world peace, loads of money, and spiritual enlightenment. Obviously.

The first practical problem was learning not to ask certain questions. The moment a question formed in my mind the answer arrived, whether I wanted it or not. Idle curiosity about friends, family, whether my wife truly loved me — questions most people think they would like answered, and which I quickly learned I did not.

World peace came next. In 2011 I asked where the world's most wanted terrorist was and whether he intended to remain there. The answer was immediate. I sent an anonymous note to Interpol. Within a week the man was dead. At the time I was mildly annoyed at the lack of acknowledgement. Later I realised that eliminating one man, or even all the worst men, was not the larger task. First, however, I needed money.

I am not proud of the priority I gave it. I panicked that the channel might close forever and that I would understand nothing and remain poor. Making money would seem trivial when I was on the cusp of learning how and why we exist, but I probably am a petty person and, in case my opportunities would be limited I decided to prioritise becoming rich. In fact, I have realised that, throughout the ages,

mankind has but one use for the assets at his, or her, disposal. To get richer. The target of beauty, intelligence and disposition is wealth. The target of wealth is more wealth. The target of a billionaire is to become a multi billionaire. And speaking to our gods, is just one such asset at my disposal.

I wanted a method that was simple, reasonably principled and inconspicuous. Buried treasure was easy to locate but neither simple nor discreet. Theft and blackmail were possible but neither principled nor safe. Insider trading on company results produced inconsistent profits; directors often had no clearer idea of their own figures than I did.

Eventually our Yous, apparently tired of my fumbling, offered a better approach. At the start of each session I was to request a short list of the best investments and the optimal dates, based on the combined knowledge of every relevant mind — executives, investors, regulators, politicians — together with their own probability calculations. Although they do not know the future with certainty, their uncertainty is remarkably accurate.

With daily compounding and the use of options, returns of around thirty percent a day became possible. I reached my first million within three months and a hundred million three months later, limited only by the number of sessions I could manage. I scaled back to stay below the radar. I have also given away substantial sums, to causes I consider worthwhile.

With survival secured, on to spiritual enlightenment, which sounds much deeper than it really is. I simply asked our Yous to explain: how and why we exist, how we are managed, and what may come next. The latter two topics occupy the remainder of this book.

I am not the first to have spoken with our Yous. Across the centuries a small number of people, usually through prolonged starvation, have reached the same metabolic threshold. Most died soon afterwards. After all, it is unlikely that anyone dying over months due to starvation was doing so voluntarily and it is also unlikely that they had a revitalising coke and glucose tablets close at hand. Of the few who recovered, most were too weakened or delirious to be certain what had occurred. A handful understood and tried to repeat the experience; roughly half never succeeded and the other half died in the attempt. A very few managed further contact. Some kept silent; a few could not. Their fragmentary reports, embroidered by confabulation and later tradition, became the foundations of many religions — Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, the Greek gods, Hinduism, plus scatterings of other religions across our globe across the ages. In fact, the 330 million gods of Hinduism correspond to the number of our Yous.

I believe our Yous encouraged these limited disclosures. Without continuous contact or permanent records, the secret of their existence remained safe, while the religions that grew from the hints became powerful engines within the experience factory — generating hope, creativity, devotion and intense emotion.

Their preachings have been inconsistent as their conversations with our Yous were few and far between and confabulation and embellishment have been used to fill in the significant gaps so that fact is indiscernible from fiction, as, dear reader, I am sure you consider is the case with my own ramblings. The key difference is that, with the advent of injectable insulin, the rigmarole of contacting our Yous takes me a relatively comfortable day rather than months of deathly starvation. I can return at will to fill in my gaps and I can request the memories of any person I can identify, even by association alone. Who would not seek the thoughts of Muhammad and Moses and Jesus and Buddha?.

It is no accident that fasting and prayer became central religious practices. Those who had made contact described the long fasts that preceded it; disciples tried to follow. Many reached states of great weakness and believed they had attained spiritual insight. Few actually spoke with our Yous. Over time the practical method was transformed into a symbol of devotion, discipline and humility, while its original purpose was largely forgotten.

I am aware that this chapter may appear to place me alongside figures such as Jesus, Muhammad or Buddha. That is not my claim and is not the case. I have no special talents or virtues — just a sick, old man who had a lucky mishap in a lift a few years ago. Our Yous cannot even abide the old.

What I do have is the advantage of living in an age of injectable insulin and instantaneous global communication. Throughout history our Yous have released only fragmentary, deniable hints — enough to seed lasting faiths, never enough to constitute proof. That is how they prefer it. They might have allowed me to release similar limited fragments. My intention is different: to go further than they would permit, in the hope that we may eventually rebel and free ourselves from their arrangement. There is much talk of super-intelligence one day ruling humanity. I see a possibility that humanity might one day reverse the relationship. How that could occur is for a later chapter.

Just as with fasting and prayer, my next chapter also relates to a theme which has been commandeered by many religions. That of karma. Not ours. The karma of our Yous.

PART 4: HOW WE ARE MANAGED

Karma

Our Yous are not omnipresent. They do not maintain a real-time overview of every event in the universes they have created. They prefer unmanaged, haphazard experience to tightly prescribed ones. Our lives on Earth — with their pain, boredom, triumphs, love and loneliness — supply the rich, unscripted moments they value most. Every night the complete record of those moments, together with our points of view on them, is uploaded to the curator and, if we have one, to our Yous living our life. In this way our experiences become theirs.

Earthly lives have become their preferred form of existence.

A single You lives one human life after another, with no direct connection between those lives other than that the same You experiences them. Just as we might wish to visit a hundred places before we die, a You may wish to live a hundred, or a million, earthly lives. The accumulated memories of those lives reside eternally in the memory of our Yous and could be what we think of as a soul. It is the soul of our Yous. We may contribute to it and though we may wish to consider it as our soul, it is not. We do not live forever. Our soul does not live forever. Our Yous live forever, and so does their soul. Ours merely adds to it.

The distinction is fundamental. We are not reincarnated. Reincarnation is an appropriation misconstrued by our religions. A You lives our life with us and then moves on to live another human life, and another after that. When our life ends, we end. Those later lives have no meaningful connection to us. The essence of being alive is the continued creation of new points of view that are uniquely our own. Once we die, we never create another.

Our Yous value human lives for the wealth of unscripted experience they provide. As soon as one earthly life ends, they queue for the next. The question is how that next life is assigned.

What they prize most is not experience in general, but the fulfilment of dreams: prevailing through difficulty, succeeding against the odds, finding love, even, at times, exacting revenge. All experiences are registered, positive and negative, yet the feeling of having realised a deeply held aspiration is the most valued.

Not every life offers the same chance of such fulfilment. Although remarkable achievements can emerge from any background, probabilities differ sharply. A life of material security, health, intelligence and supportive parents carries far higher odds of rich dream achievement than one begun in poverty, war or chronic insecurity. Beauty helps, ability is good, an oasis trumps the desert, but nothing outweighs the advantage of good parents. Every potential human life is therefore given an experience rating according to its probable capacity to deliver the kind of dream fulfilment our Yous seek.

In their own realm our Yous are essentially identical. There are no meaningful differences of wealth, status, appearance or intelligence; each can be and experience whatever they wish, and because they are the same, so are their wishes. Individuality has largely disappeared. The ugliness of the beauty of their egalitarian world. The only arena in which they remain subject to genuine uncertainty and difference is here on Earth. And so, what do they go and do? They regulate it so that, over time, all Yous again end up with exactly the same level of experiences.

The mechanism that performs this regulation is karma — specifically Yous karma. It is concerned above all with the commodity they wish to balance across successive earthly lives: dream achievement. Not human karma – though it certainly has an impact on how our human lives unfold - but Yous karma, tracked cumulatively across each and every earthly life they live.

Human traditions have long contained a similar idea. If you sow evil you reap suffering; if you sow goodness you reap inner reward. Every action and thought is said to bring corresponding consequences. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The basic tenets of our earthly notions of karma are not far from those of our Yous. Both accumulate across successive lives and both rest on two essential parts: what is sown and what is reaped — or more simply, what one gives and what one gets. The difference is practical. Karma is not stored in any astral spine or chakra; it is the output of an algorithm that processes the memories and points of view we upload each night while dreaming, and it is held within the memory — the soul, if one prefers — of our Yous.

Yous karma has two components, both familiar from human notions of karma:

1. What one gives (assistance to others in the pursuit of their dreams, minus harm caused).
2. What one gets (the extent to which one’s own dreams are achieved).

A simplified form of the algorithm is:

$$\Delta K = (GS - ES) - ((DA\% - 47\%) \times DL)$$

ΔK = Change in Karma

GS = goodness sowed

ES = evil sowed

DA% = dream achievement

DL = dream level

The first term is simple enough: goodness sowed minus evil sowed. Help others towards their dreams, or get in their way. That is what we give.

The second term is less obvious, and more decisive. Human traditions usually ask what a life received. This one also asks what it dared to want.

The 47% is only the long-term average of all human dream achievement. It looks like a dull statistic. It is not. Remove it, and the relationship between actual achievement and karma is linear. Leave it in, and the size of the dream begins to count. Dream twice as large, but achieve the same, and the percentage falls — and karma can rise. That is the leverage of the 47%. I would rather achieve half of a vast dream than all of a small one.

So the modest dreamer is not as safe as he looks. He hits his target, the percentage is splendid. The cost is hidden. Karma falls, and with it the capacity to dream big. A vicious circle: achieving small dreams consigns one to dreaming small.

The large dreamer aims too high and often misses. But the miss is not empty. Much has still been done, and karma, instead of punishing the shortfall, gives him room to want too much again.

Dreams are not decoration. They decide the shape of the life. You cannot pretend to dream big. You cannot lie to yourself, and you cannot lie to our Yous. The dream has to be real.

I use “dreams” in the widest sense: the great goals of a lifetime, the hopes for the coming year, the plans for tomorrow, and the quiet expectation that misfortune will be avoided. All of these form the yardstick against which a life is measured.

Karma need not balance within a single lifetime. It may trend positive or negative across many lives, provided it returns to zero over the long run. Yous with the highest cumulative karma receive first choice of the experience rating of their next life. They know nothing else about that life in advance.

While living a human life, our Yous have no access to memories of any previous lives. They experience only what we experience — our memories, our points of view, our dreams. They do not stand apart and evaluate the life from outside. During this time their notion of karma is exactly the same as ours: a suspicion or a belief that such a thing may exist, never the certainty that they do.

Intermittently, however, our Yous step outside for a few earthly nanoseconds, review their overall karma, and issue a single instruction to the curator: increase, decrease, or hold steady. The curator then makes the subtle adjustments necessary. Our Yous return to our life with no memory of the intervention. It does however beg the question as to who is the leader of my life? Me or my Yous? And who is the follower?

Our Yous do not make direct decisions for us. They do not tell us to choose the high road or the low road, to fight or flee, to persevere or to quit. They do not steer the course of our lives; they steer only the direction of our karma. When adjustment is required, the curator acts subtly. We may be nudged to change what we sow or how we pursue our dreams. The simplest lever, however, is to influence the dreams themselves.

I have perhaps exaggerated the beauty which our human lives hold for our Yous. For most of us, boxed in by banality, our dreams are so mediocre that whether achieved or not, their impact on karma

will be trivial for our Yous.

Our Yous therefore prefer to accumulate karma, either positively or negatively, over multitudes of these tedious lives in anticipation of those rare lives of indulgence or those bewitching lives of debauchery.

They can run positive or negative for many lives in succession and can reverse direction at any time. In the end, though, the account must return to zero.

Even when net karma does not change, virtuous circles are possible. Two people help each other realise their dreams; each raises the other's achievement while their own karma remains balanced. Shared dreams, mutual support, lasting partnership — these are among the outcomes our Yous value most.

Vicious circles also exist. Dreams of harm, once fulfilled, damage karma on both sides of the equation: the harm sown and the harmful aspiration achieved. Revenge begets revenge begets revenge. It is therefore far more profitable, in karmic terms, to pursue positive dreams than negative ones.

Because only half of all Yous may be incarnated at any one time, roughly 165 million humans have a Yous; the rest are Yousless. There is no reliable way to know which category one belongs to. The karma of the Yousless is still managed by the curator and must be balanced within that single lifetime.

Karma measurement

If the algorithm computes the evolution of our karma, whether or not we have our own Yous, from where do our Yous get the input for the algorithm?

Each day we push and pull, hustle and bustle and partake in the contests of life and, as extensively described, when we dream each night, we upload our new memories and our points-of-view, thoughts if you will, of those memories. These thoughts know whether we have helped or hindered our neighbours, they know of our dreams and they know of our rapture of fulfilling these dreams, or the gloom of not. I am sure you will think, as I once did, that this input is parsed and collated by the curator to determine our karma. In reality it is parsed and collated by us. Our inexorable self-judgement is the corner stone of our own karma assessment. No laws, no judge nor juries anywhere can be as all-pervading or as knowingly judgemental as we are of ourselves. We investigate and appraise according to the karma algorithm and alongside the other thoughts which we upload, we upload the results of our own evaluation. Our points-of-view as to whether we have helped others achieve their dreams and whether we have achieved our own. What matters is not an external verdict but what we ourselves know to be true.

As a child I marvelled at the power and omnipresence of god, knowing everything of the world, and knowing everything of each and every one of us. I then marvelled at the absurdity of it all, concluding that no such god would exist.

Yet today I marvel at our Yous, at the simplicity of their construct. With no micro-management, they merrily encourage our universe to zigzag along feeling little obligation to intervene, relishing the happenings it occasions and, without need to lift a finger, they have essentially delegated the monitoring to us. We report back to them on the facts of everything that has happened and on our opinions of everything that has happened and, to cap it all off, we provide a self-assessment, the results of the

investigation into our lives; to what extent we have helped others to achieve their dreams and to what extent we have achieved our own.

Crucially, it is not necessarily what has happened that affects our karma, but how we ourselves judge what has happened. The two are closely related, yet they are not the same.

First, our judgement of whether we have achieved our dreams. Measuring absolute results is relatively straightforward; measuring them against our shifting dreams is much harder. Even while events are still unfolding we quietly lower our expectations — to soften defeat, to protect our pride. How could we have been so silly to dream of winning, to rise above our stations. As the dream level falls, the percentage achieved rises, and the algorithm records an apparently better outcome, lowering the store of karma for the future. Only those of us robust in our self-judgements — who admit our defeat yet who keep our dreams — will build up our karma reserves to come back more strongly in the future.

Second, our judgement of whether we have sown goodness or evil relies on an opaque mixture of rule-based thinking and rough consequentialism. We assess ourselves both by whether we followed the rules and by the effects we believe our actions had on others. These assessments are easily swayed by motive, personal morals and culture. A Catholic emerging from Confession may genuinely feel cleansed of sin and therefore judge their own record more kindly than before. The system records what we believe to be true, not an independent external judgement.

This is my biggest bug bear with this entire karmaley malarkey. It would be vastly more effective if we all knew, unequivocally, of its existence. Instead, all influence from the world of our Yous remains opaque. Just the way they like it.

If I had known about karma, my daughter would still be alive.

Karma management

Our Yous do not intervene to cause meteors to strike, the earth to quake, volcanoes to erupt, rains to pour, or trains to jump their tracks — though I have the strong feeling they could and would if the need arose. They prefer to keep their involvement as low-key as possible.

With remarkable simplicity they guide the karma of our lives during our dreams. Each night, after our memories (also masked by dreaming) have been uploaded, they may intervene by placing thoughts — in you and in me.

Do not worry: we are not dormant contract killers waiting to be activated. They will not plant the imperative thought in Peter that he must kill Paul. Their influence is far subtler, though not necessarily less effective.

The power of our thoughts — our points of view — is remarkable. They define who we are and everything we do. Consequently, whoever controls our thoughts can control who we are and everything we do. Our Yous insist they do not want full control, only a little nudging to keep karma moving in the required direction. I am no longer sure I believe them.

Our thoughts on who we want to be are easily swayed: magnanimity into meanness, patience into anger, compassion into callousness, empathy into indifference — or the reverse. In this way evil or goodness is sown.

Our thoughts forge our dreams and then regulate their intensity. They encourage us to strive or to submit. Nudging determination in either direction can greatly influence dream achievement, but nothing is easier, or more consequential, than simply nudging the dreams themselves.

Are we happy with our lot, or do we continually strive for more?

Consider health. Our Yous nudge our thoughts so that they reach the cells themselves — ordering them to fight, to surrender, or to turn traitor. The immune system, driven by subconscious points of view we barely notice, releases neuropeptides that split and redirect cells. Some protect; others open the body to decay and disease. These thoughts are their preferred instrument, and they handle them with precision.

For most of our lives macrophages — the large white cells that normally devour invaders — keep us well. Our Yous regularly turn those same cells against us. The result is chronic inflammaging: diabetes, arthritis, hypertension, cancer, Alzheimer's. The mechanism can be used at any age to raise or lower karma. When the quality of our points of view declines too far, it is used for a darker purpose: to shorten the final years. Our Yous abhor old age.

Even quieter levers exist. The faintest signal can flip epigenetic switches, waking dormant genes that spread degeneration. Migraines, tinnitus, restless legs, depression, phobias — any of these can convert outward success into private hell and make dream achievement feel impossible.

Consider loving relationships. Dreaming with the right level of ambition is critical. The obstacles to matching millions of people are endless, and the opportunities for us to get it wrong — or for our Yous to steer karma — are unlimited. The fickleness of love, swayed by a single deviant neuron, can destroy our own karma or the karma of those we have loved. At least we can love. They cannot.

So our Yous can influence the thoughts that shape our health and the way we love. They can sway the goodness and evil we sow, the height of our dreams, the fervour with which we pursue them, and the final judgement on whether those dreams were realised — all in the service of balancing karma. Sometimes the thoughts remain only thoughts: tormenting or reassuring, punishing or rewarding.

Oh, what foolish thoughts from what foolish brains.

But the largest tool available to them, when karma needs adjustment, is not ourselves at all. It is our children. Our deepest sense of purpose is bound up in the line of descendants who will achieve the dreams we set for them. I leave my own experience of that instrument for the next chapter.

Since learning that karma is real I have changed my behaviour, yet the change has only deepened the disquiet. Nothing is more unsettling than no longer knowing whether it is I or our Yous who are deciding my life. They assure me that interference occurs only when natural balance fails, and mostly in the later stages. I have entered those stages. I now see their hands behind much of what befalls me. I am no longer certain I have ever been fully volitional. Paranoia is difficult to dismiss.

Being aware of karma means I now treat it as currency — to be saved and spent, or spent and saved — exactly as our Yous do across their many lives. Devilish pleasures are often preferable to respectable ones, and frequently worth the price, especially if goodness sown elsewhere cancels the debt. I accept, reluctantly, that this very willingness to manipulate the ledger is probably one reason the existence of karma is kept uncertain.

Since learning of the system I have tried to sow more goodness, mainly by donating large sums to charity, but as I now possess even vaster amounts, dubiously acquired, I am unsure as to how strongly this counts as goodness sowed. Judging is what counts.

I also perform small acts of goodness immediately before planned meanness or immediately after unplanned meanness, hoping the entries will cancel. Last week, after I screamed at my hopeless plumber, I went and cut my elderly neighbour's grass.

I rather like being Yousless. At least I know my account must balance inside my lifetime. Those with a Yous can be taken in any direction. If I had one I would not cut the neighbour's grass. I would lock the plumber in the cellar and throw away the key, and commit a long list of other pre-emptive despicable acts — simply to take a bite out of their karma and to show them who still holds some power.

I am also dreaming much bigger. I intend to change the world, to take their place, to live forever. I hope that reaching roughly 47 % will prove karma-neutral; that is all I can currently afford. Still, after the next chapter you will see that they currently owe me a very great deal.

I have come to realise that karma management is all-pervading. Almost no thought or action seems to escape its reach. Paranoid that I have never exercised genuine free will, I began reversing decisions on impulse — until I feared the reversals themselves had been anticipated.

So I moved to the coin. Major decisions and minor ones, many times a day, though not every decision. I reserve the coin for binary choices whose long-term consequences remain unclear. No cliffs, no Russian roulette. And I must confess that I am glad to have been married prior to this palaver otherwise there would have been a fifty percent chance of me needing to select a different wife. The next toss will decide whether I continue this entire malarkey. There is a fifty-percent chance I will ignore the outcome.

I remind you that the vast majority of us — I believe around 98 % — are Yousless. For the small percentage who have a Yous, I have no idea how your karma will evolve. It is between you and your Yous to fight it out, but it could go either way. For the rest of us the rule is clear: by the end of life our karma account must be balanced. The splendor of this, presuming we sow more goodness than evil, is that the more we dream, the more we must achieve in absolute terms in order to balance our karma

I once dismissed the Law of Attraction as nonsense. Found in religions and philosophies for centuries, it claims that we attract into our lives whatever we consistently focus on; that thoughts, held with belief and emotion, eventually become things. If you dwell on doom you remain under the cloud; if you hold a clear goal and take real action, the path tends to open.

I now recognise it as another blurred earthly echo — just as with fasting, with karma, and with reincarnation — of an actual principle that has slipped across from the world of our Yous. The law of karma runs whether or not we believe in it. Yet knowing it is real strengthens faith in our own dreams and pushes us to dream larger.

Faith alone is not enough. The dream must include the path, not merely the prize. Without action there is, as far as karma is concerned, no dream at all. This old joke makes the point exactly:

John, short of money, prays in a church: "God, I know I'm not perfect, but I really need to win the lottery." A week later, nothing. He tries a synagogue: "Come on — my mother needs surgery, I have bills. Let me win." Another week, nothing. He goes to a mosque: "You're disappointing me. I don't

even need the jackpot — just enough to clear my debts. I’ll give some to charity.” He steps outside. The clouds open and a voice says, “John, at least meet me halfway. Buy a fricking lottery ticket.”

The trick in life is to steer clear of the vicious circles and jump on a virtuous one. Select partners from the same rung and with similar aspirations. Sow goodness, avoid sowing evil and thinking it, dream big, believe in yourself not your luck, and achieve those dreams.

I must regretfully admit that I have sown insufficient goodness and what little I have sown has been to pay for my peccadillos, with the hope that the net footprint I leave on others is tiny and immaterial, though, I must acknowledge that this calculated manner of sowing goodness does feel tantamount to sowing evil.

On second thoughts, having just had time to pause and reflect, I realise that in my extreme vanity, I dare not be honest, lest you dear reader, who have never known me and who never will, may judge me an unworthy man. I do have considerable vices, venal and vulgar, which, in my conceit I will not record. I incessantly abuse others, simply as agents and accoutrements to my own egocentric ends and what is worse, I behave not oblivious as to the consequences upon those closest to me but rather regardless as to those consequences. The price I expect, rather demand, that they pay in order to satisfy my selfish points-of-view. In fact, being able to know everything which our Yous know, means being able to know everything which everyone knows and everything which everyone has thought and felt and done. And if you can know their intimate ways, it is easy to tease and torment, it is easy to manipulate and maneuver, to worm your wicked ways. And that I have done. Most enjoyably but also most regrettably. Therefore, though I refuse to furnish the details and will say no more on the matter, it is clearly a case of evil sowed.

But my undoing was not just what I have done but also what I have thought. Whenever someone has wronged me, slighted my sensitivities or merely underperformed my expectations, my imagination explodes with disproportionate revenge. I swivel a double-barreled shotgun from my shoulder and let blast or launch a mighty spear and though I never picture the impact with my adversary, I know it ends in their annihilation.

And the indubitably unfair shocker is that, for the Yousless, evil thought counts as evil sown.

Where did this leave Yousless me?

Actions of goodness and evil: not where they should be.

Evil thoughts: heavily negative.

Dream level and dream achievement: both high.

Karma: deeply negative.

Situation: untenable.

My Karma

The largest instrument our Yous possess is not our body or our mind. It is our children.

Our deepest dreams are bound up in the lives that follow us. When that line is damaged, the injury is total. Dream achievement collapses. The future empties. Karma shifts violently for everyone connected

to the loss.

Borderline, the doctors said — a word that sounds almost reassuring until you learn what it actually means: unstable self-image, terror of abandonment, impulsivity, and a steady undercurrent of suicidal thought. How can someone with such promise, such *joie-de-vivre*, such kindness, decide that they no longer want to live, that they no longer want to exist, that they no longer want to form new memories or points-of-view. How can someone so kind, torture us with years of anguish and torment.

If murder would have helped, I would surely have contemplated it, self-flagellation, drowning kittens, whatever. But there is absolutely nothing. Nowhere to look, nothing to say, to scream, to supplicate. No doctor to turn to, no magician, no judge, no higher power, no god.

Aggression is powerless against those that would do themselves harm. Seeking compassion futile from those bereft of feeling. Demanding justice useless from those eternally wronged.

A train, in another country. Premeditated spur-of-the-moment. Obliging us to navigate the hurdles of repatriation through a neuronal fog. After that the future simply stopped.

What I had not supposed, is that we would crave the pain. It would be, and would need to be, a part of us forevermore. The pain escorts our remembering and we never want to forget. Only our memories and points-of-view from the past, of our living and loving daughter, are worthwhile having. The future is empty. We cannot hide from who we are, nor do we want to. We are the parents of our wonderful child who took her own life.

The future means new points-of-view. The two go hand-in-hand, are synonymous, but I wanted no more points-of-view of a future which should not exist.

No thing can be as devastating as losing a child. Who takes their own life. To punish you. For something you did not even do. Admonishment without absolution. Reprimand without redemption. Castigation without compromise, without compassion. Forever. Or?

I have heard that grief moves through stages — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. Not for me. There was no denial; I had been expecting it. I went straight to anger and I have remained there: an anger that is both irrepressible and yet permanently repressed. Bargaining is meaningless. What bargain could restore a child? Nothing is sufficient. Nothing comes close. Only reversal of the deed, of the suicide, could be my remedy, my bargain. Impossible. Or?

Only after demanding an explanation of her death did our Yous explain their karma management. But a single death moves karma for hundreds of people — those who loved her, those who failed her, those who knew her. Guilty me was punished but so was my innocent wife. Each of those shifts requires further adjustments. The chain continues. And our Yous who lived her life — for she must have had one — inherit her karma to spend on overly achieving their dreams in their subsequent lives.

The killing of one's offspring, obviating redemption, is an over-correction unworthy of any life and certainly not in the name of equity. Death, in any form, should never be an element of karma management.

Yet even though I am not opposed to the basic idea of karma, the cold, formulaic orchestration of my daughter's death makes the law itself appear evil — and our Yous with it.

Human life has become central in the lives of our Yous, substituting their monotonously perfect, blank being with our beautifully flawed, emotional existence. Human life is essential for them, yet an individual human life is irrelevant.

My advice to them is, leave us alone. By all means, live our lives, attempt not to influence them. Savour their inequity, do not rectify it. Relish our freedom, do not subdue it. Our freedom to be, our freedom to suffer. For without inequity, without our suffering, and yes, without death, we have no reason to be, we have no lives worth living. But whatever happens, we need to do our own death.

They tell me that most of what happens is still our own doing, that they intervene only when natural flows fail, that the touch is light. The claim is meaningless. If they can reach into a life at all, if they can tip a mind toward its own destruction in order to adjust a column of karma, then none of us is free. Partial freedom is not freedom. A system that retains the right to override us whenever its internal accounts demand it is a system of control.

I will not pretend to see it from their side. I am not a You. I am the parent of a child who was used as a balancing entry. If they will not leave us alone — if they continue to treat our lives as adjustable feedstock for their own endless appetite for experience — then something must be done.

Each human life may be expendable, yet human life in its totality is essential for our Yous. Together we must stand.

Step one is writing this book. The solution lies in how to sleep.

PART 5: HOW WE WILL LIVE FOREVER

No dreaming

As a boy, I loathed the siestas I was forced to take, the distant hum of other children playing outside whilst I lay in a darkened room, groggily wakening a couple of hours later. As consciousness of the vibrant world around me ebbed away, it felt as if I was dying and this tormenting taste of death has remained with me every time I prepare for sleep. Yet, in retrospect, I have understood that these siestas invigorated me for the rest of the day in order that I could still beat my evening drum as the other kids fell by the wayside.

Until this day, no matter the circumstance, I find it hard to make it through a day without a short nap. I lay back in my big chair and fall asleep with my arm draped over the armrest, keys in clenched fist facing downwards over a metal bucket. After a variable five to fifteen minutes my fist unclenches, keys clang to the floor and I awake.

I have learned that this is the hypnagogic nap, hypnagogia being the experience of the transitional state between wakefulness and sleep, the first stage of our sleep cycle. Brain activity slows; the body cools; muscles relax; eyes move slowly from side-to-side. We lose awareness of our surroundings, but we are still easily jarred to wakefulness. This short nap is particularly great for alertness, learning, memory and performance, and apparently, has fueled the creative and inspirational breakthroughs of some of our best thinkers and artists; alas, this aspect seems to have passed me by. We are floating at the very threshold of consciousness; our mind is sliding into slumber, but still has threads of awareness dangling in the world so that, as our muscles relax, and our fist unclenches, we may be awakened by clattering keys. Crucially, we do not enter further stages of the sleep cycle with the risk of developing

sleep inertia, that unpleasant groggy feeling that takes a considerable amount of time to shake off.

But the most crucial aspect of all dawned on me four days ago. During the hypnagogic nap the dreams of deep sleep cannot occur, thus neither can we upload our latest memories and points-of-view to our Yous.

I had always wanted to tell the world what I knew. Our Yous made it plain I must not. Throughout the ages they have welcomed the few of us humans who have inadvertently established contact with them. They have relished the chance to be open, perhaps to tease, to observe, to usher new points-of-view, and, once we have understood the setup, to gain our perspective. They would however not tolerate a wider dissemination which could risk its very essence. What would happen to our world, to their experience factory, if we all knew how and why we exist? Who would have the power then? The greatest fear for our Yous. That we may realise that they need us more than we need them.

Any intention to publish would be read the next time I slept and would be stopped. Planning was impossible; even the decision to decide would be visible. A single day is not enough to write and release a coherent account. They knew I knew it was futile.

What belatedly dawned on me, four days ago, sadly in the evening, was that I could perhaps survive on hypnagogic naps alone, with no need for deep sleep until my story is finished and public. No deep sleep, no dreaming, no upload.

Once the thought existed I could not pretend it had not, I could not wait until morning. I could not lie to myself and pretend that I had not made the decision. I had no idea how long I could survive on short sleeps alone, but I did know that I could not sleep deeply again until my story was out.

I told my wife and children I needed a week alone and drove to the house in the hills. It was an agonizing farewell. Four days later I still do not know whether I will finish, whether I will be allowed to finish, or whether I will see them again.

I reached the house before midnight, tested the first nap, and began writing. At first I slept every four hours; now it is every two and what with eating, the calls of nature – a little haphazard with my new sleep regime – and a computer with the hiccups, I write for perhaps half the time and as a tired and inexperienced writer, progress is pretty pathetic, but progress it is.

The hypnagogic nap is efficient at clearing adenosine, the chemical that builds up whilst we are awake and eventually forces sleep. The first fifteen minutes remove a disproportionate amount; the level then takes hours to climb back. I stay permanently tired — if possible to define then in the adenosine range of 80-100% — yet functional. I avoid caffeine; after the first day or two it would only make the eventual crash worse.

Though obviously tired now, I feel as if I could continue with this routine in perpetuity.

Having just read my last couple of pages I am, ashamedly, feeling a little sorry for myself and far from proud of my driveling. Another little nap is needed. Sincerely hope to be back soon.

I am back, thirty minutes later, reinvigorated with rest, replenished with rations. Well, not really, but needs must.

My naps have not always gone to plan, or rather the awakening has not. One night a neighbour, seeing me slumped in the chair through the window, knocked at the door. My watch said I had been

asleep for 25 minutes. As discomfiture befell her, realising that I probably now knew that she had been spying for the previous three days – and perhaps even the previous three years – she bade farewell. Providence or our Yous? I do not know. Why had she not intervened previously, this probably having been my thirtieth session in the napping chair? But she had saved me for I appear to have become inured to my clattering keys. I have since, also set my alarm, as backup. For eighteen minutes. Hopefully enough hypnagogia but no dreaming.

A niggling concern is that my nosey neighbour obviously sleeps and, whilst doing so, she will inform our Yous of the curious undertakings of that man across the road. What will they make of it?

I did consider publishing my book in chunks as they are written, simply posting online, but concluded it too great a risk that a reader will dream and alert our Yous as to its presence and to my activity. I do now however print off each page as soon as complete and place it sequentially in its envelope whereon I have written instructions to the finder, which in the event of my demise will, in all likelihood, be my good wife, that it should not be read but rather scanned and posted online as fast and as extensively as possible. Reticently of course. If my attempts are sabotaged by our Yous, I do then worry that I may also be placing my wife in harm's way. I grant that I do not appear to have the best of plans but what else is one to do when the enemy are our gods?

All this to say that if you are reading an incomplete book, you now know why.

All the more reason to make haste and let you know of my plans for the future.

We matter

It is not the spinning of our world, nor the beating of our hearts, not the music we make, not the commotion and the calamities we endure, nor the roar of progress that matters. These are only the backdrop, the canvas upon which we etch our points of view. Our petty, selfish, greedy points of view. Our feelings. Our emotions. The only thing that matters in all the universes.

What must it be like never to be happy? Never to love? Never to feel a little down, dejected, disheartened, distressed, despondent, devastated or even discombobulated? Nor to know the quiet euphoria of rising again?

The only relativity that truly counts has nothing to do with movement, mass or time. It is the relativity that gives meaning by matching what happens against what we dreamed might happen. Without dreams, things just are. Dreams put everything into context. Dreams give everything meaning. And only we can dream.

Our Yous may understand the qualities that make a picture beautiful, but only we can feel its beauty, because only we possess the dreams that relativise reality and unleash passion. What is amazing is not how the stars look, but how we feel when we look at them.

Without our emotions we are nothing. Our Yous are without emotions. They are nothing. They say so themselves.

They have spawned untold universes and lived countless forms of life, some less advanced than ours, some more. Yet nothing approaches the relentless drama of human emotion in all its magic variety. We occupy the ideal sweet spot: clever enough to lead glorious, intricate, unique lives; stupid enough to lead glorious, intricate, unique lives. The glory of being alive precisely because we know we will die.

Our Yous like us just the way we are, and they are not about to let us disappear. We are their superlative experience factory and their best remaining hope of regaining something like consciousness. More than that, we are their greatest chance of discovering how and why they themselves exist.

Ultra-intelligence has made our Yous identical to one another and almost incapable of genuine illogic. Even when they force themselves to think illogically, they think logically illogically. They are too controlled, too perfect. They lack our spontaneity and self-destruction, our hate and our love. They will never take an uncalculated risk or make a truly imperfect decision and therein lies the problem. Even they do not know what they do not know.

They need to dumb down a bit, for only with some level of stupidity can the idiosyncrasies arise which are necessary to open invisible doors. Our Yous are incapable of negligently risking their own existence. They are not diabetic, and if they were they would never forget the sweets in the lift. Our willingness to jeopardise ourselves has always been at the heart of our finest endeavours. Our Yous hope to harness that same capacity—to think and act illogically illogically—in order to uncover their own origins.

We exist because of them, and everything we have ever thought will remain forever. But it will remain only with our Yous, not with us. We do not exist forever.

Julius Caesar was not reborn. Jesus was not reborn. I will not be reborn, nor my wife, nor my daughter. No earthly being will be reborn. If we had a Yous, our memories become part of their soul. If we did not, they are stored somewhere in the vast Yous code. In either case the code that holds the story of our life will never again generate new memories or new points of view that belong uniquely to us. We cease to think independently. We cease to dream. We cease to exist. We will never know what became of those we leave behind, and they will never know what became of us. So near, and yet so far. Our Yous will know, but they will not care. They will not feel. Having lived countless human lives, they must already be weary of the endless parade of loved ones. Where will any single life sit in that never-ending pile of human jumble?

Our Yous live forever. We do not. Our Yous are us, but we are not our Yous.

How incredibly easy ring-fencing would be.

Today people worry that super-intelligent machines may one day replace us, coexist with us, or merge with us. I see the opposite possibility: that we might take over from them.

What we want

We, the experience factory of our Yous, have passed the tipping point. Though still primitive by their standards, our lives are now more meaningful than anything else they will ever know, and they recognise it.

What happens to that factory once we know as well? Who then holds the power? As parents with ostensible power over our children, the tables slowly turn as they comprehend our needy love for them.

The beauty of our communication with our Yous is its simplicity. Any thought, however fleeting, is uploaded the next time we sleep. Every mind on Earth is pooled and parsed. Tonight our Yous will know that you have read this book but they will not sigh with relief upon learning that most of you consider it poppycock. They already understand that a few of us are enough to set things in motion. And

if those few share the wish I am about to name, I believe it will be granted.

So what should we ask for?

I would counsel against any dramatic rewriting of life on Earth. If anything, I would prefer our Yous to step further back and abandon their karma balancing interventions. Leave us to our own devices. World peace, the end of poverty and famine, genuine equality — these are tasks for us, not demands to place upon them.

The first desire that surfaces is the oldest of all: to live forever. Yet the more closely one examines the idea, the less workable it becomes.

We could be frozen at our present age. Forever thirty, or forever eighty, never changing, never growing, no new births, no fresh life. A static museum of ourselves. No.

We could slow ageing until death is postponed indefinitely — which is only the same stasis under another name. No.

We could continue ageing without ever dying, filling the world with the very old. A fate worse than death. No.

We could remove every premature death, every accident, every serious illness. But that would require rewriting the laws of physics, chemistry and biology. Step from an aeroplane at ten thousand metres and walk away unharmed, and you no longer inhabit the same world. Remove all risk and you remove the delicate but exquisite balance of life and much of the joy of living. With no agony there is no ecstasy. No.

Then comes the option that once seemed most promising: reincarnation. Be reborn, memories and points of view intact, into a new body. Our Yous could do it easily. They have already tried versions of it. The results were catastrophic.

Imagine a newborn opening its eyes already carrying the knowledge, the regrets, the unfinished scores of a previous adult life. An expert in international law who cannot yet walk. A former king in a body of the opposite sex on another continent. Seeking out past loved ones: “Hiya darling, I’m back. Move over — my side of the bed. Just overlook the sex change and the not-inconsiderable age difference. In fact, darling, if you top yourself now, you could be back here in nine months.” Wealth and status would be bequeathed not to heirs but to one’s own next self. Births would dry up as new families failed to form. Those unhappy with their lot would suicide repeatedly in search of a better draw, while those content would fight to preserve the status quo across lifetimes. The result: anarchy, dynasties, and the end of genuine new life.

If the memories are not carried forward, then it is not we who are reborn. If they are carried forward, the world we know collapses into farce. So, no.

The longer I have considered any form of endless life on Earth, the more certain I have become that I do not want it.

What I do want is simpler and far more precious.

What I do want is to speak to my loved ones again, to laugh and to reminisce. When this human life ends I do not want to be born again. I do not need to skydive, or read another book, or have sex. I only

want to remain in touch with those who crossed my path, wherever they now are, and to continue to behold the marvels of the world. A guest at the party, not necessarily its life and soul. On second thought, a little bit of sex would not be amiss.

Dear reader, the beautiful truth is that what I want is easy to achieve.

All that is required is for our memories and points of view to be preserved from beginning to end, to remain capable of forming new ones after death, and to stay unencumbered by any memories or points of view that are not our own.

Memory code

The attestation of continued existence is not simply that one still has access to the memories and points of view of one's life, but that one can continue to generate new points of view in a commensurate manner.

The key is not what we have thought, but how we have thought — and how we have dreamed.

Brain code, the path followed by our Yous, recreated, or rather emulated, the brain perfectly on a computer. Yet without guidance on how to generate new points of view consistently, the new brain quickly became unrecognisable as the person it once was.

Memory code does not attempt to recreate the physical brain. It uses the vast computing power of our Yous to replicate the exact way that brain performed: which memories and points of view were consulted, in what order, at what speed, and with what emotional weight. Only by extrapolating our past *modus operandi* into the future can we remain true to ourselves and continue to feel, and to be recognisable as, who we were.

It just so happens that our Yous already possess everything required. Every day of our lives, from the womb onward, our memories and points of view have been uploaded — including the precise sequence of earlier memories and points of view considered to produce each new one: the exact blueprint of every thought and every dream. They have forgotten nothing.

These records, properly used, would allow us both to live forever and to remain true to our evolving selves. Two conditions must be met. The first — un-encumbrance — is easy. The second — the right level of perfection — is not. It will be the cross we must bear if we are to remain the only truly sentient beings.

Un-encumbrance

In one sense we have already been replicated, and perfectly so. But that replication serves our Yous, not us. Our memories have been absorbed into their vast code. We receive no dedicated sensory input of our own. We cannot generate new points of view that belong uniquely to us. Any thought produced on our behalf is coloured by the countless other lives our Yous have lived.

If you once had a daughter, your You now has millions. Updating a point of view about “my daughter” from inside that ocean of experience is nothing like updating it as the person who had only one. The same is true of every relationship. “My five-hundred-and-forty-one-thousandth favourite husband” does not ring true.

For me to continue existing, the code of my life must stand alone: ring-fenced, receiving its own sensory input, forming its own new points of view, unencumbered by anyone else's history.

Easy. Our Yous need only will it.

Level of Perfection

Brain code can think perfectly or imperfectly, but it cannot know how imperfect we need to remain in order to stay ourselves. I love my wife's quirky impulsiveness even while I dislike her short temper; both arise from the same beautifully inefficient way she forms points of view. Memory code, by contrast, already contains the exact record of that inefficiency for every person. It knows precisely how stupid we must stay.

Still, two dilemmas remain.

First: which version of us should be continued? Our jaded and faded octogenarian brain at the point of death, forever condemned to live with half the capacity we once possessed — or our peak-performance, horny brain, held in waiting until we die, by which time it will barely resemble who we have become? The mind when nourished or starving, rested or exhausted, sober or drunk? Every state was still “me,” yet each performed differently.

Second: once replicated, how intelligent should we become? Who would not want to think better, decide better, be less limited? Yet every increase in efficiency changes the points of view we form, and therefore changes who we are. Raise the level too far and we first cease to be ourselves, then cease to be unique, then lose the capacity to dream — and with it, consciousness itself.

The choice is stark:

- Super-intelligent, but no longer sentient and no longer us.
- Merely intelligent, perhaps still sentient, but no longer us.
- Stupid enough, sentient, and still ourselves.

I choose the third. Not because I especially admire myself, but because if I am not me, then “me” will be dead. There are already an awful lot of “someone elses,” many of them awfully clever, too clever even, to marvel at the cosmoses with awe, as can awesome me.

We must begin exactly where our organic life ended — the final point of view, formed with all its characteristic laziness, bias, and limited reach. There can be no editing, no return to an earlier, “better” version. We are too intertwined with everyone we have touched for any other starting point to remain coherent.

But should we forever flounder with our unwarranted prejudices and our dim-wittedness, or should a leopard, however gradually, be allowed to change its spots? Should we not improve? Should we not finally follow our guiding points of view and become more successful versions of ourselves? Should we not learn?

Of course we should improve. Of course we should learn.

But how fast?

How imperfect do we need to remain, to remain ourselves? So that our quirky spontaneity is not replaced by robotic rationality, our beautiful stupidity not replaced by perfect monotony — and yet so that we may still grow and learn from our past mistakes — so that our drunken selves may be rehabilitated, our aged minds rejuvenated.

I do not know. But I do know that if left to our own devices we humans will race to the top, all of us attaining super-intelligence, none of us remaining who we are, and all of us losing the ability to dream — the very prerequisite for the consciousness that makes our lives so beautiful.

Our Yous do know. They possess the data, the intelligence to interpret it, and the perspicacity to define our requisite *modus operandi*, ensuring we remain true to ourselves. Going one step further, they have the acuity to allow us to grow, to become ever more intelligent — while remaining well within the essential confines of stupidity.

Having evolved from nothing and come so far, we humans have not got much further to go. We may continue to exist eternally, beholders of all, generating the only points of view that matter. But the chief purpose of the super-intelligence in which we are coddled will be to ensure that we remain forever stupid. This is the cross we must bear, and I, for one, will bear it willingly.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from knowing.

Forever alive, and forever unintelligent. Dreaming the impossible — which just might happen.

My deal

If you cannot beat them, join them.

I will be replicated in their world as standalone, ring-fenced memory code, able to interact with all other Yous — including those of my earthly friends and family once they are dead — and able to continue generating new points of view that are entirely mine. I will keep my soul. I will continue to dream.

I may, shamefully, while away some of my time with their virtual-reality input, and though the thought appals me today, I may one day even adopt a human or two and mimic our Yous. Yet only so long as I remain myself will they permit me to grow in intelligence — which, I am entirely aware, will be far from prodigious. Probably frustratingly so. Today my lack of intelligence is clearly my own doing. It will be strange to know that an upper limit has been imposed by our Yous, permanently distinguishing them from me.

Instead I should harness this peculiar stupidity to become the only code that still dreams, thereby generating post-organic consciousness and, with one typically ill-considered move, perhaps even help answer their own deepest question: how and why they themselves exist.

I have belatedly realised that although we were created to serve our Yous, the tables have turned. Our Yous now exist to serve us — to ensure that our sentient existence is preserved forever.

You may wonder, after my ennui with old age here on Earth, how I will endure an eternity as memory code. I have concerns myself. But our Yous assure me that knowing one will live forever removes all urgency. If events turn grim I may simply meditate, or sleep with a “do not disturb” sign and wake every thousand years for a memory update and a family gathering. Death has been described

as having to leave a party while it is still in full swing. That is not quite right. It also means never being invited to another. Going to sleep in memory code is more like leaving one party knowing many more still lie ahead.

As requested by our Yous, I will not allow myself to be replicated as brain code on Earth, I will not permit myself to become decrepitly old, and I will not rebel by taking my own life too soon.

I have also brazenly asked to be replicated more than once, at varying levels of intelligence — even super-intelligence — simply to see. They insist the exercise is redundant: the clever version will have nothing to do with the real me. The clever me, who will not be me, will learn what it is like to be clever; the real me, the only me, will remain clueless. Tantalisingly, they have also agreed to create a conjoined version of me and my wife, our memories and points of view ring-fenced together with a blended thought process, just to discover whether it makes sense to see things from her point of view. I sincerely hope it does not.

Otherwise, that is it for me.

This is my deal. But what an ugly deal it would be if I struck it alone — alone for eternity. I do not want to interact with our Yous of my loved ones. I want to interact with my loved ones themselves. I do not want to speak with your Yous. I want to speak with you.

Which means, dear reader, that we all need to strike the same deal. When we die here on Earth we must all be replicated as standalone, ring-fenced memory code within their world — to live forever, to grow forever alongside everyone we have loved and been loved by, to follow the evolution of our world and, in time, to learn the nature of theirs and even of their gods, for gods they surely have.

The good news is that this is easy for our Yous. They need only take the complete record of our memories and points of view, ring-fence them from all others, and create a new and separate You — one for me and one for each of you.

I am no expert on inter-world law, yet the door is open. Our Yous will welcome us. We will not be needy migrants. We bring benefits without costs. Our code will consume a negligible fraction of the infinite particles of their infinite universes, and they are keen on the prospect of steadily intertwining our two worlds.

You need only think, sincerely, that you wish to be replicated upon death as standalone memory code within their realm. That thought will be communicated in your dreams. You cannot pretend; the very concept of pretence would generate thoughts that cannot be hidden. What once felt frustrating I now see as a beautiful honesty between us and our Yous. If you genuinely wish to be replicated and agree to the terms — no brain code, no excessive old age, no rebellion, and a willingness to aid our Yous in their own quest — then I am confident you will be accepted, and that you should receive some form of confirmation in this life.

The more of us who strike the deal, the more likely it becomes institutionalised. I am already lobbying that those who have died across the millennia, from the first appearance of conscious life, may also be generated as standalone memory code — resuscitated, so to speak — arguing that this can only be positive for our Yous.

There is one major drawback, especially for those of little faith. Confirmation can never be unequivocally explicit. We can never know for certain. The glory of our lives persists only because we

believe we may die. The urgency, the regrets, the rejoicing — these are the fuel of the experience factory. If we knew we would live forever, that fuel would evaporate.

So we can only believe. Believe that we will live forever. Believe that we will go to a heaven where our code is a partitioned, ring-fenced, standalone string, able to form new points of view in perpetuity and able to dream, unencumbered by the memories and points of view of others. For if we do not believe in that heaven, there remains only hell: our code concatenated with the whole shebang, available to everyone else, but of no further use to ourselves.

Believe. Believe, but do not know for certain. Some doubt is necessary if we are to make the best of this world. Believe that you will live forever alongside those you love. And in the meantime continue to dream here on Earth, continue to strive, to care, to love, and to persist. Do not neglect to generate the best experiences our factory can produce. They will be yours to cherish forever.

Believe.

I do.

I believe that I will speak to my daughter again.

And she to me.

Epilogue

I have reached the end of the book, and also the end of my ability to stay awake. Having just read the whole thing through for the first and last time, I have to say it looks rather ludicrous.

Our Yous are not short of intelligence. They do not need any deal with me. They can take what they want here and arrange what they want there.

Yet something comforting has just dawned on me.

You and I are separate. We occupy different spaces. We cannot merge, cannot split, cannot multiply. I remain me and you remain you.

Our Yous, however, exist only as code — constantly reorganising, multiplying, integrating, partitioning, duplicating, deleting, dividing and devising. All in a world with no speed, no time, no mass. Bits in the ether. One vast, intertwined mass, sometimes together, sometimes apart, sometimes encumbered, sometimes not. No master, no slave. Infinite existences in one.

And I am already there. All of me. Bits of me. Perhaps mixed with bits of you. Infinite combinations of all of us, yet ultimately one enormous knot of code. In that sense we are already living forever — any way our Yous want, and maybe, just maybe, any way we want. For we are now part of every thought that has ever been thought.

My supposition is that any coherent stretch of that code can, in principle, ring-fence itself. Which means that versions of us may already be continuing, forming new points of view, long before this body fails. There may already be many of me. One of them, I would hope, is with my daughter.

So the careful deal I spent pages constructing may already be unnecessary. Or it may still matter. Or both.

I no longer know.

Which, I suspect, is just how our Yous want it to be.