

The Boulder Is Mine

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on losing God and choosing to climb anyway

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“One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”

— Albert Camus

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Prologue

I sat in the pew, waiting silently for my turn.

I stepped to the altar. A cross, drawn with oil on my forehead.

My mom watched from the crowd. A woman deeply rooted in the faith, a future catechist watching her son take the step she would soon teach others to take. I felt mellow.

I was baptized as a baby. Raised by a Catholic mother, I was surrounded by faith. I was told to follow the Ten Commandments, to live like Jesus and love others. The answer to life was given to me before I could ask the question. Be a good human, love others, and trust in God's path to heaven. Back then, this made sense to me. It was all I knew.

Times change. As a pre-teen, you live a simple life. Wake up, eat, go to school, socialize, eat, and sleep again. A daily cycle. Then the teenage years start. They're different for everyone. For me, they opened my eyes to a bigger question. Through the situations and experiences I was put through, my faith in a higher power diminished. After losing my faith, I held onto one question: what is the meaning of life? I read about Sisyphus, a king condemned to push a boulder up a hill forever. The gods forced the boulder on him as punishment. I chose mine.

Telos

EVERY person eventually asks it, whether or not they say it out loud.

Does life have a purpose, or do we make one?

Purpose is either built in and discovered, or absent and chosen. Most people are handed an answer before they're ever able to ask the question. That's what religion did for me.

The idea that everything has a *telos*, a built-in end it's meant to reach, came from Aristotle, one of the most prominent Greek philosophers of the 4th century BC. An acorn's *telos* is to become an oak. For humans, Aristotle explained, the *telos* is a life of reason and virtue: flourishing.

Thomas Aquinas, a 13th-century Catholic theologian, took Aristotle's *telos* and made God the final end. This became the backbone of Catholic teaching on meaning. It was the system behind "live like Jesus" and "love others as God loves you." The purpose I was taught had over 2,000 years of philosophy behind it.

Faith is so attractive to humans because it answers everything: purpose, morality, death. The question is solved. You don't have to wonder why you were born. You're told exactly why and how to live. This made sense to me for a long time. But answers only work as long as you don't look too closely.

II

Christendom

A crucifix. One hung in every classroom. Morning and afternoon prayers.

Down every hall, a restroom filled with smoke.

When I first started at a Catholic school, I envisioned students in straight lines, learning with discipline and treating others with respect. That's what my mom taught me the faith should look like. "Treat others as God wants us to." "Love one another." "Spread the word of the Lord."

School felt like the opposite.

I hated using the restroom at school. Most times it was filled with upperclassmen crowding the walls with vapes in hand. Within the student body, I knew plenty of students who drank underage, did drugs, and engaged in fornication. Drama, rumors, and deception meant to bring others down spread through the school like a virus. I wasn't innocent either; I got caught up in the drama too.

People performed the faith: saying the prayers, wearing the cross. But some did it for attention, to gain approval from others. Søren Kierkegaard, a 19th-century Danish philosopher and devout Christian, saw this problem too. Everyone in Denmark was Christian, but few people lived like it. He called this "Christendom": Christianity as a culture, not a commitment. He thought this was

more dangerous than honest disbelief, because it let people feel faithful without changing anything. He saw it in 1850s Copenhagen. I saw it in many people I know in Hawaii. Kierkegaard's answer was to dive deeper into the faith. Mine was to question whether the faith itself was true.

Hypocrisy doesn't disprove the existence of God. Everyone sins; I sinned as a Catholic. The Church calls itself a hospital for sinners. That wasn't my problem. I was confused, lost. Almost no one around me acted like God was real. If belief in a higher power doesn't change how people live, is it truth or comfort?

I switched schools for 10th grade. The space from that environment gave me room to think. I started questioning not the people, but the religion itself. I stopped watching the people in the pews and started listening for God. I heard nothing.

III

The Absurd

THE silence. I wasn't the only one who heard it. In the 1880s, Nietzsche wrote, "God is dead." It wasn't a celebration. He meant belief had lost its power, and people hadn't realized what that would cost. He left a question behind: if God is gone, where does meaning come from?

Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher who lived around 300 BC, taught that where death is, we are not. Death is just the end of experience, nothing to fear. I stand by my belief that there is no heaven and no hell. Life truly ends at death.

I can't prove there's no afterlife. No one has. But I see no reason to believe in one. I go through my days believing this life is all there is.

Albert Camus, the French-Algerian writer of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, introduced "the Absurd": humans demand meaning; the universe stays silent. The clash is the Absurd. The universe isn't absurd, and neither are we. The collision between the two is.

The myth of Sisyphus is about the king of Corinth who cheated death and was condemned to roll a boulder uphill forever. Every time it nears the top, it rolls straight back down. Camus sees all of humanity in him: working and striving, knowing it all ends one day.

The question the myth poses isn't whether Sisyphus can escape, but how he faces it.

IV

Philosophical Suicide

FACING a silent universe, most people search for a way out. Camus names two exits: physical suicide and philosophical suicide. Philosophical suicide is escaping the Absurd by leaping into a belief that explains it away. Religion is the clearest example.

Philosophical suicide isn't a Catholic problem. Every religion offers a version of the leap. In Islam, life's purpose is to worship God, and judgment leads to paradise or hell. Hinduism teaches living by *dharma*; the soul is reborn until it reaches *moksha*, release from the cycle. Buddhism has no creator God, but rebirth continues until nirvana, the end of suffering. They offer different answers but the same structure: meaning is secured by something beyond this life, accepted on faith. Judaism and Buddhism put more weight on this life, and the closer a belief stays to the here and now, the closer it gets to Camus. Camus also criticized philosophers who leapt into abstract systems. The problem is escape, not religion. I focus on Catholicism because it was the faith I lived, the faith that surrounded me, not because it's worse than the rest.

Remember Kierkegaard? He faced the same doubt. His answer was that faith can't be reasoned into; you leap past reason. Camus responded that the leap is the escape. It trades honesty for comfort. Kierkegaard leapt. I won't.

Then there's the safe bet. Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century French mathematician, offered a wager: if God exists and you believe, you win everything. If God doesn't exist, you lose almost nothing. But belief chosen for safety isn't belief. It's insurance.

As a Catholic, I was taught there was forgiveness for anyone who repents, even a murderer. But growing up, what I heard was that anyone who doubted God, or believed in another god, would be sent to an eternity of torture in hell. To me, that doesn't sound like an all-loving God. Official Catholic teaching is softer: it calls hell "self-chosen separation" from God and says sincere seekers outside the Church can be saved. But why would any separation be eternal? Why no chance after death?

John Stuart Mill, a 19th-century English philosopher, refused to call a being "good" if its goodness contradicts what good means. If that refusal sent him to hell, he'd go. You can't worship a justice that doesn't look like justice. It's hard to worship a God who would separate anyone from Him forever. Is that really justice?

It isn't just hell. Look at what scripture says God did. In Deuteronomy 20:16-18, God commands Israel to leave nothing alive in the cities of the land promised to them, wiping out entire populations. In Genesis 22, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac; an angel stops him at the last moment. God tested loyalty with the life of a child. The flood in Noah's story wiped out almost all of humanity. In Exodus 12, every firstborn in Egypt is killed. Catholicism doesn't require reading these literally; it teaches that God is revealed gradually. But if it's God's word, why this portrait? If it's human writing, why trust it on heaven?

Plato's dialogue *Euthyphro* raises a dilemma: is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it's good? If the first, "good" is arbitrary. If the second, goodness doesn't need God. Either way, the commands above can't be called good just

because God gave them. They killed people and destroyed families and lives.

I looked for meaning in God. The religion isn't bad, but for me, it didn't hold up morally or logically. Accepting it anyway would be philosophical suicide. If the meaning of life isn't in heaven, it has to be faced here.

Everything Is Permitted

THE strongest case against me deserves a fair hearing. Fyodor Dostoevsky, a 19th-century Russian novelist and devout Christian, wrote *The Brothers Karamazov*. In it, Ivan wrestles with an idea: if there's no God and no immortality, then everything is permitted. If there's no God, why shouldn't everyone do whatever they want?

Morality doesn't need heaven as a reward or hell as a threat. People can choose to be good because they understand suffering, their own and others'. Good done to avoid hell is closer to obedience than to authentic goodness. As Camus later argued, revolt leads to solidarity.

At one point, I believed in nihilism: if nothing truly matters, why try at all? Camus's answer is that meaninglessness isn't a reason to quit. It's a reason to live more intensely. Without a reward waiting, every moment counts for itself.

Faith helps people. I've seen it in people I love. My mom finds real meaning in it. The Church gives belonging, structure, and hope. But comfort isn't the same as truth, and comfort can come from things that aren't true. I'd rather face reality than be comforted by something I don't believe. But rejecting God carries its own danger.

VI

The Trap of Secular Gods

REJECTING God doesn't mean you stop worshipping. People replace Him with other things: money, fame, status, power. These are secular gods, things many people worship without calling it religion. Some artists trade control of their music, their artistic integrity, and their values for money, fame, and status. People chase success and become slaves to it. Success itself becomes the summit. It's the same leap with a different god. The summit becomes the new heaven.

Nietzsche declared God dead, then warned what might come next: the Last Man, from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The Last Man wants only comfort and small pleasures: no risk, no striving, no greatness. That leaves two traps: settling for comfort (the Last Man) or worshipping success (a secular god).

I'm ambitious. I've been chasing money, early retirement, and a path to success since elementary school. So when does ambition become worship? If you believe reaching your peak will save you or make you complete, you've leapt too. The summit can't be your heaven either.

VII

The Climb

IF the summit can't be your heaven, what's left? Jean-Paul Sartre, a 20th-century French philosopher writing after World War II, coined the phrase “existence precedes essence”: you exist first, and no one hands you a purpose. Objects are designed for a purpose before they exist. A kitchen knife is designed to cut food. A bottle is designed to hold liquid. But humans? We weren't designed for anything. There's no designer, no blueprint. You can't avoid defining yourself. Catholicism says I was created to live like Jesus and love others. I still choose to love others, but not because it's a set purpose. It's a choice, not a factory setting. If you have to define yourself, what drives you to?

Friedrich Nietzsche, a 19th-century German philosopher, believed life's core drive is to grow, overcome, and expand. Not to dominate others, but to overcome yourself. That's the drive I've felt my whole life. Becoming the greatest version of myself is the purpose I chose.

Camus's absurd heroes live to the fullest without false hope. One of them, the Conqueror, pours everything into action. He acts knowing it won't last or save him. That's who I choose to be.

In third grade, I tried to sell newspapers for 25 cents. I tried going pro in Fortnite. I tried reselling, dropshipping, and building

apps and startups. I've failed at 95% of the ventures I've tried. I never stopped, and I still haven't. The climb isn't a theory. I've been doing it since I was a kid.

I climb because this is how I choose to live. I climb until my body reaches its physical limit. On a mountain taller than K2, more extreme than Annapurna, taller than Everest. A mountain with no summit. I don't climb for the top; not for power, fame, status, or money, the things people live for nowadays. The climb itself is my meaning.

But is climbing selfish? In *The Rebel*, Camus argues that revolt starts personal but leads to solidarity: "I rebel, therefore we exist." I was told to love others because I was made for it. Now I choose it. I choose to love those who love me. I don't believe in wasting time or emotion on those who try to bring me down. Jesus asked his followers to love even their enemies; I'm honest that my love has limits. But love that's chosen is stronger than love commanded by a set purpose.

VIII

Memento Mori

IF life ends at death, death should change how you live. *Memento mori* is Latin for “remember you will die.” Stoic philosophers used it, and so does Catholic tradition. On Ash Wednesday, the priest says, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” I remember my first Ash Wednesday Mass. I had a game earlier that day, and I received my ashes when I got to the church. They read the scriptures, and afterward we left. In the Catholic interpretation, you remember death so you can prepare for what comes after. To me, *memento mori* means remembering death because nothing comes after, so you don’t waste the life you’re given. I still believe you should remember death. It just holds a different meaning to me now.

Marcus Aurelius lived by this same reminder. He was a Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher in the 2nd century AD. He was the most powerful man in the world, yet he wrote private reminders that he could die at any moment. In *Meditations*, he used that awareness to act well now, not later. Power didn’t make him forget death. Death made him use power carefully.

Martin Heidegger, a 20th-century German philosopher, argued that most people avoid thinking about their own death, so they live on autopilot, doing what everyone else does because it seems safest.

Facing your own death makes your life authentic: your own, not borrowed.

No afterlife means no second chance. No next try. Every day is finite. That's why the climb is urgent. Death isn't the enemy of meaning. It's what makes the climb matter. If you had to live this exact life again, would you?

IX

Amor Fati

EVERY good and bad memory I've had. The friends I made in middle school. The achievements I've earned as a student. The struggle of 9th grade. Every single failure I went through. In Nietzsche's thought experiment, a demon tells you you'll live this exact life again, forever, every pain and joy repeated.

I would.

The memories I made and the relationships I've built only came with all of it, the bad included. The first time I made money on my own, at 11, is still my proudest accomplishment: holding \$80 from a single sale. I wish I had held on to myself and pushed harder in 9th grade, but everything I struggled through that year led me to where I am now and to the people I'm close to.

Nietzsche's answer to the demon is *amor fati*, Latin for "love of fate." It means not just accepting the life you live, but loving it, struggles included. I've failed at 95% of the businesses I started. I've sat through countless nights filled with doubt. I failed 9th grade. I wouldn't trade any of it, because it came with people and moments I'd never give up. The love I chose is part of what makes this life worth repeating.

The climb isn't only grinding. It's the rush of finishing a build at 11 p.m., solving the equation I've been stuck on, waking up every day to chase my goals, every second I spend with my girlfriend. I don't push my boulder despite life. I push it because it's what makes me feel alive.

My view on life has changed, and who knows, it might change again. I hold it because it's honest now, not because it's final. Camus called this lucidity: seeing clearly, without pretending. I don't think religion is a bad thing, and I have deep respect for people who believe in God, especially my mom, whose faith shaped who I am.

I stood at the altar as the bishop's thumb traced a cross of oil on my forehead. "Amen," I answered. I accepted the meaning I was given. Now I choose one every day. Camus ends *The Myth of Sisyphus* with: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." I've imagined it. I've found it. The gods forced the boulder on Sisyphus as punishment. I chose mine.
