

WHO AM I?

A Short Enquiry into the Question That Never Goes Away

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A Truth Seeker's Bible Companion

The Question That Dogs Us All

Somewhere around the age of six or seven, standing in a church in Dublin in my best woollen shorts and a properly knotted tie, I asked a priest: "*What happens to our souls when we stop?*"

He gave me the standard answer. Everlasting life. Heaven with our Lord. I remember his face as he said it — kind, certain, and completely untroubled by the question. I was not satisfied. Even then, I could feel the difference between an answer and a real one.

That was the beginning. Not of faith. Not of doubt. Of a question that has followed me for nearly seventy years and has never once been settled.

Most people ask "Who am I?" at some point. Usually when something breaks — a marriage, a career, a belief they thought was solid. The question arrives like a bill that has been accumulating interest. You can pay it or you can ignore it, but it does not go away.

I did not ignore it. I could not. Life made sure of that. Drink made sure. Women made sure. Work made sure. Anger made sure. Dublin made sure. The question was not academic for me. It was survival.

What follows in this booklet is not a textbook. It is not a sermon. It is the compressed result of over fifty years of searching — through philosophy, through direct experience, through suffering, and through joy — for an honest answer to the oldest question a human being can ask.

I do not claim to have the final answer. But I have found things that deserve to be heard. And I have learned that the question itself, honestly held, changes the person who asks it.

This is what I found.

This is what it cost.

And this is why it matters.

What I Found

Let me take you back to a night in 1967. I was a newly minted teacher, just gotten a job in Essex. It was a miserable, rain-swept night, and I was alone in a quiet cottage on the edge of town. I had always been sceptical of the soul — taught simply to believe what I could touch or see. That night, I was revisiting

the works of Yeats and Rilke, not searching for anything in particular, when during a peculiar silence something shifted.

I felt removed from my physical self. Not asleep, not dreaming, not hallucinating. I was observing — not just my own thoughts, but a timeless quality that seemed to transcend who I was or had been. It was as if I gazed into the pool of my innermost being and saw not just a reflection, but a larger, deeper existence. Something vast and quiet and completely real.

It was my first mystical encounter with the soul. From that night forward, I could not unsee it.

Now, I know how that sounds. I've been told often enough. Circumstantial. Anomalous perception. A trick of the brain on a wet night in Essex. And if that had been the only experience, I might have filed it away and carried on.

But it wasn't the only experience. Not by a long stretch.

What followed was not a single revelation but a slow accumulation across decades. And it did not arrive neatly. It arrived alongside drink, heartbreak, bad decisions, and years of living in ways that did not look remotely spiritual from the outside. I was not sitting in a monastery waiting for enlightenment. I was getting on with a messy, complicated life — and the experiences kept coming anyway, uninvited, undeniable, and impossible to reconcile with a purely material world.

I have had many clairvoyant episodes — knowing things I had no business knowing, about people and situations I had no normal access to. I have had precognitive experiences — seeing events before they happened, with a specificity that coincidence cannot reasonably explain. The first of these came when I was nine years old, a dream about a family member that proved accurate in every detail.

I have had four out-of-body experiences. These were not accidental, not vague, and not dreams. In at least one case, a verifiable physical effect occurred that I could not have produced by any normal means.

I have had several near-death experiences, including one in which consciousness did not merely persist — it expanded. Everything I perceived during that episode was more vivid, more coherent, and more real than ordinary waking life. Not less. More. Coming back from that was its own kind of difficulty. You do not return from an experience like that and slot easily back into normal life. You carry it. You carry the knowledge that something immense is there, while also having to pay the rent, manage your temper, and get through the week.

And I have had two experiences that go beyond anything I have ordinary language for. In one, I looked into the face of the ground of my being — a phrase I use because I have no better one. In the other, I had a vision of the most beautiful being I could ever possibly imagine. This being smiled at me, and I knew him from some long time back — but I don't know when, where, or how. That smile instilled in me a knowledge of a traumatic future event I was to live through. In

that moment I knew the most profound joy and sadness all at the same time. The experience prepared me for, and gave me the strength, to face an upcoming tragedy I could not avoid.

I am not telling you this to impress you. I am telling you because this is what happened, and because a booklet called “Who Am I?” that doesn’t contain the author’s actual answer to that question would be dishonest.

I have not lived a clean life. I am not pretending otherwise. I am a peculiar mix of saint and sinner in the one body — always have been. But I have been privileged to have some of the most profound experiences it is possible for a man to have, and I have lived to tell the tale.

So what do these experiences tell me about who I am?

They tell me that the soul is not a metaphor. Picture yourself at different life stages — childhood, adolescence, adulthood. It’s never the same self. Your tastes, your beliefs, even your memories are in constant flux. Yet there is an internal observer, a true witness if you like, who remains constant through all of it. That is the soul. Not a poetic flourish. Not a comforting fiction. The thing in you that watches, that endures, that was there before you had language to name it and will be there after the language runs out.

These experiences forced me — not gently, not gradually, but with the authority of things that cannot be unseen — to accept that consciousness is not confined to the brain. Something in us runs deeper than personality, deeper than memory, deeper than the body that carries us through this life. The question then becomes: if that is true, what does it actually mean? And can it be tested?

That is a question for philosophy and evidence, not just testimony. And it is where we go next.

Is It Just the Brain?

After everything I have just told you, the obvious question is: could it all be explained by the brain?

It is a fair question. It deserves a fair answer.

The standard modern position — the one you will meet in most universities, most science documentaries, most newspaper columns — is materialism. It says that consciousness is produced by the brain. Full stop. Your thoughts, your feelings, your sense of being someone looking out at the world — all of it is generated by neurons firing in a lump of grey matter weighing about three pounds. When the brain stops, you stop. There is nothing else.

This view has enormous strengths. It has given us modern medicine, brain surgery, antidepressants, an understanding of how memory works, how perception works, how damage to specific brain areas produces specific deficits. No serious person dismisses what neuroscience has achieved. I certainly do not.

But there is a problem. A serious one. And it has been staring philosophy in the face for decades.

Neuroscience can tell you where in the brain activity occurs when you feel joy. It can tell you which chemicals are involved when you fall in love. It can map the neural pathways that light up when you remember your mother's face. What it cannot tell you — what it has never been able to tell you — is why any of this feels like anything at all.

This is what philosophers call the hard problem of consciousness. And it is not a small technicality. It is the crack in the foundation.

Think of it this way. A thermostat detects temperature and responds to it. It processes information. It adjusts its output. But nobody supposes a thermostat feels cold. Nobody imagines there is something it is like to be a thermostat. Now scale that up. Make the information processing enormously complex — billions of connections, trillions of signals — and you have a human brain. The materialist says that at some point, all that complexity produces subjective experience. Feeling. Awareness. The sense of being you.

But why should it? Why should any arrangement of matter, however complex, produce the inner experience of tasting chocolate, or hearing a cello, or grieving for someone you have lost? Complexity explains processing. It does not explain experience. That is the gap, and no amount of brain scanning has closed it.

I am not a neuroscientist. But I have spent decades watching this debate, and I have noticed something. The materialists are very good at explaining the mechanics — the how. They are remarkably quiet on the why. They can show you the wiring. They cannot show you the electrician.

Now, I am not asking you to take this on my authority. I am asking you to think about it honestly. If consciousness is just a by-product of brain activity — steam from a locomotive, as it is sometimes described — then several things follow. It means your deepest experiences, your love, your grief, your sense of meaning, are ultimately nothing more than chemical events. It means that when the chemistry stops, everything stops. It means there is no self that endures, no observer behind the eyes, no soul. Just machinery winding down.

That is a coherent position. I will give it that. But is it adequate? Does it account for everything we actually experience?

I have sat with dying people. I have had my own encounters with the boundary between life and death. And what I found there — what many thousands of people across cultures and centuries have reported finding there — does not behave the way a by-product should. Consciousness, at the point where the brain is shutting down, does not fade. In many cases, it intensifies. It becomes clearer, more vivid, more ordered. That is not what you would expect from a failing machine producing its last puffs of steam.

There is another way of looking at this. Instead of consciousness being produced

by the brain, what if the brain is more like a receiver — a radio, if you like — tuning into something that exists independently of it? Damage the radio and the music distorts. Destroy the radio and you hear nothing. But the signal was never inside the radio in the first place.

This is roughly the position known as idealism — the view that consciousness is fundamental, not derived. Not a by-product of matter, but the ground from which matter itself arises. It is an old idea. You find it in Plato, in the Upanishads, in the work of modern philosophers who have looked at the evidence and found materialism wanting. It is not a fringe position. It is a serious philosophical framework, and it has the advantage of accommodating everything materialism explains — brain-consciousness correlations, the effects of drugs, the consequences of injury — while also leaving room for the things materialism cannot explain. The experiences I described in the previous section. The hard problem. The persistent, cross-cultural testimony of consciousness surviving the death of the body.

I am not asking you to become an idealist on the strength of one short section in a booklet. I am asking you to notice that the question is genuinely open. The confident tone of popular science — we know consciousness is just the brain — is not supported by the philosophy. The hard problem remains unsolved. The evidence is more complex, and more interesting, than the headlines suggest.

If you want the full case — all three models of reality laid out side by side, tested against evidence and logic — that is the work of the first volume in *The Mystical Mosaic* series, and of a companion booklet called *Only Three Possible Models of Reality*, which I will happily point you toward. But for now, what matters is this:

The question “Who am I?” cannot be honestly answered until you have decided what you think consciousness is. If it is just the brain, then you are just the brain, and the question answers itself rather bleakly. If it is something more, then so are you. And that changes everything.

Which brings us to what you do with all of this — not as philosophy, but as a way of living.

Living the Question

So where does this leave you?

You have heard my testimony. You have seen that the standard explanation — consciousness is just the brain — has a hole in it that no one has managed to fill. The question “Who am I?” is not settled. It is wide open. And that, I want to suggest, is not a problem. It is the beginning of something.

Most people treat the big questions the way they treat a smoke alarm — something to acknowledge briefly and then silence as quickly as possible. Get back to work. Get the kids fed. Pay the mortgage. I understand that. I have lived that. But the question does not go away just because you stop asking it. It waits.

Here is something practical you can do with it. Not a meditation technique. Not a spiritual programme. Just a single question, used honestly.

Ask yourself, at any point during your day: *Who am I right now?*

Not who you were last year. Not who you intend to become. Right now, in this moment — getting dressed, sitting in traffic, making tea, lying awake at three in the morning — who is doing this? It sounds almost too simple. But if you ask it without pretence, and if you sit with the answer rather than rushing past it, something happens. The roles start to separate from the person underneath. The teacher, the parent, the friend, the professional — these are things you do. They are not what you are. And underneath all of them, something quieter is watching. Something that has been watching your whole life.

That is the thread this booklet has been pulling on. Not as theory, but as experience. Mine, certainly — I have told you what I found, and I have not dressed it up. But also yours. Because whatever you believe about consciousness, materialism, idealism, or the soul, the question still applies. You are still here. You are still the one asking.

I discovered something over a lifetime of living with this question — through hardship, through loss, through experiences I could not explain and could not ignore. If I had to put it into a formula, it would be this:

If comedy equals tragedy plus time, then wisdom surely equals tragedy plus insightful experience plus time.

I did not arrive at whatever understanding I have by being clever. I arrived at it by being broken open, again and again, and by paying attention to what I found inside the wreckage. That is not a boast. It is a report. And it is available to anyone willing to stay with the question long enough.

I am not asking you to agree with me. I am asking you to take the question seriously — not for a weekend, not as a hobby, but as a thread running through your actual life. The people I have known who lived well, who found depth and meaning even in difficult circumstances, were not the ones who found the answer. They were the ones who refused to stop asking.

If this booklet has done its job, it has opened a door — or at least shown you where one is. If you want the full philosophical case — the three models of reality tested side by side, with evidence — that is the subject of a companion booklet called *Only Three Possible Models of Reality*, and it is yours for the asking. And if you want the deeper journey — the soul, consciousness, what happens when we die, how to live in light of all of it — that is the work of *The Mystical Mosaic*, a seven-part series I have spent my life preparing to write, and which is now underway. I would be glad of your company.

But none of that requires you to read another word. The question is already yours. It always was.

Who are you? Not your name. Not your job. Not the story you tell at dinner parties.

Who are you, right now, reading this?

Stay with it.

About the Author

Philip Tate is a spiritual philosopher, author, and master diviner with over fifty years of dedicated research into the nature of consciousness, the soul, and the meaning of human existence. A practitioner of astrology, palmistry, tarot, and the I Ching, he has had direct mystical experiences including four out-of-body experiences, several near-death experiences, and encounters with consciousness beyond the body that he describes in this booklet and throughout his wider work.

He is the creator of *The Mystical Mosaic*, a seven-part spiritual book series also known as *The Truth Seeker's Bible*, and the founder of Mosaic House.

This booklet is part of the Truth Seeker's Bible Companion Series — short, accessible explorations of the questions that drive the main series. For more, visit Mosaic House or search for *The Mystical Mosaic*.

What to Read Next

Only Three Possible Models of Reality — The companion booklet. Three frameworks for understanding existence, tested against evidence and logic.

The Difference Between Proof and Evidence — What counts as evidence for spiritual claims?

The Problem of Evil — How can evil exist if consciousness is fundamental?

Your Soul's Journey — What if consciousness doesn't end when the body does?

The Truth Seeker's Bible, Book 1 — The full exploration begins.