
Preface

Every reader has a right to know a given author's background, especially in a text that seeks to examine the source and purpose of our existence. These subjects have been the fodder of religious leaders, writers, poets, and philosophers for millennia, but we usually know precious little about who wrote the accounts. In some cases, the luminaries' histories were lost to time's vagaries. In others, we receive only what a particular author or vested sect wished to be known. My various credentials and shortcomings will be revealed as this text unfolds, with the essential point being that I consider myself an ordinary person. Some of my past is shameful, but you have every right to consider my uncensored history when contemplating the efficacy of what will be presented here. We owe one another complete honesty when considering anything profound.

I am a child of the Upper Valley, a wonderfully scenic and bucolic part of the tributaries and headwaters of the Connecticut River watershed that separates New Hampshire from Vermont. My father descends from a semi-aristocratic lineage that includes maternal (Holton: "Semper Fidelis") and paternal (Elder: "Virtute Duce") family crests. My mother is the daughter of Italian immigrants and was raised in a strict Catholic household. I grew up in relative poverty and endured an often traumatic childhood, thanks mostly to my father's inveterate alcoholism. My education at the University of New Hampshire includes a B.S. in pre-Paramedical Studies and an M.S. in Nonfiction Writing. I also earned a Ph.D. in Speech Communication from Penn State, with my dissertation being produced as a book by Nova Science Publishers (Elder, 1999). I currently have some face/place episodic memory problems and am mildly dyslexic, with scores of various intellectual indices bouncing between average and genius levels. My health is failing, with heart trouble, diabetes, high blood pressure, a degenerative nerve disease, advanced osteoarthritis, and other maladies making me disabled.

In terms of work and life experiences, I have been a bouncer, custodian, writer, petty criminal, weightlifting coach, college teacher, craftsman, drug addict, merchant, business manager, and high-level scholar. Being loud and contentious by nature, coaching was the only job I ever truly loved and was suited for, but failing health took that away. I have worn many guises since then, but found none that truly fits. I'm a trained academic who detests the academy, along with all the pretentious affectations that are part and parcel of that life-style. I am far too coarse, blunt, and confrontational to be kindred of the educated elite. Similarly, while a deeply religious man, I do not subscribe to any major religion. Blind belief is not part of my nature, although I accept that many things exist that I do not understand. Some consider

me bright, but I am constantly dismayed by how little I know. In short, the primary impetus recommending me for the task at hand is a profound concern about our species' fate and a firm belief that the person reading these words has the inherent power to shape the future. Yes, that means you.

Why and how did you become motivated to read a text that examines the nature of existence—that asks the questions: How did we come to be? Why are we here? Is there an underlying logicoemotional foundation that runs throughout existence and unites all things? Perhaps it is a universal need that draws us together—an innate instinct. It seems that searching for our *raison d'être* has been a driving force since humanity first became aware, and some of us spend years on the quest. That shared urge to explore and learn is what links us to our ancestors and progeny, and it is my hope that you will extend and broaden whatever insights are offered here. Without a doubt, your actions, however humble or grand, are existential echoes that will help define the future of our kind for better or worse.

What follows is one man's quest to find a spiritual basis for our shared reality—something that can unite us in our love for one another and deep reverence for the energetic, physical, and metaphysical aspects of existence. Though my quest began as a rather prototypical search for "God," it ultimately evolved into an understanding that we are all one with the Divine—just as are all components of being. Our gift is that we have developed the capacity to comprehend the nature of the universe, the sheer harmony and beauty of how existence operates and our various roles within it.

I have looked in many directions for insights and answers, including ancient accounts by Homer, Thales, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle, as well as studies in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. I have also surveyed numerous sciences in formal settings and am no stranger to empiricism and rationalism. These paths are united in seeking to provide a greater understanding of the foundations of existence, be they moral, religious, or scientific. It has been my experience that the staid wisdom of the ancients is often enhanced by applying contemporary rationalized thought, including findings in theoretical physics, cognitive neuroscience, and psychology.

Regrettably, some authors claim that there is no need to look beyond their compendia for answers, for their works are supposedly the *Alpha* and *Omega* of all that is knowable and needed. Like many of you, I am dismayed by those mystics and clergymen who offer to show us "the way" for the sake of a few dollars and/or membership in their growing family of believers. Many of these ardent sophists are little more than vulgar entertainers who are far more eager to gain profit than an understanding of prophecy. Some are fundamentally dishonest, while others cannot see beyond their entrenched dogma, sincerely felt though it might be. They thus do little to help those of us looking for insights into some of the most important questions that can be asked, such as, "Why are we here?"

Alas, all too many proffer that the answers can *only* be found in sacred passages from text X, which is replete with the dusty words of long-dead prophets and even God "himself." We are cautioned that looking for truth anywhere else is the stuff of doubt and heresy. Yet, asking a reader to close his or her heart to possibilities is antithetical to learning and evolving. This is where rigid dogma, banal ego, and vested power seek to usurp free will, binding our common welfare with a fixed way of living and thinking, regardless of the varied and dynamic challenges that life presents. Ultimately, this is where slavery to the "word" takes precedence over what might be required for our survival, the ascendance of the ideal over the practical and necessary.

Many of us feel an urgent need to look in new directions, for experience, learning, and our current situations have revealed much. We are opening our minds to new discoveries and possibilities, and we see that much of what we once assumed as truth was naïve and misguided. The world is indeed round and slavery need not be the divinely ordained way of things. We are also beginning to understand that we have much more to learn about ourselves and the universe in which we dwell. Some might regard this opening of our minds and hearts as the first small steps toward gaining wisdom. Our species is growing, much like a child whose entire existence revolves around understanding everything from the mundane to the sublime.

This quest for knowledge is a primal urge, and perhaps we should consider its purpose. The essence of our being might involve many of the metaphysical processes we use when seeking to understand the foundations of existence. In effect, our contemplations might help give rise to what we are and what we can become—beings whose thoughts are communicated and enmeshed through our expressions, creations and behaviors. Moreover, perhaps the thoughts we use to find and share intended meaning help sustain some of the processes that are integral to the universe's ongoing dynamics and evolution. In essence, I postulate that there is an underlying order or *logos* to all things that is one with thought, matter, and energy—an integrated union wherein the metaphysical and physical/energetic are forever conjoined. We are products of those ongoing processes, and are driven by nature to understand their workings and our essential oneness with them.

You might or might not find reasons to subscribe to these views as this text continues, but there is little doubt that you will judge the efficacy of all that is presented here by using the perceptual and intellectual tools we all share. This takes us to a particular area of perception that is the focus of this text, and it is an important and fascinating means by which insights have been gleaned since humanity first became aware. This intriguing form of behavior has captivated the interest of both ancient and modern thinkers alike, that being the wisdom and foresight our dreams can reveal, be the dreams ordinary or sublime.

All people dream, and some of us recall our dreams in vivid detail. Over the ages, there have been numerous philosophical and scientific efforts directed toward examining and understanding dreams, and many have argued about their causes, purposes, and meanings. As we shall see, our earliest written records indicate that dreams have been regarded as messages from the Divine, mantic harbingers of things to come, blessed insights, and even the stuff of delusions. This text is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of the numerous ideas concerning dreams that have been broached, although I have included an overview of some of the major developments in dream theory and research in Parts 2 and 3 of this book. This review stretches back over 6,000 years, and becomes somewhat technical when addressing modern dream concepts. However, the information presented will help give meaning and insights into the dreams that are offered in Part 1 of this text, and you might wish to jump to the history and science sections *before* reading the dreams upon which I reflect.

As will be shown, dreams appear to involve aspects of what modern researchers call our "waking default system," a pattern of brain activity that becomes manifest when we are not focused on particular passive or active tasks (see Domhoff, 2011). This is a time when our minds tend to wander, creating the environment for daydreams, speculations, and dreams during sleep. In essence, the default system is indicative of our mind's incessant need to process information as we craft meaning and seek relevance, and research into its characteristics is intense and ongoing (for example: Christoff, 2012; Doucet et al., 2011;

Smallwood et al., 2012). Dreams might thus be the best window we have into our primal, meaning-making processes—and might also be a portal into examining metaphysical phenomena that are fundamental aspects of existence.

This volume reflects on my own dreams, which probably share many elements with dreams you have experienced. I shall bring to bear the knowledge of the ancients and findings from contemporary science as avenues of exploring what our dreams can tell us about the nature of the universe and our roles within it. Some of this will be done in the historical overviews, although ample explanations and information will be provided within the narrative sections. So let us cut to the chase and investigate the domains of our dreams.