

# The Psychology of Nothingness I: Exploring the Void

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This is the first in a series of essays concerning nothingness. How in the world is there anything to say about nothingness, given that nothingness involves that which is devoid of anything? Yet, as we are about to discover, nothingness is dynamic. It is found in everyday life and is inherently valuable. This is a remarkable, even absurd declaration to make about that condition which is devoid of any substance. While admitting that nothingness is a very elusive topic to address, I will try in this essay and the three following essays to make sense of this seemingly senseless condition.

In this first essay, I bolster and elaborate on this assertion about nothingness being not only a condition that relates to our daily life but also a condition that retains great value. I will consider the condition of nothingness as a “strange attractor”—a condition that calls for our attention, that pulls in energy and substance, and that serves as a point of organization. I will address the emotions associated with nothingness and absence, as well as the very broad and distant matter of where we all come from and from what emerged our universe. I will consider matters such as the frightening numinostic status of nothingness, as well as psychological structures, such as symbols and archetypes, that we construct to deal with this numinostic status. I will also look at ways nothingness comes into being and being devolves into nothingness. Perhaps of greatest immediate importance are the psychological features that accompany nothingness—these being such features as anticipation, freedom, beauty, and waiting.

We now begin our venture into the world (or non-world) of nothingness.

## **Nothingness Lingers in Our Lives**

Multiple levels can be introduced when considering the presence of nothingness in our lives. Nothingness is to be found at a very personal level (proximal), and at a level far away from the human condition (distal). The proximal presence of nothingness is experienced by us as anxiety.

### **Anxiety**

While we are afraid of many things in our life, the fundamental source of anxiety is a fear of nothingness and “nonbeing” according to many existentially and social-critical philosophers (e.g. Martin Heidegger), authors (e.g. Jean Paul Sartre), theologians (e.g. Søren Kierkegaard), social scientists (e.g. Robert Jay Lifton) and even poets (e.g. W. H. Auden). The noted existentially oriented psychoanalyst, Rollo May (1977, p. 208) puts it this way regarding the connection between anxiety and the condition of nothingness:

... the security base of the individual is threatened, and since it is in terms of this security base that the individual has been able to experience himself as a self in relation to object, the distinction between subject and object breaks down.

Stated in similar terms, when one is confronted with the presence or prospect of nothingness, the sense of self is threatened. We fear the loss of boundaries between our psyche and the swirling volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, turbulence and contradiction (VUCA-Plus) that face us in mid-21st century life (Bergquist, 2026).

In his remarkable exposition on nothingness, Don Howard (2025, p.22) references the work of Paul Tillich, a prominent 20th Century theologian:

Paul Tillich the Protestant theologian and philosopher, wrote about “the threat of nonbeing” as the root of anxiety. For Tillich, non-being haunts us—not as a thing we encounter, but as a condition we fear. But even he stops short of imagining a world in which being never arrived. His non-being is psychological, spiritual. It makes us tremble, but it never overtakes us.

It is in this statement that we find not just a statement about the source of anxiety in our life, but also the source of confusion about the nature of nothingness. We slip into a consideration of tangible subject/object relations or offer a description of challenging “somethings” (such as VUCA-Plus).

*VOIDS and Avalanches:* as we will continually see in this essay, nothingness easily slips through our fingers, for we want to grasp nothingness as something and in doing so lose the fundamental nature of this profound experience of a Void, a blank screen, a deep pit into which everything is pulled (as in the dark stars of our universe). We find the Void to be quite compelling. Like the dark stars, energy and images are pulled into the Void. Much as we find with the cascading of snowpacks down a mountainside, the Void pulls in our thoughts, hopes, and fears. Just as an avalanche will pull in snow, trees, and boulders from outside the immediate path of the cascading snow, the Void compels us to expand our fear of a specific lost relationship toward much broader and profound anxiety about isolation from all people.

When we enter a spiritual space (such as a cathedral or a cliff overlooking the ocean), there is often a surprising and frequently disturbing emergence of deeply embedded concerns regarding life’s meaning or our place as finite beings living in an infinite universe. I experienced just this kind of spiritual “awakening” when visiting the cathedral in Salisbury, England, and when standing in the middle of a raging rainstorm in Carlsbad, California. At the cathedral, I experienced a profound sense of return. I felt like I had been at this cathedral many years earlier—in another lifetime. While dwelling in the rainstorm, I was reminded of King Lear living “madly” through a rainstorm in Shakespeare’s play about a man losing control of his domain. I was King Lear for a moment, facing the loss of control in certain domains of my own life. I was face-to-face with the Void of the cathedral’s lofty edifice as well as the storm’s swirling tempest. I felt timeless and lost.

*Numinostic Experiences:* while many psychoanalysts might use the term “regression” to psychologize and diminish my experiences in Salisbury and Carlsbad, there is an alternative way in which to frame my confrontation with the Void. Many years ago, Rudolph Otto wrote about this “awe-full” confronting of nothingness—confronting the Void. In what some scholars identify as the first “psychological” analysis of religious experiences, Otto identified what he called the “numinous” experience. In his now-classic book, *The Idea of the Holy*, Otto creates a new word, “numinous” (from the Latin “numen” and paralleling the derivation of “ominous” from the word “omen”).

Otto (1923, p. 11) writes about a powerful, enthralling experience that is “felt as objective and outside the self.” Otto’s numinous experience is simultaneously awe-some and awe-full. We are enthralled and repelled. We feel powerless in the presence of the numinous yet seem to gain power (“inspiration”) from participation in its wonderment. These complex reactions capture my experiences at Salisbury and Carlsbad much better than the term “regression” (though there certainly were regressive dynamics in the cathedral and storm).

Using more contemporary psychological terms, the boundaries between internal and external locus of control seem to be shattered when one is enmeshed in a numinous experience. The outside enters the inside, and the inside is drawn to the outside. As Rollo May mentions, the security base offered by a boundary between subject and object is threatened, if not obliterated. The Salisbury Cathedral entered my psyche, and concern about control in my own life was pulled out into the rainstorm. When the numinous is a Void, then we are pulled into a nothingness that is indeed anxiety-provoking. For example, when we arrive at the rim of the Grand Canyon in Arizona, there is not only the beauty of the rock formations and the deep appreciation for the ancient age of the geological structures we are viewing, but also the breath-taking sense of the Void—the massive amount of “air” (non-structure) that appears before us.

*Fear of Falling:* for many of us who stand near the edge of the canyon, there is the fear of falling—even though we are standing many feet from the edge. This fear is based on the compelling force of the abyss formed by the Colorado River that winds through the canyon. We are psychologically pulled into the canyon and can easily imagine the extended fall to the riverbed many feel below the rim where we are standing. The “numinotic” pull of the canyon is felt deeply in our head, heart, and guts. Even when stepping away from the rim and perhaps having a meal at the Tolar Hotel by the rim, there is a pull toward the canyon. We look out the window where the canyon is in full display.

We don’t actually need a deep canyon to feel the awe-full experience of falling into the Void. The horrible and dreadful images and pictures of Voids in primitive cultures continue to enthrall us—leading us to feelings of profound anxiety. I imagine Ginnungagap from my youth. This is the Void existing before the world was created. Or there is the Mesopotamian myth of the Void present prior to the formation of an orderly world. Ruled over by Tiamat, a primordial god, this state of nothingness or disorder was experienced in real life by those living in the Fertile Crescent of the Middle East. Thus, as has often been the case, the Void is elusive and must be represented by something that is tangible—such as the yearly flooding of the two rivers that form the Fertile Crescent. Somehow, a formless power from outside time or space seems to intervene and lead us to an experience that penetrates and changes (though we don’t know how) our unconscious life (the “backburners” to which I will turn shortly).

*Numinosum and Uroborous:* the noted psychologist and psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, is one of the main “architects” of nothingness, whom I will often reference in this essay. Jung built on and extended Otto’s portrayal of the “numinosum.” He (Jung, 1938, p. 4) describes a numinous experience as one that “seizes and controls the human subject . . . an involuntary condition . . . due to a cause external to the individual. The numinosum is either a quality of a visible object or the influence of an invisible presence causing a peculiar alteration of consciousness.” Elsewhere, it is noted that Jung’s notion of numinous is:

. . . rooted in experience and not just in ideation. The numinous is an experience which the individual undergoes and not simply the non-rational quality of dream-thoughts and mythologems. The numen or object present in or to the numinous state of mind is experienced as a powerful and meaning-filled other. It transcends conscious intention and control. (Chapman, 1988, p. 89)

More generally, Jung seems to be speaking to the gradual evolution of human consciousness when writing about numinous experiences. As one of his protégés, Erich Neumann (1954), has noted, human consciousness (replicating the evolution of organic life) begins in an undifferentiated state (which Neumann calls the “uroborous”) and which I have identified as the condition of nothingness. This state is represented

in many symbolic forms, ranging from many images of chaos (floods, wind, or ocean) to the more stylized image of a snake circling to begin devouring its own tail.

As I will soon consider in this essay, the condition of nothingness is often represented in symbols. Jungians suggest that the experience of the numinous is composed of both the primitive, undifferentiated elements (the “uroboros”) and the much more complex forms of high-art. The high art is recruited by the dynamic and compelling low art of primitive consciousness. As I will note in a later essay, the “seed” of beauty is to be found in this primitive consciousness—and specifically in the experience of nothingness.

Jung suggests that the numinous experience is frightening and often not welcomed. He proposes that we build societal norms and institutional structures to protect us from the numinous. Those aligned with the Jewish and Christian faiths approach the condition of nothingness by creating a myth of creation in the book of Genesis. Something comes from nothing through the divine work of Yahweh.

Jung nominates the Catholic Church as an institution that has provided protection from the numinous, through its rituals and priestly roles. However, Jung (1938, pp. 22-23) suggests in *Psychology and Religion* that the Protestant revolution shattered this protection and left those who adhere to a Protestant faith fully exposed to the powerful presence of the numinous: Protestantism, having pulled down many a wall which had been carefully erected by the [Catholic] church, began immediately to experience the disintegrating and schismatic effect of individual revelation.

As soon as the dogmatic fence was broken down and as soon as the ritual had lost the authority of its efficiency, man was confronted with an inner experience of nothingness—Tillich’s “non-being”—without the protection and the guidance of a dogma and a ritual. Specific, repetitive, and reinforced dogma and ritual are the unparalleled quintessence of Christian (as well as pagan) religious experience. Protestantism has, in the main, lost all the finer shades of Christian dogma and ritual: the Mass, the Confession, the greater part of the liturgy, and the sacrificial importance of priesthood.

Without this religious institutional protection, Protestants have looked elsewhere for a barrier that can be erected between self and numinous. In *Psychology and Religion* (based on the pre-World War II 1937 Terry Lectures), Jung (1938) suggests that the Nazi regime in Germany may powerfully and horribly exemplify the substitution of a secular institution for a religious institution in blocking the emergence of numinous, experiences that reside in the condition of nothingness. Whether or not Jung is correct in linking the Third Reich and ultimately the Holocaust to the threat of numinous experiences, we certainly can acknowledge and respect the power of these experiences.

### **Chaos/Strange Attractors**

We can take a step away from our internal state of anxiety and our intimate experiences of nothingness and non-being. We find that the natural world in which we live is filled with dynamic pulls that seem to emanate from nothing in particular.

*Attraction:* another of our guides to the world of nothingness, John Van Eenwyk (1997) identifies these pulls as what chaos and complexity theorists call “strange attractors.” He approaches the challenging topic of strange attractors by first offering a general description of attractors in the natural world (Van Eenwyk, 1997, p. 53):

"Attractor" is a general term used by mathematicians and physicists for any pattern that defines the repetitive motion of a system. For example, a pendulum that is subject to friction eventually stops swinging. The point directly underneath it when it stops is called a single-point attractor, for it appears to attract the pendulum's motion on each successive swing, eventually bringing it to rest over that point. A pendulum not subject to friction swings back and forth in a continuous manner, constantly tracing out the same pattern of motion. This is called a limit-cycle attractor.

There are other kinds of attractors (for example, those that rotate on an axis while revolving around a center, tracing a doughnut shape called a torus) that settle into discernible patterns, which consistently recapitulate themselves as they retrace their paths (circle, ellipse, torus, etc.).

Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 53) now turns to more intriguing complex attractors:

Complex-or chaotic-dynamics, while they do settle down into patterns that are recognizable, never retrace the same path. Because chaotic systems can be analyzed mathematically, they can be represented on a graph. These bear little resemblance to the familiar graphs of lines, planes and solids, however. Instead, they contain multiple bifurcations that double back upon themselves in bizarrely repetitious fashion. Expressed in the language of geometry, chaotic dynamics are simply spectacular. The images produced portray complex patterns, or attractors, of chaotic movement captured in time and space. These patterns are called strange attractors, for they reflect the bizarre configurations into which complex dynamics settle.

The word "attractor" here is somewhat of a euphemism, suggesting that the patterns into which the iterations of mathematical functions settle themselves have actually attracted the iterations of those functions. But "strange" accurately describes these patterns, for while discernible as such, they are so complicated that they transcend the usual categories associated with patterns.

Van Eenwyk (1997, P. 54) offers an additional distinction regarding the unique nature of strange, complex attractors:

Unlike regular attractors, which settle into repetitive cycles of limited size, strange attractors contain "isolated orbits . . . [that display] no orbital stability . . . the future behavior [of which] has a sensitive dependence on initial conditions." [K Teomia, "Periodically Force Non-linear Oscillators," in A. V. Holden, et. Chaos, p. 218). Never repeating—yet always resembling—themselves.

Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 54) concludes by stating that strange attractors "are the epitome of contradiction: infinitely recognizable, ultimately unpredictable."

*Patterns and Fractals*: it is here where we find the presence (or non-presence) of nothingness. The never-repeating yet recognizable "patterns" found in the visual production of complex systems are called "fractals." They are to be found in the patterning of structures in pine tree trunks, limbs, and needles, in the patterns among rivers that disperse after flowing into a flat delta. Fractals are also found in the patterning of employee behaviors in an established, traditional organization (Bergquist, 1993).

In essence, what appears is a transformation from nothing (random, sense-less) to something (order, pattern, meaning). Order is recruited from disorder into order. Attractor basins are formed, bringing about stability in an environment that appears chaotic and unpredictable. These complex attractors and attractor basins are indeed “strange”—as is the appearance (or nonappearance) of nothingness at any moment in our life or in any emerging pattern or surprising (and often beautiful) replication in the world we are experiencing.

## Symbols

As noted by Jung and Neumann, the challenge of nothingness, and more generally, the experience of the numinous is often addressed and managed through use of symbols (as well as the dogma and rituals of religious practice). It is often through symbolic representations that we approach the seemingly elusive and unapproachable condition of nothingness. We turn again to Paul Tillich to help us better understand the condition of nothingness.

*Essentials of Symbols*: specifically, Paul Van Eenwyk (1997, Pg. 71) quotes Paul Tillich (extracting a list from Tillich’s *Dynamics of Faith*, pp. 41f). Tillich describes six essential elements of symbols that I suggest are related to the representation of nothingness. First, symbols point beyond themselves (to that elusive condition called nothingness—the Void). Second, symbols participate in that toward which they point (symbols are themselves nothing or at least not much—just an image without explicit meaning or purpose). Third, symbols open up levels of reality otherwise closed to us (this “reality” ironically being the “nonreality” or nothingness).

Fourth, according to Tillich, symbols unlock dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality (the condition of nothingness aligns with and resonates with gaps in our own self-knowledge and our own “soul,” thus making nothingness and nonbeing that much more numinously frightening). Fifth, symbols cannot be produced intentionally (they often appear nonexistent until they suddenly emerge from nothingness to something that is apparent). Finally, symbols grow autonomously (self-organizing). And they die when they can no longer produce a response (this response seems to emanate from an unknown source or from nothingness).

Van Eenwyk (1997, Pg. 71) offers his own description of the role played by symbols: “. . . [S]ymbols are not so much entities to be interpreted as they are dynamics to be experienced. As transition makers, they have their roots in both the transformer and the transformed.” As Tillich suggests, the symbols themselves are without substance; they are substance-less experiences. The physical manifestation of the symbol is transformed into something that is experienced rather than “seen.”

And from this substance-less, unconsciously based (nothingness) experience comes something that is known (conscious) and impactful (Van Eenwyk, 1997, p. 69):

Drawing on the language of chaos theory, . . . symbols resemble manifolds. That is, they take us from the known to the unknown and back again. We often experience this as does an orbit that passes through a manifold and back. We go from stability to instability and hopefully—back again. In this case, stability refers to consciousness and the ordering capacities of the ego. Instability refers to the unconscious and its crazy-making jumbling up of conscious categories. Thus, the ego feels stable when reduction, definition, and rationality can accurately describe a situation. When these cannot, as when the ego becomes enmeshed in unconscious dynamics, the ego experiences instability. -

*Symbols as Transformers*: at this point, Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 69) turns again to insights offered by Carl Jung and his analytic psychology colleagues:

According to analytical psychology, a symbol's ability to take the ego from consciousness to the unconscious and back again is its most important function. By doing so, said Jung, "Symbols act as transformers, their function being to convert libido from a 'lower' into a 'higher' form." [Jung, Symbols of transformation, CW 5. Par 344] Chaotic dynamics do the same thing. In fact, chaos theory itself functions like a symbol in the domain of science: it transforms perspectives and unlocks domains of inquiry previously thought to be inaccessible.

It is at this point that Van Eenwyk begins to link chaos theory to symbolic processes and to Jung's descriptions of the tensions and conflicts inherent in inner-psycho processes – a topic to which I will turn shortly.

## **Archetype**

While nothingness and the Void are represented symbolically in many ways, there is an even more powerful and deeply embedded vehicle for representing these conditions. This vehicle is the archetype, which Jung presents as a dominant feature of the human unconscious (Jung, 1978). While the Jungian archetype is usually portrayed as a specific character (such as a witch or warrior) or as a natural element (such as wind or fire), this, according to Van Eenwyk, is not an accurate portrayal.

*Frame of Reference*: the archetype is much bigger than any specific representation. Van Eenwyk proposes that the archetype is a broad frame of reference that can be represented in many ways in our unconscious life. From this perspective, the archetype might be considered a psychic strange attractor. A feminine/nurturing archetype, for instance, might be represented as an “earth mother,” a warm, embracing wind, or a den where a fire in the fireplace is gently warming the room, and a heavily cushioned couch provides comfort to the weary traveler.

Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 66) offers an interesting metaphor in his portrayal of the framing nature of the Jungian archetype and its relationship to attractors and fractals. He brings in the olfactory neurons and the nature of odors:

...rather than there being a separate neuron for each odor, which automatically alerts the cortex to the presence of its signature smell, neurons cooperate together to generate a pattern which itself comprises the recognition factor of the olfactory apparatus.

This means that brains are not hard-wired into neural pathways, each of which handles a specific function. If that were true, one would need only to find a specific neural pathway to explain the brain's activity regarding any particular function. But "an act of perception is not the copying of an incoming stimulus," says Freeman. Rather, "it is a step in a trajectory by which brains grow, reorganize themselves and reach into their environment to change it to their own advantage." All of which is accomplished through fractal attractors, “the behavior the system settles into when it is held under the influence of a particular input”.

Van Eenwyk is hovering on the edge of what might be considered a hologram-based model of cortical functioning.

*Holograms:* given Van Eenwyk’s portrayal of cortical functioning, I would introduce the model of brains as a hologram. This model offers yet another parallel between Jung’s archetype and dynamic operations of the human brain. Specifically, the hologram suggests that all information in a system is present in each unit of the system. Karl Pribram (Hampden-Turner, 1981, pp. 94-97), for instance, offers a holographic portrayal of the human brain in which memories are stored in three-dimensional space—allowing retrieval to occur at any point in the brain. A clarifying analogy is offered in describing how our brain might operate like a hologram (Hampden-Turner, 1981, p. 97):

If two stones are dropped into a pan of water and the surface is quick frozen, the two sets of concentric ripples form an interference pattern. If a laser light is shone through the ice, a holographic image of the two stones is recreated. The images of the stones are encoded in every part of the rippled ice and can be created from as little as a square centimetre.

We might similarly portray archetypes as three-dimensional framing functions that enable diverse images, memories and thoughts to be immediately organized at any one point in time around a specific archetypal theme. This theme, like ripples formed in the water, influences the entire psyche. An external event, like the two pebbles tossed into the water, precipitates archetypal “ripples” in the psyche.

This notion of archetype as a framing and organizing function, rather than being a specific character or event, is particularly important when considering nothingness or the Void as an archetype. Obviously, there is no specific character or event in nothingness; however, nothingness and the void, as a strange attractor, can draw in specific characters and events, leaving the human psyche with the fearful absence of anything.

I recently read an account of this dynamic found in the life and mind of a specific person portrayed in the widely read novel called *Mona’s Eyes* (Schlesser, 2025). While this book is primarily concerned with a child (Mona) and her grandfather’s view of artwork in Paris museums, there is also a subtheme about the mysterious death of Mona’s grandmother. Thomas Schlesser (2025, p. 178) writes about Mona’s reflections on her grandmother’s death:

Mona hadn’t understood this absence [grandmother’s death] at the time; it must have seemed like an unfathomable mystery because no one had been able to explain to her what ceasing to exist meant, when she was barely beginning her own existence. Moving forward in life means making the grueling effort to bring out into the light the wounds that we hadn’t seen coming, and that, by their very surreptitiousness, traumatize us to the depths of our being.

Here, in Mona’s psyche, we see a Void—a nothingness—related to the “mysterious” (unacknowledged) death/absence of her grandmother. Throughout the book, we see this archetype of the Void/Absence pulling many characters and events into Mona’s psyche. It is often the paintings and sculptures that Mona and her grandfather view that trigger the framing and organization of her grandmother’s absence.

As Schlesser notes, the Void is slowly disassembled in our life as we grow older. The wounds associated with the Void are brought to light as we grow older. This is a “grueling” and “traumatizing” process—as are all

“individuation” processes identified by Carl Jung. In some ways, we would prefer to remain oblivious to the content contained (and protected) in the Void. Non-being might be a source of existential anxiety; however, it might also be serving as a barrier that allows us to remain childlike in our ignorance of death and finality.

We might also conjecture that the artwork viewed by Mona precipitated many other images in Mona’s psyche. Much like the pebbles tossed into Pribram’s pan of water, the paintings and sculptures could radiate (ripple) through Mona’s holographic psyche. One of these ripples could be Mona’s experience of the archetypal Void as represented in the mysterious death and immediately acknowledged absence of her grandmother.

## **The Big Bang**

In search of nothingness, I now leap backwards to the origins of our universe. A vast, infinite amount of nothingness was suddenly exploring into something. Quite a something it was!! The entire universe was created in a moment. What a big bang it must have caused—actually not a bang at all given that there was nothing in the universe to carry the sound of creation and no one (or nothing) to “hear” the bang even if it did exist. Therefore, we might reframe this moment of creation as the big silence or, more accurately, a great wave of cosmic expansion. Today, we can detect a faint glow throughout the universe (Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation) that might be considered a remnant of the heat produced by this vast expansion. Perhaps, what occurred should be called the Big Heat . . .

*Before the Bang:* whatever this event of creation is called, it offers a dramatic example of nothingness suddenly becoming something. In confronting the matter of nothingness, we will inevitably finally ask: what came before the Big Bang? Don Howard (2025, p. 24) offers several versions of how this nothingness before the Big Bang might be described:

. . . when physicist Lawrence Krauss titled his book *A Universe from Nothing*, he described a state that lacks matter and energy, but not the laws of quantum mechanics. His "nothing" includes a vacuum structure, governed by fluctuations in underlying fields. These fields exist, even if what we normally think of as "stuff" does not. They are something-low-activity; rule-bound, silently simmering, but something none-the-less. Philosopher David Albert has sharply critiqued this usage, noting that it retains physical structure under the label "nothing."

In similar fashion, Stephen Hawking and James Hartle proposed a “no-boundary” condition in quantum cosmology, in which time itself behaves like a spatial dimension at the earliest moments of the universe. This eliminates a hard "beginning," but does not eliminate structure. Their version of nothing still requires a mathematical framework that defines how time, energy, and curvature behave.

It is at this moment when something is created from nothing that the notion of nothingness becomes particularly elusive. While the nothingness we face in our personal life seems elusive, it is still something we experience in our “gut” (or in our head or heart). We know that nothingness is “something” because we can feel it and we take action to avoid this feeling or find ways to make “sense” of this “nothing/something” that seems “senseless.”

Howard offers his own attempt to capture something about the senselessness of a “reality” that existed before the universe was created (Howard, 2025, pp.7-8):

One possibility is that nothingness was unstable—not in the physical sense, because physics doesn't exist yet—but in a deeper way. That its very lack of constraint meant there was nothing to prevent being from erupting. That existence emerged not because it was pushed or chosen, but because there was nothing to stop it.

The other possibility is intention—that being was chosen rather than forced—conceived either impersonally, as intention without a subject, or on a theistic reading, as intention with a subject: someone who willed there to be being. In many traditions that "someone" is called God, though not necessarily bound to that image and perhaps unlike anything theology or history has imagined. On this view, what exists came into existence because it was wanted. Not accidentally. Not mechanically. But freely. Being is not merely a fact—it is an act.

Both versions hold up to a limited sense under critical scrutiny—and Howard offers this scrutiny. The first version is secular. It is attractive because it requires no external agency to bring about the creation of our universe. Furthermore, we observe instability operating in our daily life and can envision an unstable reality prior to the Big Bang. However, when there is nothing, then what is it that is unstable? And from what source does all the energy and matter of the universe come?

*Biblical Beginnings:* Howard's second version is sacred and widely embraced in many religious traditions. It requires an external agency to create our universe. We of the Western World find this version in the biblical narrative of Genesis. Howard (2025, p. 16) comments on the Biblical version:

In the Judea-Christian tradition, the doctrine of creation is ex nihilo—creation “out of nothing”-emerged gradually, becoming explicit in late Second Temple Judaism and early Christian sources. It affirmed divine sovereignty: God did not shape a pre-existing chaos but brought being into existence through will alone. In this view the universe is contingent—dependent on something beyond itself.

The one fundamental question that drives many people, ultimately, to a more secular (and even atheistic) perspective concerns the presence of God: where does God come from? Who created God? Was it another God? Many religions do have multiple Gods, some of whom were creators of other gods. But where does it stop? And does the secular version offer anything better? There is still the question regarding the source of all the energy and matter. And what produced the instability of the reality that existed before anything existed?

The answer embraced by one ancient culture is that all things rest on the back of a turtle. And on what does this turtle stand? It stands on the back of another turtle. Ultimately, turtles stand on the backs of other turtles. And who created this infinite number of turtles, let alone everything residing on the back of the first turtle? A variant on multiple turtles is multiple universes. Our universe was created by or in another universe. Our Big Bang might have been the slipping of a new universe through some “wormhole” that leads from an already existing universe. But where did that universe come from? Are there universes standing on the backs of other universes? Or are they standing on the backs of turtles?

Regardless of the accepted version and the type of turtles being deployed, it is clear that our universe is very large and composed mostly of nothingness—and will increasingly be filled with nothingness (or perhaps more black holes) as it expands, continuing the Big Bang explosion. I used to deliver a lecture entitled “God has to be much bigger, given the recent discoveries regarding the Big Bang.” Whether or not we believe in some

divine source, and whether or not we believe that this source created our universe, it is necessary for us to acknowledge that the vast expanse of nothingness is very real. Most of what is “out there” is a massive, numinostic Void.

So, we are left with the Void. This is not only the Void that is conveyed in our description of the nothingness that existed prior to the Big Bang. And that still exists in most of the universe. The Void also exists in the explanations that are offered regarding where something came from and why something (rather than nothing) exists at all. As Rudolph Otto noted, the Void of nothingness is indeed “awe-full” and a source of confusion, elusiveness, and ultimately despair. As Mona experienced, absence lingers in our head, heart (and soul)—be it the absence of something or of an adequate explanation of why there is something.

Despite the state in which we find ourselves when contemplating nothingness and the Big Bang/Big Silence/Big Heat/Big Wave/Big Confusion, there is good reason to pursue the psychology of nothingness, for as I have tried to show, nothingness and the Void are a big deal in our daily life and influence the way we perceive and engage our world. Specifically, I wish to consider the movement in both directions of nothingness and something (Being). I begin with the movement from nothingness to Being (that which occurs during the creation of our universe).

## **From Nothingness to Being**

While we might not grasp how being comes from nothingness in our universe. We do witness this remarkable transformation occurring in our lives. In several other publications, I have distinguished different types of issues we confront in our everyday world. There are puzzles that have clear answers and operate within specific parameters, while there are problems that have no clear answers and operate through several different parameters (such as financial, logistical, aesthetic, political, and psychological parameters in the formulation of a city plan). It gets even more complicated (and complex), given that some problems are nested in other problems; furthermore, the problem might best be solved in two different, contradictory ways. Polarized solutions to complex problems are commonplace and are often labeled “wicked” or “messy” by social planners and observers.

### **Confronting Mysteries**

Finally, there are issues that are best conceived as “mysteries.” Their ultimate cause is not understood, and the human capacity to find an adequate solution to a “mystery” is lacking. The mystery might include challenging, and often existential, factors such as immorality, evil, and even death. How do we ultimately make sense of the holocaust or the death of a loving, cared-for child? The mystery can also reside in that which is cherished, beautiful, and life-giving. As the lyricist inquired: “What about love?”

I am reminded of the song, “If I loved you” from “Carousel,” the Rogers and Hammerstein musical. Near the end of this beautiful duet, the female lead (Julie) comments on the leaves falling from the grove of trees in which they are standing:

You were right [Billy] about there bein' no wind.  
The blossoms are comin' down by theirselves.  
Just their time to, I reckon.

Much as it is time for Julie and Billy to fall in love. While it makes no sense for these two star-crossed characters in *Carousel* to fall in love, the mystery of love leads them to immediately marry. And face the hardship of a troubled and ultimately tragic relationship. From nothingness (the mystery of loving attraction) comes something (marriage and life together).

While this is a highly dramatic example of a mystery (love) being transformed into a nested and polarizing set of problems (marriage), the attempt to turn a mystery into a problem is not unusual in human enterprises. National politicians try to “solve” the mystery of climate change by debating isolated solutions that are often built on top of simplistic climate-related puzzles (“the problem is inadequate insurance on seaside homes”). Business leaders look at the mystery of a volatile market, with some of their products being a big financial hit and others being a costly flop. A new product-development guru is hired to “solve” this mystery and doesn’t do much better than the one that was fired. Perhaps a new marketing campaign will provide the solution; or maybe we just need to paint that chair a different color.

And then, sometimes, we get it right. As astute politicians, we look for diverse solutions to the complex mysteries we confront. We acknowledge that over which we have control and over which we have no control. We think systematically and find the leverage points to bring about fundamental change (Meadows, 2008). As a business leader, we are creative in finding new solutions to an old problem or a newly emerging problem. Or we create something startlingly original and find there is now demand for what was previously unknown. So, with systems thinking we shift from the unknown or elusive nature of things to a sense of what is really happening in the system. From the unknown (seeming nothingness) dynamics of a complex system, we come to at least a partial understanding (somethingness) of this system as it operates in a rugged and often dancing landscape (Miller and Page, 2007). And it is from a creative, innovative rethinking and reframing of a mystery to transform it into a vibrant, shifting set of initiatives that we find startling beauty alongside the ability to live comfortably and with agility in the rugged and often dancing landscape.

## **Creativity**

It is in nothingness that creativity is often fostered. It is in the gaps, stumbling, and confusing collaborations that new products and services emerge. We see this creativity emerging from the mutations occurring in the evolution of species, the cracks and crevasses within organizations, and the intersections between ideas and institutions. I briefly reflect on each of these sources.

*Mutations and Flaws:* when everything in a natural system is uniform and stable, then nothing is happening. And if nothing happens, then a sense of Being is absent. Everything becomes a statue that shows no evidence of life. Similarly, ideas emerge from instability. An idea exists as it bumps up against other ideas and evolves into something that is increasingly clear and mature. Evolutionary theorists identify the important role played by mutations, and evolutionary variations and flaws. Organizational theorists write about the cracks and niches in a system that produce innovation (Stacey, 1996). Intellectual historians describe the powerful role of intersecting ideas and practices, accompanied by intermixing disciplines and professions (Johansson, 2004).

With regard to evolutionary mutations and flaws, there is a classic (sometimes controversial) theory in the field of evolutionary biology, called the Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium, which provides rich insight to not only those interested in evolutionary change, but also the psychology of nothingness. The Hardy-Weinberg Equilibrium model works backwards with reference to evolutionary change. It concerns the five key

assumptions that lead to NON-change in terms of biological evolution. It is in non-change that we find a vacuum and sense of nothingness.

The first assumption is that there are no mutations in a population. This would mean that all genes, as the basis of life forms, are the same for all members of a species. There is no room, in other words, for variations or mistakes. The second assumption is that any specific population is isolated. Individual members of a specific population (community) can't migrate into or emigrate from that specific community. Members of any species within a specific community can only breed with individuals from the same community.

The third assumption that would block biological evolution concerns the population size. The population must be very large for the blocking of evolution to occur—leading to the averaging out of differences among members of any one species. If the community is small, any differences will have a major impact (big frog in a small pond), whereas in a large community, differences will be absorbed and not have a large impact. The fourth Hardy-Weinberg assumption concerns mating preferences. There will be little evolution if mating is random—anyone from the other gender will do, and there is not much discrimination. If members of a species show preferences for those of the opposite sex who are bigger, stronger, prettier, faster, smarter, or hairier, then evolution is more likely to occur. The final assumption to be made is closely related to the fourth. It concerns survival and reproduction in a specific population. Evolution is unlikely to occur if everyone in the community has an equal chance of survival and an equal opportunity, as a surviving adult, to mate and produce offspring. It is a dull world of nothingness if everything is the same and nothing stands out. The world is certainly not colorful. It is not even black and white. Everything is gray.

If there are no mutations in a population then evolution will not take place. There is no room for variations or mistakes in a system in equilibrium. Innovation requires that things are not always going right in an organization. There must be variations if the organization is to generate innovations. Scott Page (2011) writes about the generation of multiple ideas (mutations) and the power of diversity within any system in his very challenging book, *Diversity and Complexity*. Page suggests that a world filled with many perspectives is one in which good ideas, clear thinking, and accurate information are likely to emerge: “if we have lots of diverse paths . . . , we are not likely to make mistakes. If we only have a few paths, mistakes are likely.” (Page, 2011, p. 240)

*Complexity and Diversity*: Page (2011, p. 17) makes the strong case for the important interplay between complexity and diversity. Systems that are complex and diverse will be more resilient and amenable to change:

Systems that produce complexity consist of diverse rule-following entities whose behaviors are interdependent. . . . I find it helpful to think of complex systems as “large” in Walt Whitman’s sense of containing contradictions. They tend to be robust and at the same time capable of producing large events. They can attain equilibria, both fixed points and simple patterns, as well as produce long random sequences.

There is one thing we have learned in recent years that has almost become an axiom: if there is extensive variability (disturbance) within the environment in which a system operates, then there must also be extensive variability (diversity) inside the system. Page (2011, p. 204, 211) identifies this axiom as the Law of Requisite Variety:

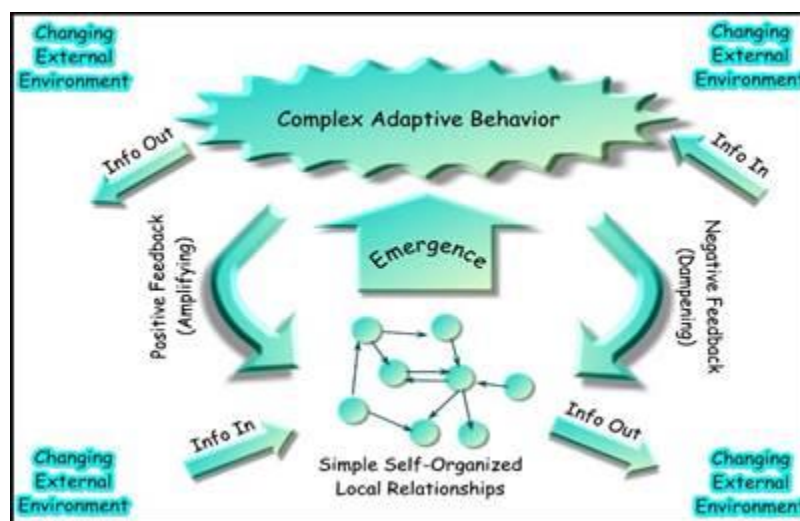
. . . the greater the diversity of possible responses, the more disturbances a system can absorb. For each type of disturbance, the system must contain some counteracting response. . . . The law of requisite variety provides an insight into well-functioning complex systems. The diversity of potential responses must be sufficient to handle the diversity of disturbances. If disturbances become more diverse, then so must the possible responses. If not the system won't hold together.

These perspectives on evolution and diversity strongly suggest that creativity and a flourishing of Being occur when mutations, flaws, trial balloons, and controversy are abundant. In shifting our attention to the conditions where diversity is absent, then we confront nothingness. The Void exists when this diversity is absent, and everything seems frozen in place. Just as our eyes must always be moving (dithering) if we are to see something and not “phase out” the static image in front of us, so our world of people, settings, and ideas must always be moving or the world “phases out” to a state of nothingness.

*Cracks and Crevasses:* mutations in an environment can create new, adaptive variations among entities in this environment. Similarly, cracks and gaps in a system can lead to creative enactments (as well as failures) within this system. Ralph Stacey (1996) writes extensively about this creative dynamic in organizations, noting that organizations grow and adapt precisely because they are not orderly.

Theorists and researchers who study complex adaptive systems propose that an unstable, marginalized entity or person operates outside the standard structure and constraints of a system, will elicit considerable positive and negative feedback, as well as information from diverse sectors within the system. Without formal guardrails, this “renegade” entity or person will self-organize, forming a creative mode of operation and distinctive set of desired outcomes.

As this “outlier” (to use Malcolm Gladwell’s term) or “anomaly” (to use Thomas Kuhn’s term) gains some ascendancy in the system, then emergence will occur. The entire system will have to adjust to the presence of this Outlier. It must, therefore, undergo fundamental transformation. At this point, the system either fails to survive this transformation or it becomes a complex, adaptive system. As Donella Meadows (2008) has described, the small, revolutionary change can provide the leverage for large-scale change. The following graphic provides a summary view of how leveraging occurs and a complex adaptive system is created.



**Diagram: *The Wiki and the Blog: Toward a Complex Adaptive Intelligence Community*** D. Calvin Andrus, Ph.D. Office of Application Services Central Intelligence Agency Washington, DC 20505 calvina@ucia.gov

*Intersections:* I offer a third way in which to describe this relationship between creativity and nothingness. Franz Johansson (2004) writes about the *Medici Effect* (referring back to the leadership provided by the Medici family during the Italian Renaissance). This effect is present when often-competing disciplines intersect. New solutions are generated in this intersection. Members of one discipline are curious about what those in another discipline have to say.

New learning can occur when alternative perspectives on an important issue are introduced. Artists can learn from scientists. Historians can provide insights for those who are engaged in politics. I have conducted sessions where art professors at a college learn about laboratory-based teaching from chemistry professors, while at the same time teaching these chemists about the use of studios as a mode of education. Members of an organization can hold opposing and contradictory views and still be effectively and creatively engaged with one another—provided that curiosity is complemented by a motivation to learn. By being curious about the other side’s perspective, they can make more thoughtful and accurate predictions and take more appropriate actions in a VUCA-Plus saturated environment (Bergquist, 2026).

Actually, entire organizations reside at the intersect. Kenneth Boulding (1973) prophetically described the Intersect Organization more than fifty years ago. At the time, these new kinds of organizations held great promise in solving longstanding problems in our society. Yet these intersect organizations have also been subject to troubling ambiguity given their venture into the nothingness of societal gaps. According to Boulding (1973, p. 179):

... many societies have witnessed the development of “peculiar” organizations which did not fall into any of the well-recognized categories. They are not quite government, although they are usually the result of some kind of government action. They are not quite business, although they perform many business functions. They are not quite educational or charitable organizations either, though they may also perform some of these functions. They frequently occupy “cracks” or interstices in the structure of a society. They have been named “intersects” because they have some qualities of more than one conventional type of organization.

Many contemporary human service agencies in the United States exemplify Boulding’s intersect organization. The leaders of an innovative Canadian community college built a small mall on the edge of campus to generate some additional revenues from the mall rentals. A California community college district during the late 20th Century operated a geothermal greenhouse project in cooperation with one of the counties in its region, funded by a California Energy Commission grant. This college also owns an environmental refuge outside its district, which was deeded with the provision that certain structural maintenance be observed and that it also be used for instructional projects.

Kaiser-Permanente was one of the first intersect health organizations. Founded as a combination health delivery system and health insurance program, Kaiser blazed the trail for many other health care systems in the United States. Kaiser is a classic “intersect.” It is both a delivery and insurance organization, and both a human service agency and private business.

The Delta Dental Insurance Companies in the United States provide yet another example of the intersect organization in the health field. Most states now have a Delta Dental Insurance plan that covers dental service costs. Delta Dental organizations are nonprofit, yet make a profit—excess funds are usually placed in reserve or given as bonuses to management staff. In many ways, Delta Dental operates like a private insurance company, having a very active marketing and advertising program. Yet it also operates as a quasi-governmental regulatory agency, given that it controls the cost of dental care by reimbursing member dentists for only a designated amount for specific dental services.

*Buffers and Mediators:* some intersect organizations (for example, regional transit districts) serve as buffers and mediators between conflicting organizations, while others, such as Amtrak, operate as quasi-governmental agencies that run utility, transportation, or communication systems. The Small Projects Assistance (SPA) Program fosters collaboration between the Agency for International Development (AID) and the Peace Corps, at both the field and headquarters levels.

This collaborative program supports small, self-help projects at the community level with minimum red tape. These projects have been supported by SPA through a combination of grants and technical assistance. SPA also works closely with SCORE, a volunteer organization that provides valuable mentorship-based assistance to those seeking and receiving SPA loans. SPA works at the intersection between other organizations and the government. It is entrepreneurial and can provide rapid response and cut through red tape—the classic advantages of many Intersect organizations.

Joint Powers Administration (JPA) organizations similarly operate in a flexible, intersect manner. JPA's are legal entities created when two or more public agencies — such as cities, counties, school districts, or special districts — enter into a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) to jointly exercise powers they already have individually. It is a formal mechanism for collaborative governance that allows agencies to pool resources, share expertise, and deliver services more efficiently than they could alone.

In each case, there is a gap – a sector of nothingness—that is filled by the intersect organization. As Boulding suggests, these organizations are “peculiar” in that they produce something (a service, product, set of regulations or guidelines) from out of the nothingness that exists in the gap between disciplines, public and private ownership, or profit and nonprofit purposes. The Medici Effect is in full effect, with creative and collaborative solutions existing in abundance.

### **From Another Realm**

There is yet another way to conceive of the movement from nothingness to something (Being). We can consider that an idea, feeling, or fundamental sense of Being comes from something other than our conscious mind. We don't need systems-thinking or a Medici Effect when facing the Void or a Mystery. There are other sources and other realms that can lead us from nothingness to something. The most widely acknowledged source for many generations of “believers” in Western Cultures has been God. We find inspiration, guidance, and even an entire theological perspective coming “out of nothing” (*ex-nihilo*) from a divine source. Whether this be the guidance and inspiration offered Joanne d'Arc as Warrior-Queen or the troubling conceptual conversion offered C. S. Lewis, the God of Christianity has often been the source of new-birth—be it Joan of Arc's courage or Lewis's theology.

*Secular Realms:* recent neurobiological studies of the conversions and revelations of Christian saints and theologians suggest that the realms may be secular rather than sacred. Visions might be optical migraines, while words from God might be coming from conversations between the two hemispheres of the human cortex. Courage might be founded on a deep fear of uncompleted addressing of childhood trauma, while conversion experiences could be nothing more than the transitions that occur during our adulthood (often precipitated by a major intrusive event). Finally, we might find that there are spiritually based events that can be assigned to a specific sector of our brain (“God spots”) rather than to any outside (divine) source. The periaqueductal gray area of our brainstem might have more to do with our religious inquiries that create something out of nothing than does a voice emanating from Mt. Sinai.

Since the paradigm revolution offered by Sigmund Freud at the start of the 20th Century, another source from a different realm has often been identified as the vehicle that delivers “something out of nothing.” This source is the human unconscious. The unconscious—and dreams in particular—have often been a source of scientific inspiration (Albert Einstein), technological innovation (Nikola Tesla), or creative art (Salvador Dali). The vehicle for this movement of nothingness into being has been identified as the removal of censorship and cultural barriers (Freud, 1930/2010; Freud, 2009), the regression of the ego (Kris, 1953), the process of incubation (Ghiselin, 1961/1985) or the creation of structures that promote novelty, autonomy, and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013).

*Peremptory Ideation:* I wish to introduce yet another source of nothingness becoming something. This source is a specific process that operates in the human conscious. A noted psychoanalytically oriented researcher, George Klein (1967) proposed that in our internal world (psyche), we create a specific idea or image that begins to “travel” around our psyche (head and heart). This train, already filled with ideas and images, picks up fragments of unconsciously held material (memories, feelings, and thoughts) along the way. The ideational train operates much like the aforementioned avalanche and other forms of “strange attractors”. The train becomes increasingly rich and emotionally powerful as it picks up new intra-psyche material. It gains increasing energy from this unconscious material. An ever-expanding Something is formed ex-nihilo by this ideational train, its initial, primitive content.

At some point, this ideation begins to pull in material from outside the psyche. External people and events suddenly take on greater saliency (more emotional power and vividness). Klein suggested that this ideation takes priority when we are valuing, attending, and remembering in the external world. It assumes a commanding (“peremptory”) presence. A positive (reinforcing) loop is created, with the external material now joining the interior material. They all cluster around the original ideation.

As in Klein’s model of peremptory ideation, Carl Jung’s notion of “numinous” consists of cognitive content picking up the emotional content and races along, accumulating more thoughts and feelings. In many ways, this expanding dynamic is similar to that of an avalanche drawing in nearby snow, trees, and rocks while plummeting down a mountainside. Complexity and chaos theorists speak of these dynamic processes as strange attractors. The volume of a snowpack at the bottom of the mountain is much larger than the snowpack that started to fall as an avalanche at the top of the mountain. Similarly, the numinous is much larger when it comes to prominence than it was when first precipitated by some profound external or internal experience.

## **Preparing for the Future: Meaning and A-Causality**

Our capacity to make something out of nothing is evident not just in our envisioning of systems and in our creativity, but also in our envisioning of a future (something) that does not yet exist (nothingness). Fred Polak (1973) proposes that this capacity to envision a collective future is fundamental to the maintenance of any society and culture. Elsewhere, with two of my colleagues (Bergquist, Weitz and Pomerantz, 2026), I have relied heavily on Polak's work when identifying the primary pillars needed to support true freedom in a mid-21st-century society. I wish to build on this analysis regarding freedom by suggesting that our construction of a meaningful present-day reality is critical to any construction of a future reality. Furthermore, this present-day construction requires our search for and acknowledgement of initial indications (seeds) regarding aspects of the desired future—whether it be our personal future or our collective future.

*Finding Meaning:* we humans are not passive recipients of reality. Rather, we actively construct our reality from moment to moment. Specifically, we are in the business of constantly constructing our current reality. We construct our anticipation of what is about to happen and use this anticipation to guide our immediate actions (Bergquist, 2026). We begin with the unknown (nothingness) of the immediate future and adjust our thoughts, feelings, and actions based on what we anticipate in the immediate future (something). These adjustments are made from moment to moment as we receive feedback from our environment as a result of the actions we take. Longer term, we construct an envisioned future to inspire and guide our actions over an extended period. Similarly, as a society, we anticipate, act, revise, and find guidance in our socially constructed future.

All this constructive activity and production of ongoing, altered anticipations can be incorporated in a single act—this being the “making of meaning.” We find meaning in what we see and what we anticipate. We find meaning and purpose in the actions we take based on this constructed meaning. Without meaning and purpose, we are adrift in an existential sea of anomie (Durkheim, 1897/1997), alienation (Becker, 1971; Becker, 1973), and ultimately despair (Sartre, 1993)

In making meaning out of nothingness, we bring in past experiences (“I can anticipate that the same thing is about to happen.”) and we bring in our hopes and aspirations (“I want this to happen, so I will anticipate that it is about to occur.”). Our meaning at any one point in time is also influenced (even determined) by our current relationships and the meanings already constructed by our society. We also bring in content from our unconscious life when establishing meaning. The peremptory ideational train might even be influencing our immediate meaning-making and anticipation.

John Van Eenwyk, one of the authors we have already cited, focuses on the unconscious (and particularly the Jungian unconscious) as a major source of meaning and (I would suggest) our anticipations. Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 37) suggests that we must consider the role played by the unconscious and, in particular, the symbolic manifestations of unconscious content as related to our everyday construction of meaning:

... we need to see the everyday events and circumstance as having meaning—a meaning that relates directly to the issue at hand. For example, if we arrive at the door of the office to deliver our application and find it locked, and the secretary refuses to listen to our entreaties, we should consider bowing to circumstances and walking away instead of trying to beat the door down.

Jung called this active role that the archetypes play in resolving the conflicts generated by the synchronic dynamics of individuation the *transcendent function*. He defines it as: A natural process, a manifestation of the energy that springs from the tension of opposites, and it consists in a series of fantasy-occurrences which appear spontaneously in dreams and visions. [Jung, Two Essays, par. 121.]

I propose that these fantasy occurrences might be carried by the peremptory ideational train as it travels through and influences the content of our dreams and visions.

*Synchronicity*: it is in this final statement that Van Eenwyk brings up one of Jung's most controversial concepts—this being synchronicity. For Jung (1960), there are no accidental relationships between one event and a second event. Even if there is no causal connection between the two events, there can be an important a-causal relationship that contains something of importance (such as the secretary's refusal). Placed in the context of meaning-making and anticipation, Jung's concept of synchronicity and Van Eenwyk's emphasis on a "symbolic attitude" suggest that the seeming non-content of nothingness can strongly influence the way in which we view and act in the world. We "believe" that the nothingness of non-causally connected events is filled with an important "something." There is something that these events are telling us. Our peremptory ideational train is conveying a message to us about something about which we are ignorant (nothingness). This is something that we must learn.

While it may be important for us to be symbolically attuned and conscious of that which is usually unconscious, it is also critical that we are discerning about that which we should attend and what we must learn from unconscious sources – or even from God (given that the "Devil" can be disguised as a divine source). What is the source of our personal anticipation and the meaning we assign to specific events—and people? Is our assignment based on a rigid, socially-determined anticipation that is aligned with our equally as rigid socially-constructed self—what Jungians call the *Persona*.

As Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 33) notes, our *Persona* tends to operate on the basis of acceptance and rejection. Is it really valid and developmentally mature for us to base our meaning and our anticipations on the probability that other people will find us acceptable? Wilhelm Reich (1933/1980) observed that we can be shielded by character armor to avoid rejection. At this point, as I have suggested regarding the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*, there is not only the rigidity of the armor but also the lost sense of one's heart (Bergquist, 2006).

Perhaps, we can call on the self-wisdom that is contained in what Jungians call our Shadow. Van Eenwyk (1997, p. 33) suggests, "all that which by nature we might be but aren't, due to the demands of our surroundings, comprises the *shadow*." Do we allow alternative perspectives regarding self and alternative anticipations to enter our consciousness – often arising from our *shadow* function? Once again, it is a matter of discernment. Our shadow can be a mischief-maker simply messing with our head and heart. Much as Flip Wilson's "devil made him do it," we can easily make excuses for our aberrant behavior by pointing to our "undeveloped" "anti-social" shadow function—the function that also shows us what we "might be but aren't".

### **Seeking the Future**

As I have noted, the future is envisioned not only by creating something new (emanating from the nothingness of an absent future), but also by identifying, appreciating, and incorporating the vague presence of a good idea about the future which is already present in our personal and collective mind and heart.

*Teddy Bears:* those psychotherapists associated with the object relations school of psychoanalysis write about the Transitional Objects that accompany a child's movement into a new, unknown stage of development. It is important to bring along that teddy bear or piece of blanket from your early childhood when you move into late childhood. Similarly, as adults, we bring along a favorite picture or paperweight from our old desk when moving on to a new job.

William Bridges (1980; 2001) similarly writes about retaining something of our old job/life when transitioning to a new job/life. While we may be glad to leave that old situation, it is important that we not leave it totally behind. We must honor what was good in this situation before moving on to what is new. And, as the object relations analysts would suggest, bring along some relic from the old situation into the new one. The awe-full experience of nothingness, which is contained in the unknown of the new situation, can be mediated by grasping onto your good memories of the past and the adult version of a transitional object that we have carried with us from this recent past. An adult edition of our childhood teddy bear is not such a bad idea.

*Roses:* we can also find support and guidance in our transition from the old to the new by considering the elements of our future contained in our present situation. As in the song, "The Rose" composed by Amanda McBroom and sung by Bette Midler, there is a beautiful vision, strategy, or source of support lingering in the background of our current life or existing in our unconscious (perhaps associated with our ideational train). We see nothing of our Rose during the winter; yet our Rose is there gaining strength (nutrients) so that it might burst from the ground and bloom – displaying something that is remarkable, beautiful—even awe-some. We are likely to find evidence of our soon-to-bloom Rose—or cluster of roses—in our nighttime and daytime dreams (Barrett, 2001), in our fanciful wanders during a dull meeting, in the way we become enthralled with a specific television program or theatrical performance, and/or in the what we know "is not the problem" or "is not the solution" (Schutz, 1994).

*Seeds:* during a period of transition to some future state, we are inevitably flooded with ideas from our own mind and from many other people. I borrow from my colleague, Suzi Pomerantz, who often turns to the snow globe when describing the situation in which we find ourselves in the mid-21st century. When we tip the globe, the snow flutters about and we are often unable to see or think clearly. This need not be a negative condition.

Midst the fluttering, there may be one or more good ideas that can lead us into the future. These ideas from our present situation can serve as "seeds" (or fertilizer) for creation of a new venture out of nothingness. Brainstorming provides us with the opportunity to upend our personal or collective globe so that everything is fluttering around. The facilitators of the Synectic process (Gordon, 1961) go a step further. They propose that there is the seed of a good idea contained in any offering of an idea. One has only to spend a few minutes examining the proposed idea to find this seed.

Don Howard has something specifically to say about the holding of teddy bears and discovery of roses and seeds in our creation of something out of nothing. He is bringing in findings from scientific fields (Howard, 2025, p. 8):

In many popular accounts of cosmology, we're told that the universe arose from "nothing"—as if that were a tidy solution. But if you read closely, the nothing they describe is already loaded. It includes quantum fields, energy fluctuations, mathematical symmetries. In some versions, it's a

vacuum governed by the laws of quantum mechanics. In others, it's a timeless equation from which space and time emerge. But in every case, there's something there: a backdrop, a potential, a structure. Rules. Relations. Possibility.

It seems that there are many ways in which we can bring something (being) out of nothingness. As Howard suggests, the world of nothingness is actually filled with many things and many forces. This world only awaits our access through processes such as paying attention to matters and strange attractors in our life, attending to symbols and dream content, acknowledging the value and messages conveyed by Teddy Bears, participating in brainstorming and Synectic processes, and simply appreciating the many ideas that flutter around our heads and hearts when engaging in a life transition.

### **From Being to Nothingness**

We also should appreciate our capacity to move in the opposite direction. We can take something that exists in our world and deconstruct it to the point where nothing of this object or event seems still to be in existence. This deconstructive process is not a bad thing. Rather, it represents some of the most creative and insightful work that we do as scientists, artists, or critics.

### **Exoscopic Perspective vs. Intrascopic Perspective**

At the heart of this deconstructive process is the distinction drawn between what I would call an *Exoscopic* and *Intrascopic* perspective.

*Exoscopic perspective*: this way of seeing the world represents a shift in viewpoint from outside (being) to inside. This shift involves construction of reality from a blank slate (nothingness) with perceptions arising from the external world that stimulate this construction. The Exoscopic perspective involves the Piagetian (Piaget, 2001) process of Assimilation. External stimuli are assimilated into existing cognitive structures and affective proclivities. Assimilation involves the deletion of anything new and different that is coming in from the outside (this deletion leaves the outside in a state of nothingness).

However, as I have noted throughout this essay, the nothingness of the pre-assimilated and pre-constructed external world has a powerful, if often unacknowledged, impact on the person assimilating the incoming information. For instance, in the preparation of an actor for a specific theatrical performance, attention often is drawn to the costume being worn by the actor and sets designed for this performance. Clothing produces character, and settings impact the way in which an actor enacts the script they are given. The nothingness (pre-processing) of the external world (represented by the costumes and sets) impinges on the “Being” of the actor’s performance.

A dynamic interactive process is established not just for the actor, but also for all of us as we “act” (behave) in the nontheatrical world. The settings in which we dwell influence our behavior, for the dynamics of acting impact our behavior even when we are not performing on stage. Our behavior, in turn, reinforces our beliefs and most importantly (from a polystatic perspective), our anticipation (Bergquist, 2026). What we anticipate, in turn, impacts our neurobiology (allostasis) as well as the actions we take. Something is created out of nothing through the Exoscopic process. Beginning with the “nothingness” of the potential regarding beliefs, anticipations, and neurobiology, there is the actualization of these internal processes with the introduction of external stimuli such as costumes, settings—and actual events occurring in our immediate world.

William James described this Exoscopic process when introducing the situation in which we are running away from a bear. He suggests our strong emotions (fear)—and I would suggest our anticipations—arise because we recognize that we are running away from the bear. For James, the external action (running from the bear) precedes the internal response (fear, activation of the sympathetic system). Whereas there was no fear (and a dominant parasympathetic system) existing inside us prior to beginning to run (sustained by an activated sympathetic), there is now the fear and activation. In essence, there was no fear before the bear showed up. Our physiological system and psychic state were quiet. “Nothing” was happening. Then “all hell broke loose” as the Bear was spotted AND we began to run.

*Cascading Dissonance:* William James was not the only one to embrace the Exoscopic perspective. Leon Festinger’s noted theory of Cognitive Dissonance operates in a similar manner (Festinger, 1957). We operate with a “settled” set of assumptions most of the time. “Nothing” is happening. Then something occurs that challenges these assumptions. Cognitive dissonance abounds. Something must happen. We must adjust our perception of what has occurred out there in the world—and therefore need not act upon the challenging conditions. Alternatively, we take action in response to the challenging conditions. We must then adjust our beliefs or even our sense of self based on how we have chosen to act.

For instance, we are meeting with a dear friend, who asks our opinion regarding a presentation they made at a town meeting last week. We firmly believe that their presentation was confusing and not an effective presentation. It certainly was not helping your friend’s cause (which you also support). One of our core beliefs is that we are an honest person. This belief is rarely apparent. It resides along with many other beliefs about myself in the tacit (unconscious) domain of my self-perception (Polanyi, 2009). This core belief has been aroused by the external request made by my friend.

Another core belief is also aroused. I believe I am a caring person who doesn’t want to hurt the feelings of people who are my friends. This core belief is also tacitly held. Both core beliefs are usually non-existent in my ongoing management of interpersonal relationships. However, they are both suddenly aroused and conflict with one another. Dissonance exists. Festinger would suggest that this dissonance is profoundly uncomfortable. We will do just about anything to eliminate the dissonance and return our psychic state to consonance.

So, what action do I take? I tell my friend that his presentation was fine. It might have used a little refinement; however, the real reason for negative reactions probably was the stubbornness and sheer ignorance of those attending the meeting when they spoke against my friend’s presentation. What is the result of this dishonest and distorting statement (other people at the meeting were quite astute and open to my friend’s ideas)? First, a state of dissonance was now produced related to my self-perception of honesty and my performance of a dishonest act. I can resolve the dissonance by asserting that my commitment to being kind overrides my commitment to be honest. This doesn’t work very well, because I remain uncomfortable about not being “actually”

I can also distort reality. I can actually choose to believe that my friend did a fine job and can blame those receiving his message. This resolution also doesn’t work very well, for I am still tethered to reality. There is a third self-perception related to my ability to view reality in an objective manner. My distorted version regarding those listening to by Friend’s message doesn’t sit very well with this self-perception. Dissonance once again is raging in my head and heart.

There is one other option. I can avoid situations in the future where I am forced to confront my warring self-perceptions. This means avoiding attending sessions when my friend is making a presentation. It might also mean that I avoid future interactions with my friend. After all, “it was unfair that my friend put me on the spot regarding my opinion of his performance”. He is a “toxic” source of dissonance for me; so, I better steer clear of him—at least regarding the world of public affairs.

We see in this cascading avalanche of dissonance that things can get quite “messy” when we try to operate under the guidance of alternative self-perceptions that can, at times, be in conflict. We yearn for the return of these self-perceptions to the status of tacit “nothingness.” This may mean that we even sacrifice a friendship or an accurate sense of reality on behalf of retaining consonance and nothingness. All-too-often, our contemporary political world produces a strong incentive to avoid people with differing political persuasions and to create “alternative realities.” We take these drastic and often damaging actions so that we might preserve consonance and protect a domain of nothingness in which we insert our self-perceptions (Weitz and Bergquist, 2025; Bergquist, Weitz and Pomerantz, 2026).

*Intrascopic perspective:* as we move on from the Exoscopic perspective to the Intrascopic perspective, we find a move from the inside to the outside. The way we feel (the somatic template), our past experiences, and, in particular, what we anticipate about the external world and the reactions to our actions in this world produce our behavior where there was none before (nothingness). As we know, the movement from anticipation to action is quite challenging. Many cortical sectors are required to translate thought and feelings into action. Apparently, Will Power is a big thing. Furthermore, many mental health issues (especially depression) center on this capacity to “exert our will” and move from our internal processes to external engagements.

William James introduced a real bear, from which we run. However, we are more likely to imagine a bear attacking us when we venture into the woods than we are to actually encounter a bear. Robert Sapolsky (2004) writes about the imagined lion and proposes that we frequently imagine the attacking lion, or the attack by other threatening entities (such as an upcoming board meeting or interview for a new job). We imagine the bear/lion/meeting/interview and become aroused in preparation for a fight—or at least an anxiety-filled encounter. At times, we imagine not a fight, but instead a flight. We choose to avoid the meeting or cancel the interview. There is a third “F” that we might engage when we are actually about to meet with committee members or with the person who will be interviewing. This third “F” is freeze. We find it hard to speak at the committee meeting or during the interview and break out in a cold sweat (indicating that our sympathetic system is operating at full force without us taking any action).

An intrascopic perspective is prevalent when we consider our neurophysiological and behavioral reactions when anticipating a threatening experience. There is “nothing there,” but we react as if there is something actually there to threaten us. The committee meeting and interview are likely to be much less damaging to our ego than we imagine it will be. As human beings, we are “gifted’--and cursed—with the capacity to imagine roaring lions, attacking bears, dreadful meetings, and challenging interviews. We can add something dreadful to the Void of anticipation and to the nothingness of present, unprocessed reality.

*Dissonance-Redux:* Leon Festinger’s cognitive dissonance is in full operation when we introduce an Intrascopic perspective. We begin with our beliefs, feelings, and self-concepts, and then adjust our behavior so that it is in accord with our beliefs and, especially, our image of self. If we reintroduce our narrative about

giving feedback to a friend, the dissonance begins not with the request for feedback regarding a presentation. Rather, it begins with our reflections on the meeting where our friend made his presentation. I wince a bit when reviewing what he said and how he reacted to critical (and noncritical) comments made by others at the meeting. I wonder if I can somehow provide him with feedback that would be constructive. As in the case of the Exoscopic-based example I already offered, the self-perceptions of both honesty and caring come to the surface, out of “nothingness” (tacitly held senses of self).

I wonder if I “should” provide the feedback. And if I do provide it, how do I make it helpful to my friend—and present it in a manner that does not damage my cherished relationship with this friend? Perhaps I say nothing. Would this “ghost” of betraying my self-perception of honesty “haunt” my future relationship with my friend, especially if he is “wounded” by the outcomes of his presentation? I have been the firefighter who stood by while my friend’s house is burning! My inaction creates an untenable dissonance. So, I decide to take action.

Can I somehow “ease-in” to providing my friend with feedback. I tell him how wonderful his presentation was (which is a lie) but suggest that there are “a couple of things” he might consider. As Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) have shown, easing-in rarely works. The recipient of our message will “know” that we are offering a “sandwich” message with the “real” feedback being the “meat” and the positive stuff being the unimportant bun that is presented before and after the “meat.” So, I have enough “emotional intelligence” to avoid the easing-in strategy.

Perhaps, I present my friend with a book about effective communication. I am doing an “end run” by offering a book rather than my own reactions. I can also lie and indicate that I “have heard” comments made by other attending the meeting and want to share these complaints with my friend. This alternative end-run is usually detected by other people and leads to mistrust of my feedback and resulting defensive behavior. Another self-concept comes to the surface out of nothingness. This self-concept concerns my interpersonal skills. I have a high EQ (Emotional Intelligence) (Goleman, 1995); but it doesn’t show up when giving indirect or sandwiched feedback to my friend.

What if I “try honesty” (favorite phrase used many years ago by Jack Gibb)? I provide not just a direct description of what I observed regarding my friend’s presentation, but also what I perceive to be the various forms of reactions he got to specific portions of his presentation. Without “sugar coating” my feedback, I try to introduce some of the strengths, as well as shortfalls, of his presentation (an appreciative approach related to “catching them when they’re doing it right”). I indicate what I believe are the positive outcomes associated with my friend “doing it right.” I don’t just say, “you did a good job at this point during your presentation.”

What would it look like if I provided this honest, detailed, and appreciative feedback to my friend? I risk losing my friendship, for my friend could interpret my behavior as being “nonsupportive” of his risk-taking performance at the meeting. My friend could challenge me regarding my participation (or non-participation) at the meeting: “I didn’t see you standing up and speaking your mind.” My friend might, rightfully, provide me with feedback regarding my lack of public support for his views. I was sitting in the stands and taking (critical) notes, while my friend was out there on the playing field getting hit from all sides. It is very possible that my friend’s poor performance resulted from his own level of anxiety. He feared that the lions were attacking him, and the resulting sympathetic (fight/flight/freeze) state would be of no benefit. Perhaps I

should be assisting my friend in preparing for future meetings and providing the kind of support for him that could help him reduce the anxiety.

What do I do if my friend reacts “negatively” to what I have presented or if my friend is offering me some critical feedback regarding my feedback to him? I can easily become defensive, accuse my friend of becoming defensive, and co-produce an interpersonal experience that is undesirable and counterproductive for both of us. We both wish that everything could retreat to nothingness. However, the lid is open. We can’t put the negative interactions back in the box. What we can do is keep the lid open and spend time talking about what has just occurred.

*Meta-Communication:* this process of talking about what was just being talked about is often called “meta-communication” (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967). First, I set aside some real time with my friend and find a “safe” and comfortable place in which to provide him with my feedback. I begin our meeting by disclosing something about my own unease in providing him with feedback. I want to be helpful and would like to devote some time at the conclusion of our feedback session to talk about how we both felt about the meeting and what we think has been accomplished.

Before providing my feedback, I also suggest that I want not just to present my feedback but also want my friend to provide their observations about what happened at the meeting and their comments on how my feedback is and is not both valid and helpful. This process is called “advocacy-inviting-inquiry” (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Argyris and Schön, 1978). By introducing this collaborative, introspective perspective, we have been honest in sharing our own feelings and concerns. We have been caring in requesting our friend to provide us with feedback. The self-concepts of honesty and caring are both manifest in this initial framing of the feedback session.

With the feedback from me to my friend, and my friend to me having been engaged, we reflect on what went well and what didn’t work in this “crucial conversation” (Grenny, et al., 2021). This “meta-communication” not only helps to ensure that both parties are clear about what has been shared; it also helps to nurture the relationship itself. Both my friend and I can anticipate that future interactions will not only be constructive but also sources of important interpersonal learning for both of us.

From an Exoscopic perspective, we have both gained new insights regarding how we take in, assimilate, and make use of information from external sources (including feedback from our friends). From an Intrascopic perspective, we gain important insights regarding how our existing assumptions, fears, and hopes—as well as imagined lions, bears, meetings and relationships—influence our behavior. How do we gain “a little help from our friends” so that the lions, bears, meetings, and relationships are a little less anxiety-provoking and a little more constructively engaged?

### **Analytic vs. Synthetic**

I wish to take one final swipe at the critical interplay between nothingness and Being (something). This swipe concerns the deeply embedded distinction drawn between two fundamental modes of inquiry and theory-building in intellectual history.

*Analytic Tradition:* on the one hand, there is the strong analytic tradition that is fundamental to the modern natural and behavioral sciences and to critical analysis of many art forms. The analytic process involves

breaking things down into their smallest parts and then putting them back together again. Most importantly, breaking something down into its smallest parts often involves risking the creation of nothingness. Very small parts easily disappear. Their relationship with one another is inevitably quite elusive. We atomize and discover that there is ultimately nothing there. Some biologists describe the outcome as a “smashed frog.” We have dissected the frog but are left with a cluster of parts that produce no life when stitched back together.

The more detailed and microscopic the analysis, the closer one comes to nothingness: e.g. from atoms to subatomic – mostly “nothing.” As Don Howard (2025, p. 14) notes:

A rare change in tone—but not in substance—came with early atomism. In the 5th century BCE, Democritus envisioned a universe built from indivisible particles-atoms-drifting through a background void. This void was no true nothingness, but an empty space that made motion possible. Even in this early nod toward absence, nothingness was treated as functional rather than foundational, framed within an existing structure rather than the collapse of one.

The analytic tradition moves well beyond the physical sciences. Behaviorism in the field of psychology involves the breaking of human activities down into isolated behaviors that are predictable, measurable, and often manageable. Similarly, in the fields of sociology and anthropology there is a long-standing tradition of searching for fundamental units (e.g. memes) that are to be found in all societies and cultures. Economics has its own analytic tradition with the reduction of complex economic behaviors to fundamental structures, processes and motivations (e.g. utilities).

The deconstruction that occurs in literary criticism and the critical review of contemporary society and culture often yields important, hidden insights regarding societal and cultural biases, the deep meaning inherent in tacitly accepted trends and fashions, and the ultimate foundation of all “facts” in social constructions of reality. Fundamentally, deconstruction reveals the “nothingness” to be found in any claim of objectivity and impartiality. When an assertion, description, or (ultimately) any uttered statement is dissected, there remains only the intentions of the person delivering this statement. And these intentions are often difficult to “pin down.” They flutter about like flakes in Suzi Pomerantz’ snow globe.

In recent years, there has also appeared the “deconstruction” of specific culinary dishes at innovative restaurants. For instance, rather than serving a Caesar Salad with all the ingredients intermixed, a “deconstructed” salad is served with the lettuce, croutons, parmesan cheese, and slices of anchovy positioned separately on the plate. The intermixed ingredients are replaced with the “nothingness” of the unassembled salad. The person being served is offered the intriguing and often gustatorily splendid experience of placing the ingredients together in their own preferred way in preferred portions.

*Synthetic Tradition:* counter to the analytic tradition is the synthetic tradition. Fundamental to this second tradition is the assumption that we can only identify “something” when we synthesize: (a) put things together, and/or (b) identify patterns and meaning. This second tradition is commonly found in the humanities, in many of the behavioral sciences (including humanistic psychology and cultural anthropology). It is in the attempt to stick things together, to find what is held in common by several entities, and to discover meaning and purpose in that which initially seems to be meaningless and purposeless.

Much of what I have attempted in this essay comes from the Synthetic tradition. Along with Don Howard, John Van Eenwyck, George Klein, Carl Jung, Rudolph Otto, and many other “synthesizers,” I have been trying to “make sense” of nothingness. We synthesizers construct “from whole cloth” and interpret that which might ultimately be nothing but randomness. Everything is an ink plot, and we, as human beings, are great at generating a story about the splattering of ink on a blank piece of paper. Ultimately, we are pulled, as *homo constructus*, toward a synthesized (often simplified) version of reality.

*Synchronicity-Redux*: at the extreme of the synthetic tradition, we find the concept of synchronicity. As I have already mentioned, Carl Jung proposed that perceptible events are linked together imperceptible. An “acausal” connection is established between two or more entities. Meaning and purpose are to be discovered among a variety of entities that seem unrelated to one another. At first glance, their relationship seems circumstantial. Or it is found only in the mind and heart of the observing person. However, with further exploration, there is something that ties the events together—and important guidance can be found in this exploration.

According to Jung (1960, p. 25), synchronicity “means the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state.” The key point in this statement is that Jung finds the unifying force (the “glue”) which brings and holds external events together is to be found not in their causal relationship, but instead in one’s internal psychic state.

As a noted Jungian, Ira Progoff (193, pp. 13-14) has drawn an important distinction:

... Jung’s work ... enables him to deal with “psychological facts” without making them “nothing but” psychological. There is a dimension of human experience that is not external to us in the sense that it can be directly and tangibly grasped. Rather, it is within us, but the word *within* must also be understood metaphorically. It reflects a depth in us as human beings and also depth of the universe. Perceiving one, we perceive the other. But we cannot do so directly, as we would in laying our hands on something and grasping it. We can only do so indirectly, or symbolically.

Thus, we are led once again to the powerful role played by symbols, especially in capturing something about our vast internal psyche and equally as vast as the universe in which we dwell. It is through the use of symbols that we can not only convey something about nothingness and its transformation into Being, but also about the events that seem related to one another in an acausal vacuum.

*Weak and Strong Synchronicity*: I would also suggest another addition to (or perhaps modification) of Jung’s concept of synchronicity. I would differentiate between what I would call *Weak Synchronicity* and *Strong Synchronicity*. The weak form is manifest in the way we are attuned to specific events in our world because of the dynamics occurring in our psyche. There is the sparkle that we experience when some object or person in our outside world aligns with something that we are dwelling on inside ourselves. For instance, Lewis, Amini, and Lannon (2000) write about the limbic resonance (emotional attunement) that occurs when we are drawn to another person. Several events might be tied together because they similarly resonate. They make us feel honored, hopeful, or loved. Or, on a more negative side, they produce similar fear or sense of hopelessness or helplessness.

These weak connections can be strengthened if they frequently recur. While there might not be any causal connection between these events, they may have a long, well-established psychic connection based in part on their ongoing association with specific schema (Paul, 1966: Bartlett, 1995) such as a place of sanctuary and safety, or a pathway to success. The schema might, in turn, be affiliated with a specific archetype, thus giving it additional emotional charge and making the weak synchronicity that much more impactful (perhaps becoming a strong form of synchronicity).

While the Weak form of synchronicity can usually be captured with psychological terms such as limbic resonance and schemata, the Strong form of synchronicity holds a transcendent meaning that is definitely related to a specific archetype, as well as being expanded and reinforced by other elements (such as anima and animus) in the human psyche. Jung identifies several internal psychic structures as critical to many synchronistic occurrences. The archetype which I have mentioned often in this essay is frequently the meeting ground for several, seemingly independent events.

According to Jung (1960, p. 20):

. . . archetypes are formal factors responsible for the organization of unconscious psychic processes: they are “patterns of behavior.” At the same time they have a “specific charge” and develop numinous effects which express themselves as affects. . . . [C]ertain phenomena of simultaneity or synchronicity seem to be bound up with archetypes.

Thus, we see in the conceptions of Carl Jung the synthesizing of numinous, patterns (fractals), and synchronicity.

*Attraction and Acausality:* as I mentioned earlier, the numinostic experience acts as a strange attractor pulling in memories, feelings (affect), and events, much as an avalanche does in plummeting down a mountainside. Some of the events being pulled in might not have a “causal” relationship with one another; however, they have an acausal, synchronistic relationship because they have been drawn into the numinous. I would similarly suggest that acausal events might appear connected because they are both passengers on George Klein’s ideational train. This train may be quite long, carrying many synchronic events and images.

The train, or at least the domain of synchronicity, might be connected not just to specific moments in time, but also to a broader spectrum of expanded space. “Synchronicity,” according to Progoff (1973, p. 161), “may occur in the universe on all its levels, but implicit in its definition as involving *meaningful* coincidence is the presence of an *organ of meaning* that is an inherent part of each synchronistic event.” Acausally connected events will have great power. It relates, as Ira Progoff mentions, to our sense of personal and collective identity.

I propose that synchronicity may be one of the most important conditions that brings Being out of nothingness. It is an “organ of meaning” that brings about a continuity of life experiences, a sense of life purpose—and a guide to human destiny.

## Conclusions

There is one final question to be addressed in this first essay on nothingness. And it is a very challenging question. Is everything I have said in this essay misdirected? Does the concept of nothingness continue to be

elusive? Has it slipped through my fingers? Does my nothingness always contain “something”? Should I turn to the analytic tradition and find that nothingness is simply a specific state representing most of the universe, especially when the universe is carefully and minutely examined?

Don Howard addresses this fundamental question in the initial pages of his book (*Before Being*) (Howard, 2025, pp.10-11). I quote him extensively, because, like me, he is grappling with this elusive matter of nothingness (Howard, 2025, p. 10):

We can define true nothingness. We can describe what it is not. We can use language to outline the edges of absence. But we cannot image it—not purely, not without smuggling something in. Every attempt conjures traces of being: some sense of space, some dim volume, some vantage point. We might picture a black expanse, an infinite fog, a blank screen with the brightness turned all the way down. But these are metaphors with the furniture stripped away. They still imply space, contrast, orientation. They still rest on the scaffolding of being.

Howard might have to embrace a more analytic perspective. Perhaps he should consult with the folks from Vienna who focus on questions that have answers which can be empirically validated and those that are “metaphysical” (speculative/without answers that can be validated). However, he is moving beyond the bounds of empirical verification (which requires that something exists which can be measured and verified) (Howard, 2025, pp. 10-11):

Even the idea of absence assumes a reference point: something that once was, or could be, or should be. The moment we say "nothing," we have already imported the grammar of something. We cannot help it. We are creatures of relation, shaped by structure, encoded by time. Our minds are formed by difference and boundary. Even erasure only makes sense against a backdrop that allows something to be erased.

Howard (2025, p. 11) pushes further:

Try to imagine not a black void, but the absence of void. Not silence, but the absence of the very conditions that make silence possible. Not emptiness, but no space in which emptiness could reside. No rules to suspend. No background to strip away. No logic to violate. No dimension in which anything might begin—or fail to begin.

You cannot do it. Neither can I. And this is not a personal limitation; it is a cognitive fact. No part of the human brain evolved to simulate non-being. Every tool we possess for thinking—every metaphor we devise, every abstraction we construct, every image we summon—assumes contrast. It assumes form. It assumes presence, even if only in negative space.

Howard reframes this major challenge as an opportunity. It is an opportunity that is lost upon those who stick to an empirical perspective and to the belief that the researcher and observer of reality can be objective (Howard, 2025, p. 11):

,, , this failure may itself be instructive. It tells us something—not yet about the world, but about ourselves. We are not neutral observers. We are participants in a reality that has already begun. We

are made of being. We live inside time. We communicate through difference. So when we attempt to imagine nothingness—true nothingness—we are trying to simulate a condition from which we ourselves are excluded. A condition with no "we," no space to occupy, no mind to imagine, no process to unfold.

In that sense, the attempt is doomed from the start, because imagining is already something. And yet we try. Why?

It is at this point that we move into the heart of this series of essays on the psychology of nothingness (Howard, 2025, p. 11):

Because even if we cannot visualize it, we can gesture toward it. We can recognize what it would have to be, even if we cannot hold it in thought. We can subtract and subtract until nothing is left to take away. And when we reach that vanishing point, we can still ask: Why did it not remain that way?

If true nothingness is not only unimaginable but unstable—if it gives way, spontaneously, to being—then something remarkable has occurred. Something metaphysical. Something foundational.

In the following three essays, I explore something more about the remarkable matter of nothingness.

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