

# Introduction

Imagine yourself searching for answers to life's big questions. The questions are so many, so diverse, and so deep that you feel apprehensive, confused, and lost. Where do you begin? How do you explore? What tools do you use? The task is momentous indeed. You feel like standing at the foot of the highest mountain, looking up to scale the summit – alone, without proper gear, adequate training, or prior experience. You are daunted. You are terrified. You are ready to give up.

This book will help and guide you in undertaking this arduous journey. The reader must understand how the book is structured and how our journey will unfold to make the most out of it. As we go through the book, we will tackle multiple topics independently. We will break down each subject matter for the issues relevant to our discourse. We will carefully examine well-established facts and the latest research on the topic. In addition, we will critically analyze each issue using rational arguments and balanced reasoning. The meticulous effort will establish conclusive outcomes and not-so-conclusive ones for each subject. Finally, at the end, we will tie all the pieces together to form a coherent, rational, and balanced picture.

Historically, human beings have used three fields of knowledge to understand the mystery of life – religion, philosophy, and science. All three disciplines provide weighty arguments on the subject. Our examination will, therefore, focus on the problem from all three perspectives. A meaningful and holistic picture of life can only be formed if we incorporate knowledge from all critical viewpoints. Not doing so will produce an incomplete, biased, and faulty analysis.

We will begin our journey from a purely scientific perspective. The first five chapters of the book are devoted to scientific analysis. Science is the latest discipline extensively used in the last few centuries to discover everything related to and around us. It has helped us explain how things work – though it doesn't tell us why they exist. Any scientific work requires us to understand the context, gather information, analyze data, make hypotheses, and prove or disprove them. We will adopt this principle to address issues from the scientific perspective.

To unravel the mystery of the world around us, we need to understand its core characteristics – a task not much different than collecting and analyzing data. We need to dig deeper into the fabric of the universe to comprehend the framework upon which it exists. The book’s first chapter does that by refreshing our understanding of how the world and the universe work. We will look at the key characteristics that facilitate Earth hosting complex life. We will delve into the structure of our universe, the laws under which it runs, and the conditions needed for it to exist. Such observations, expressed in Chapter 1, will serve to identify the fundamental attributes of the universe – observations that will be key to our investigation.

Science and religion have been at loggerheads for centuries. Science has unraveled and discovered how the universe and everything within it functions. Barring some exceptions, religion does not get into such details and, therefore, does not contradict science on how the world works. The area where religious beliefs primarily clash with the views of scientists is that of origin – how things began. Four key areas of origin are fundamental to understanding the big questions of life – the origins of the universe, life, biodiversity, and human beings. How did the universe begin? How did the first life come into being? What triggered biodiversity? Where did humans come from? Science and religion fundamentally clash in all the “Big Four” origin problems. The answers to the origin problems are pivotal and determine the path one takes to understand the meaning of life. Each origin problem must be examined objectively and thoroughly. The next four chapters of the book – Chapters 2 through 5 – are dedicated to the Big Four origin problems.

With the scientific analysis complete, we will change gears and examine key subjects from a philosophical perspective. The next three chapters – Chapters 6 through 8 – will explore three primary philosophical topics necessary to understanding the mysteries of life – God, the meaning of life, and life after death. We will examine the philosophy of God and the arguments in favor of and against the existence of God. We will look at the commonly recognized philosophies of life and whether it makes sense for human life to have meaning. Finally, we will explore the various philosophies of life after death and juxtapose our earlier findings about the natural world with the notion of an afterlife. Our journey through the philosophical section will provide us with strong clues regarding the three topics under study and equip us to bring closure to them toward the end of the book.

Having finished the philosophical perspective, we will step into the religious arena – in Chapters 9 through 12 – for our final area of analysis. Based on what had been

built up from the earlier scientific and philosophical analyses, we will explore the possibility of an authentic divine source for the explanation of the mysteries of life. We will develop rigorous and exhaustive criteria to evaluate the existence of a possible divine revelation. With the strict criteria in place, we will scrutinize all the major religious beliefs of the world in search of an authentic divine revelation. We will especially examine the three Abrahamic faiths – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – in detail. We will conclude our long exploration at the end of the religious section.

After our investigative phase is complete, we will move to the final chapter, where we will examine all the information we had gathered in the earlier chapters and tie it together in a coherent and rational narrative. From all the confusion and chaos at the beginning of our journey to the various clues and findings encountered throughout the book, we will weave a clear and comprehensive picture of life. Chapter 13 will provide a conclusive, holistic perspective of the meaning of our existence.

While its different subject matters are addressed in distinct chapters, the book is written as a narrative – with arguments and findings building as you go through them. To properly benefit from the book and gain the right perspective the author intends, it is best to read the book in the sequence it is written and presented. Jumping through sections, or even entire chapters, may result in missing key lines of reasoning. With that said, certain sections of the book – primarily those related to science – touch upon complex topics that some readers not grounded in science may find challenging. Every effort has been made to tone down such topics for the general audience. Nevertheless, some readers may still be tempted to skim through them.

This book is written with an open mind – without bias toward or against any subject. The gist of the work has been undertaken through observations from the natural world, state-of-the-art scientific research, objective historical accounts, and balanced reasoning of the rational mind – not through prejudiced and constricted views. The North Star of the journey has been to go after the facts of the unraveling knowledge wherever they may lead. As part of the quest, you will encounter findings on specific subjects that challenge you to dismiss trusted theories and ideologies – an undertaking that may not go well with some readers. It must be stressed that the intent of this work is not to denigrate any subject or ideology. Every piece of knowledge or belief may have some truth and deserves respect. However, the higher goal of this endeavor demands that we follow the facts and reasonings that make the most sense.

Lastly, this work was undertaken to provide a clear, unified, and balanced perspective on life's big questions – a perspective severely lacking from the world's discourse. If you truly want to benefit from this work, you must take time to read

through the many topics discussed in the book. Ponder over each argument, rationalize it, think deeply about it, and let it soak in. Whether or not people benefit from this work ultimately depends on how they approach it. If you scrutinize this work intending to track down flaws, you will most certainly find them – as you would in everything human. If you approach this work with prejudiced notions, you will fail to appreciate the reasoning of the arguments. But if you are sincerely looking for answers and approach this work with an unbiased, unprejudiced, and open mind, it is very likely that by the time you finish reading the book, you will have a much better understanding and appreciation of the subject. You will find the experience rewarding. You may even look at the world with a fresh perspective.