

# Chapter 1

## *To Begin?*

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are peculiar things. Everybody has them, but very rarely does anyone want to talk about them. I am not going to pretend that I have no assumptions coming into this writing. This book contains many assumptions, some easily noticeable, some not so easily found (and probably some that I don't even know about). Without assumptions it is impossible to think or act. We must assume that we live in a real world, one in which it matters what I do or say. My actions have consequences. If I step off of a high building, I will probably plummet to the ground and die. If I sit in a chair, I assume it will hold me. These are assumptions based on experiences. We experience things one way and come to believe that they happen that way most of the time. We intuitively and experientially "know" many such things. Without a shared set of assumptions, I could not communicate with you right now. We both assume that words can be and often are meaningful, that it is worth a person's time to read and write books (at least sometimes), and that books should start at the beginning, continue to the middle, and finish at the end. Well, here is the beginning. I assume you're still reading.

The problem with assumptions is that they are often wrong. We make assumptions from such small amounts of information that our assumptions become distorted, over-general, or just plain false. For example, I have never sat on a chair that has broken beneath my weight, so I might assume that all chairs must be able to hold people up. This is not true. Just because I have never broken a chair with my weight does not mean that it will never happen, or has never

happened to someone else. An assumption or statement about chairs that might be a little more correct (and perhaps less general) would be “most chairs hold me up.” But even this might be wrong because I have not sat in most of the chairs in the world.

We should ask other people for their experiences so that we can form more of a basis for what we believe. If we get more people sharing experiences and ideas, hopefully we will get better answers to our questions. This book is about asking questions, searching for answers, and finding the truth as a *community*. While I sit at my computer writing this sentence, it should occur to you that I write from the standpoint of a community (no, not just a community of one). Everyone that has poured their lives into me up to this point in time can be said to be writing with me. While I must ultimately take responsibility for what is said (and consequently for what is said poorly or wrongly), still these other people have furnished me with many words to say, thoughts to think, tools to analyze, experiences to draw on, and lives to explore.

Let’s get back to our chair dilemma. Can we make a theory that will cover this experience and many similar experiences that people have all over the world? We could say that when I push down on a chair with my massive weight of 142 pounds, it must be able to push back with the same force, or it will cease to hold me up. Now we have a broader theory (which resembles one of Newton’s laws) and it will help me to make better assumptions about sitting in chairs. I arrived at this assumption by exploring my own experiences and the experiences and ideas of others.

We could go further and figure out each chair’s physical makeup by testing the density of the wood, plastic, or metal, and the molecular and chemical bonds, but do I really want to do this every time I sit down? And I could figure in Einstein’s equations and predictions, and describe the chair’s warping of space-time in a quantum field, in relation to myself, but that’s a lot to

figure out just to sit down in some old chair (besides the fact that I have no idea how I would figure all that stuff out)! By the time I figured even a tiny bit of it out, the chair would have changed, and I would have to start all over again. Figure in Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (which tells us that we can't know everything and that we can't tell the future), and what we have is a big mess: a problem that cannot be solved. So we must trust. We must have a reasonable faith in what we see and discover, and while we should continue to learn more about it, we should realize that there must come a time when we step back and realize that in order for the chair to hold me up, I must first sit in it.

In this book I have sought to do the same thing (though the job is far from perfect). I can't know everything, but I have sought to size up each chair, learn more about it, then sit in it. What I mean is that I want to discover with you who and what we are (as thinking people in an enormous physical universe), why we exist, what the world is all about, and who or what is behind all of this. We certainly aren't going to find everything, but I assume we can find something. Hopefully I have assumed only what is reasonable to assume. I guess we'll see as we go. This is no time for despair (it's only the beginning of the book). Are you willing to bear with me through this process of discovery? I assume this chair will hold up under both of us.

### **How can we start to think?**

One of my first assumptions is that I can think (and you can think) and we can find. And if we can find, I want to know why we are able to find, what is out there to be found, and where did this insatiable thirst for knowing come from? Let's back up a little. If assumptions require thought, how do we think in the first place (what is the origin of thought)? Thought often seems to be highly symbolic. A symbol is a representation of something else. We commonly think in

terms of what we see, hear, taste, touch, or smell. But humans are also capable of abstract thought (if not, you wouldn't be able understand the sentence "But humans are also capable of abstract thought," and I wouldn't have been able to create the sentence in the first place). Where do abstract thoughts come from? Our experiences? Our parents? The mind itself?

Often, illustrations from the sensory world (the world that can be seen, heard, tasted, touched, or smelled) help us to construct non-sensory worlds inside our minds that we can then pass on to other people who will hopefully understand and appreciate our illustrations, and transform their own thought worlds in turn. These new thought worlds will be created in the light of the knowledge gained (unless, of course, there is no knowledge gained, in which case time has been wasted). Because humans think in terms of symbols, pictures, or stories, often illustrations bring light and clarity to ideas that are deep in the shadow of our minds.

Unfortunately, when we think abstractly (out-of-the-box, non-concretely, above and beyond our senses and what they tell us) we tend to lose sight of what it is that we are thinking about. In short, abstract thoughts tend to wander. But we will explore this weakness later. For now, let's just think about the beginning and origin of thoughts.

One of our first orders of business in understanding our world seems to be to discover how we can even start to think in the first place. This will hopefully give us a good place to start (it is the beginning, right?). We will use illustrations along the way to light our path, though we must remember that no illustrations are perfect. Illustrations can only point to deeper meaning, and cannot completely or perfectly express all that is to be found in the ideas being illustrated (if they did, they wouldn't be illustrations, they would be the original abstract ideas!). First, try to understand the illustration by itself, without the abstract ideas behind it. Just accept it for what it

is and go on. Then, after you get it, try to discover what it is that is being illustrated. Seek meaning where the picture was. Ready? Here we go.

Imagine yourself in a violent action, such as throwing a wine glass. Fun, isn't it? Can you hear the shattering of the glass as it hits some other object? What if it never hit anything, or even got close to anything, but simply continued going in the same direction forever? What would that sound like—nothing, right? If it continued on forever, it would never smash into anything, never break apart into a thousand pieces, and never make any noise. Sounds pretty boring.

What if I ran a race with no finish line? Could I ever win the race? Even if everyone else was behind me, and I was leading the pack, would that mean that I was winning? Without a goal there is no way to judge who is winning, or even who is in the race. So what's the use in running?

How do you know that you are done with something? Usually something happens. A glass shatters, a finish line is reached, a goal, an event, or a time is reached that tells us that something has been accomplished, completed. Something is over, and something else has begun. In our world we are accustomed to thinking in this way. Things have beginnings, and they have endings. Thought is purposeful like a race. It has a destination and makes its own kind of noise like a shattered wine glass. So how does it get to the point of beginning? Where did the wine glass come from and who threw it? If thought is an effect, what is ultimately the cause? Can we say that an unthinking universe can give rise to thinking beings? Can thought arise from non-thought? Where did it all start, and how have our thoughts reached the point that they are at now?

Our lives as humans follow the pattern of beginnings and endings. People are born, they live, and then they die. Their physical bodies come from many unrelated molecules, atoms and even smaller particles. These particles have been in existence since the beginning of time. The parts that make up our physical bodies have been around since the beginning of the universe. And when we die, we will eventually become dust again, no matter how well we are embalmed. Those parts that were once “us” will become something else—a speck of dirt, coal, or plant matter, or maybe eventually a puppy dog or a water particle in a rainbow.

We should be used to this idea. We see things die all the time. When we get dry skin, our dead skin cells fleck off and into the earth, to be taken apart and used for something else. We do not have the same physical body we had when we began our life. We have different cells, different memories, and even different capabilities.

So why are we still the same person? And what is the process that brings us to our beginning as persons? DNA is a large part of the blueprint that brings about the formation of our physical parts. We are each encoded with a special plan to become physically what we are. And our parents are responsible for the DNA we have. But their parents were responsible for their DNA, etc., until we come to the question of where this organizing factor came from in the first place. Things do not organize themselves into complex workable systems. The fact that you can read this and think about it is proof that you are an extraordinarily complex system that works (both physically and intellectually).

A complex system, like you or I, contains a huge number of things that must be working properly and at the right time in the right way in order for anything useful to happen. Living things have been compared to a watch with a large assortment of interconnected doo-dads inside. Everything needs to be working in order for the watch to be useful for its intended purpose. If a

woman who had never seen a watch before were to find a watch on the ground, and pick it up and examine it, she would probably not say, “This watch must have been formed by chance!” Instead, she might reasonably ask herself, “Who made this watch, and for what purpose was it designed?”

The creation of each human body (as well as all other forms of life on earth) is a beautiful and incredibly complex job. There is so much that can go wrong, so many interrelated systems within each one of us, that we should not dream of calling it chance.

The DNA which “builds” us is too ingenious to have come from something like “blind” chance. It seems to come from a mind, not from the blind.

And what of our minds? Our minds give us the ability to comprehend and to act. How have we come to inherit our minds? Are we blank slates to be written on by the chalk of life? Our thoughts are not merely a bunch of experiences kept in our minds. There is a filing system we are all born with. The ability to analyze, reason, and sort things in our minds seems to come standard in humans. Otherwise, we would have no way to process the information or experiences we came across in daily life. Things don’t just organize themselves in your head. Instead, you were born with a built-in organizer, which is then able to process and store new and old experiences. I am not saying that you were born with thoughts (although children in the womb do indeed respond to stimuli in complex ways, something which might be classified as requiring a type of thought). But you were born with the natural ability to develop thoughts. And our minds grow as we grow. Our minds develop as working systems.

What is the mind? Is it merely physical? Is it a combination of chemical reactions, electricity, and marvelously designed cellular infrastructure (i.e. brain matter)? Can the brain be equated with the mind? To equate the two (the brain and the mind) would require a person to

assume that: 1. nothing exists outside of the physical universe; 2. humans do not outlive their bodies; and 3. humans are completely products of their environments. It does not seem reasonable to merely assume that nothing exists outside of the physical universe. A lot of people believe in supernatural beings and phenomena. True, all of those people could be wrong, but do I know for sure that they are wrong? I think it is safer to assume that there may or may not be things or people that exist outside the realm of the physical universe. We should be open to exploring what other people think about our world. We can investigate this issue later on, but for now what about the question of people outliving their physical bodies?

In order for a person to outlive their physical body, it seems that for that person to retain their identity as the same person, he/she must retain some form of mind. What good is outliving your body if you don't know it? So if people can outlive their physical bodies (a doctrine which most people in the world would subscribe to in some way), then the mind must be in some way distinct from the physical brain, which would mean that the mind exists outside of the physical universe and yet interacts with it (through the physical organ of the brain). But we do not yet know that anything exists outside of the universe, so let's move on.

As for the last question "Are humans merely products of their environments?": the answer seems clear (though some would argue differently). Either humans are free in the sense that they are not merely bound to do what nature demands because of the physical makeup of the brain, or humans are not truly free in anything they do, think, or feel. Either we are thinking beings capable of meaningful abstract reasoning, self-conscious ethical formulation, and creative production and expression or we are mindless automatons who are mere links in a chain of random events that is ultimately meaningless and cold. If our minds are not free to make choices, to do as they please (within certain bounds), then the mind does not truly exist. If this

paragraph is to make any sense to you or me, our minds must exist and be distinct in some way from our physical bodies, because if our minds are the same thing as our brains (and remember, our brains are physical and supposedly obey the laws of nature, which allows no true freedom) then this paragraph is a mere product of nature, the effect of natural forces interacting in our brains which means that this paragraph has no true meaning outside of physical causes. If I were to go back in time to the point when I began to write this paragraph, I could not do anything but write the exact same words in the same order. And you would have to respond to this paragraph in the way that you are responding to it right now. There is no choice because there is no mind. So, if we are to continue in our quest, we must acknowledge that the mind does exist, that it is distinct from, yet interacts with, the brain, and thus that it may or may not outlive the body, and that it seems to somehow exist outside of the physical universe (whether or not we acknowledge that other things can exist outside of the physical universe). Our next question? “Where has the mind come from and what is its purpose?”

### **What are we?**

Our complex bodies and minds are constantly changing, adding to the difficulty of making all things work together correctly. Yet they remain *our* bodies and *our* minds. An old proverb has said that a person cannot step into the same river twice. What does this mean? The river continues to flow and when we take our next step into it, it has changed, and moved on. All of nature is like this (except for perhaps the laws that govern nature, which we will explore later). All that we see around us and experience in the physical world is changing and continues to move. We are also changing and continue to move in our world-lines and thought-lines (which trace where our bodies have been in time and space and where our thoughts have been in

our minds). So in the end, the same person cannot step into the same river twice, because both she and the river have changed in some sense. However, while you may not be the same person in body or thought from moment to moment, you are still you. And when you die, where will you be? It seems that either you will continue to be you, or you will somehow cease to exist. If everything physical and mental around us and in us changes continually, yet we remain ourselves, is this not a small indicator that we are something beyond merely body and mind?

But though we may be beyond merely body and mind, we are also body and mind. Our bodies are in some way us, as are our minds. If we are to exist, it seems we are to exist with bodies and minds. Though we are not identical with our bodies and minds, we are identified with our bodies and minds. And our thoughts make up a large part of that identification. Through thought we identify with our bodies and our selves. Through physicality our bodies identify with our minds and with who we are. And through our selves we identify with our bodies, minds, and beyond. Thus, it seems we might conjecture that we are body, soul, and spirit/identities.

Are all living things the same as we are? A tree is still a tree after it grows an inch or a yard. However, a tree is not immortal. Why? There seems to be fundamental differences between plants and us. Does the tree recognize itself? Does it hold in its heart a concept not only of what it is, but that it is? No, in fact it holds no concepts at all. In the same way, all other forms of life seem to be fundamentally different from human beings. An animal may see its own reflection in a mirror and recognize itself, but can it sit on a porch and watch the sun fall below the horizon and wonder at its beauty, and then turn its thoughts upon itself and realize its own existence in this world, and question within itself what the meaning of life is and to what purpose it exists? What a great wonder we are! If I continue to be myself through changes to body and

mind, and if I can truly begin to think of my existence as me, does it not stand to reason that I will continue after my body has been laid to rest? It will continue to change, but I will remain. And what about my mind? If it is merely physical, it will change and disintegrate or cease to be as my body dies. But if it is beyond physical, it will remain identified with me (for how can a mind be identified without a person to whom it belongs, and how can a person identify itself without a mind?). But it seems more reasonable to believe that all three (body, mind, and self) will at some point continue to identify with one another as a whole human being (and indeed, there are compelling reasons besides those yet given that such a resurrection is more than possible).

Now that we have looked at what our minds are, where they came from, where they are, and where they are going, let's take a look at what it means to exist. We can assume now that our minds exist, but what is existence? It appears that we have never existed before in this world. That which makes up our physical bodies has existed from the beginning, and appears to have been made by a gifted mind, but we have never been. It looks like who *we* are is made of something different. We are not just physical, we are not just mental. We are us. But where did we come from?

Let's develop a working hypothesis so that we can get on with our search. Many people believe that an intelligent nonphysical source created our physical bodies (and perhaps even the entire physical universe) at some time in the past and, conceivably, this source or mind continues to uphold us and sustain our universe's information, order, and stability. This outside source (if it exists) must exist above space and time, and would be a point of reference that is a stable anchor. It must inject into us what we are. It must give us the ability to start thinking and feeling, experiencing and interacting with our world. And it must create out of nothing. In this

## I Found You

theory, our bodies and thoughts are seeds that originated from greater thoughts. Truly we are seeds of a greater existence.