

Session Number: 1.1 Why am I Here?
Metaphysics & Mystery - An Online Course
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Lauren Buckley: So I spent a long time thinking about what I wanted to ask Charles. I have this philosopher in front of me; I get to ask him whatever I want. He doesn't call himself a philosopher, but he is and I couldn't get away from this topic of metaphysics and how it affects me in my personal life and I had some cacao a little bit ago and I realize like the deep down reason for why. I can't get away from that. It's hard for me to even pay attention to the more earthly question sometimes without these being answered at least a little bit. I felt this six year old in me, this inner child who was asking these questions all the time of my Dad a lot of the times or anybody who'd listen. "Why am I here? Why is mom sick? What do you mean the universe is big and what exists beyond the universe and how does the universe end or if it does end what's beyond it or if it's nothingness how is that a thing? He was very patient. He would sit with me and answer these questions which I'm very grateful for, but ultimately he didn't have answers to most of these things of course. A lot of the answers he did have were, "this is what physics knows at this point." We came from the big bang and everything is just randomness running into each other and the universe is expanding and eventually it'll expand so far that it's cold and everything dies and then it'll contract and explode again. There may not be anything beyond it and all this. Most of the time people wouldn't entertain these questions and it was like, "stop overanalyzing things, you're super weird," but there's this very deep place in my heart that wants to know why I'm here. I spent the first 22 years of my life in science mainly because I wanted to explore the universe on the most fundamental level possible so I studied chemistry and biochemistry and the answers are bleak. The answers are what my Dad would tell me about. Everything is just increasing entropy until there's nothing and I think I've learned to suppress these questions and to sort of just try to enjoy my experience of life or to try to create my own meaning like, "well I'm here anyway. I may as well make the best of it," but there is the most core place in me that wants to be connected to something that matters, to something bigger and I'm like "I'm never going to stop asking these questions." There may not be answers, but I at least want to know what can be known about why I'm here or why my life matters or what the point is. When things get really, really, really quiet and I'm not in a place of distracting myself with the feeling of meaning through my work or my relationships. When I get really, really quiet and honest there's like a spiritual sickness in there that's like, "OK but I'm not satisfied with any of the answers that I've gotten." There's like a disconnection there. There's like a very vulnerable little six year old in there that still has no idea. There are philosophies that feel better than others, but there is like a huge uncertainty and most people don't really want to go there or they're just not interested in it. So I have an opportunity here to talk to somebody who's been thinking about this longer than me. I don't expect him to have the answers. It's not the all knowing guru or anything, but he is a delightful nerd. Yeah, so this is for six year old Lauren. So Charles, you may have noticed I'm often asking you questions about metaphysics and I've noticed you don't always love to answer them. I've been asking myself a lot like, "why do I really want to know this and why can I not let it go?" It's like I crave it deep down and it's because I don't know why I'm here and I don't know what the point is, and I'm afraid there isn't a point, and I'm afraid of deluding myself into thinking there's a point when there really isn't or it's actually a different point. I'm afraid of missing out on the point. I want to be part of a meaningful life, meaningful relationships, a meaningful species, a meaningful planet, a meaningful universe and I want to know what is actually happening (laughs). It's easy to see nihilism or existentialism as making a lot of sense, but they do not feel very good. It's easy for me to see why religion would be comforting, but for me it seems contrived. Scared to say

that, controversial, but it doesn't feel right to me and I can't bring myself to believe it. So here I am in a space between stories. I exited mainstream science, what I see as the religion now that I was indoctrinated into for the first twenty two years my life. I still love science, but I also now see its limitations and see the dogma in it. I've been exploring these agnostic and secular spiritual communities and I feel surrounded by misinformation, disinformation, people with agendas, people with "the answer," people with certainty who think they have it all figured out, people who over represent their knowledge and understanding of this stuff and people projecting certainty for whatever reason, maybe their own deep down existential fear or maybe for profit, I don't know. Although the process of learning and seeking new ideas and new experiences is a total flow state for me, it's also disillusioning to look for so long and find so little. It turns out it takes a pretty special brain to have the patience and talent to even make a half decent attempt at wrapping your head around this topic of metaphysics. So this is me thinking Charles has been thinking about metaphysics, the meaning of life, how to live a meaningful, life for decades longer than me and in a totally different way, a way that I don't use my brain to go Myers Briggs for a second in an INTJ way. He is smart and not guru-ee. He doesn't think he has the answers or think he's the chosen one and that is why I want his thoughts on these things. Even though it might feel totally out of his depth and even if he feels afraid that he might be like dipping his toes into guru territory, there are seven point five billion people on this planet that are flailing about in all kinds of ways because they don't know why they're here and they don't know if anything matters and they don't know if they matter. It feels like this is such a core sickness that most people share and maybe not everyone will want this huge abstract topic addressed directly, but enough people will. This subject metaphysics is at the tippy-top of everything and not that many people can reach the tippy-top or even try or even find it interesting and here we have Charles who's probably been thinking about this his entire life, I would guess, and yes many of these questions, maybe all of them, are ultimately unanswerable, but there's some wisdom and knowledge in there. Even just like a lay of the land would be incredible. To me this is like the most transcendent level of a radicalization of love and to use Myers Briggs language again, I can tell you that the less than ten percent of people that lead with an intuitive cognitive function are going to want to go to this information first so badly that they will never stop asking you about it. Almost nobody serves that population well. Knowing all that, my main question is, "what would you say to somebody like me?" because I think there are a lot of people in this situation. If not, I am (laughs).

C.E.: I really appreciate this inquiry and invitation to speak on these things. The first thing that comes to mind though is maybe my favorite saying from the Tao Teh Ching. I like to say it in Chinese just because it has such beautiful poetics. "Chur chen po yen, yen cha po chur (rough translation), which literally means, and you've heard it before, "those who know do not say and those who say do not know." It's not because those who know are holding back on saying. It's that translated into words it becomes something other than the truth because this inquiry is highly personal. It's not to say that there isn't an answer that might come to you through your inquiry and through your processes of life, but that answer translated into words may not be the answer for another person. The answer has to grow from within rather than being placed from without. That doesn't mean that coming across spiritual teachings, metaphysical teachings, that that's not useful, but those have to be met with an inner development and the particular words or teachings that meet the inner development are personal. So somebody who is in the role of a spiritual teacher or a guru or something like that, which as Lauren said isn't me, but someone who is in that role will know when and how to meet the germinating inquiry and processes of another person with the right words for that person. What I would start by saying is that this is the right question and the value of the

question “why am I here” doesn't depend on it achieving an answer, but it drives a life process. One thing I really appreciate about some of the things that Lauren was saying is that she's not satisfied with a false answer and is staying with the question, and that's really all that's required is to stay with the question. I would also say that it's a dangerous question in a certain sense because it opens the floodgates to a lot of different energies, different inheritances that we have from our culture. It opens up the floodgates to despair, to the esoteric teachings of the religion that Lauren referred to, the religion of science. You could look at an end and it goes to a very, very dark place. You could look at science as a mystery school where there are different levels of initiation, there's kind of the popular version and then there are the levels that are only available to high initiates, those who have studied mathematics for example, those who have studied physics. They're able to get more than just the popularized version. They're able to really understand what is meant by a universe composed of atoms and void, a universe composed of pure information or a universe devolving toward entropy and to grasp the horrifying enormity of that concept. That's what can come in through this inquiry and I think a lot of people instinctively don't want to really go there and just to live lives that are oblivious to the horrifying esoteric teachings of our religion, the religion of science. I'll just say that that religion is today crumbling on its own merits, that even from a purely rational logical place it has inconsistencies and limitations and incongruence with observed reality. It can be maintained by ignoring those inconsistencies and incongruities and if we're doing that, if we're maintaining it in that way with this secret voice saying you know it's true, but really what is true is not that we know that it's true. What's true is that we're afraid that it's true and so to recognize that what is masquerading as reason is actually fear. It's fear masquerading as reason that we're afraid that it's true, but on an observational level and on a logical level there is really no good reason to accept the truth of this particular religion, of the teachings of this particular mystery school over some other ones, but these teachings are in alignment with the whole culture. So you'll notice I have not given any answers to what is the point of life, “why am I here?” But maybe I'll say that the reason for life is life. The reason for life is to make more life. The reason for life is to bring more life into all that is, to make the universe more and more and more alive, that life is unfolding into greater and greater livingness and that the point is to be, and this is just one way to look at things, but it can expand to an awful lot. The point is to be part of the livingness and the increasing livingness of life. This goes opposite, to go into a scientific frame, this is the opposite of the teaching of entropy which says the universe is essentially winding down toward heat death where everything is just one uniform black body at four degrees Kelvin or something like that, spread over the entire universe. That's the end of things and maybe it'll be a big crunch after this is all said and done, but depending on which theory you subscribe to or which interpretation of data you subscribe to, maybe it'll just keep expanding forever until it's this diffuse amorphous uniform massive of particles. That's what the story of science, the religion of science has taught us. The universe is winding down, but what we've been learning for the last 50 years through complexity theory, through cybernetics, through non-linear dynamics, is that systems through which energy is moving, where there's a flux of energy, tend toward greater and greater and greater complexity. If you look at the universe as a flux of energy then you see that this complexity and life is a stage, it's the name that we give to a certain stage of this complexity. It's increasing along an arrow of time. It's the opposite of what the mystery school has told us. In other words, the nature of reality is toward life, to become more and more alive, to become more and more complex and we can see this in the history of the earth. Conventional near Darwinian biology essentially thinks that life is an accident. There was, by chance, a replicating molecule that began to reproduce itself and then it mutated and more efficient reproducing versions developed and then some of them built protein coats around themselves and lipid membranes

around themselves and it all got more and more complicated, better and better at reproducing themselves. That's the fundamental driver of everything, a chemical accident. What we're seeing, I guess this is maybe a suggestion that I take from complexity theory, is that this is a universal process that happens in any sufficiently complex system with nonlinear feedbacks, that the universe and reality is pregnant with life, life always wanting to burst forth and can only be suppressed with great effort actually. I'm seeing then this incomprehensibly vast exfoliation of order from the unicellular level to the multicellular to the level of humans and ecosystems and societies and civilizations and these are just maybe a few of the early steps toward the universe coming alive. We don't actually understand how alive the universe is. The dominant cosmological models today are all based on gravitation which is pretty darn linear. I mean you can calculate things very, very precisely by integrating all of the different gravitational components, whereas the minority view of cosmology, which is based on electromagnetism and plasma physics, is highly nonlinear. If you look at a map of the universe through the lens of plasma you get all these structures. If you look at the sun through the electromagnetic lens you see these incredibly complicated structures or I would actually say complex structures and the whole thing looks alive. You have the feeling that you're looking at this living thing. That only becomes available, that view only becomes available when you look for it. The alienated self in a universe of atoms and void that grinds along mechanically toward heat death, that is a myth. It's a story. It is one way of looking at things and that way of looking at things corresponds to a state of being that is an evolutionary stage in human development. It is an expression of the course of separation as I call it. It is the quintessence of separation. So separate we are that we deny the livingness of the universe itself and our part in it. I think that in order to move past this particular level of development it needs to be inhabited in all of its fullness and that's where the last few generations have gone. It's to the full "groking" of this metaphysical teaching, this which goes along with the state of being, a profound existential alienation from the universe where you are nothing but a biochemical accident. A fuzz of biochemistry whirling along and living out your life until you're snuffed out at the end and that's it. I'm not going to disprove that. It is a full on state of being and there really is no disproof possible because no matter what evidence you're offered, even if you've had communications from deceased relatives where you've had experiences that just do not fit into that worldview, you can still dismiss them. They don't meet that state of being on its own terms necessarily. They only meet the intellectual layer of that state of being. What meets it on its own terms are experiences like having a near-death experience maybe or a religious spiritual mystical experience or a psychedelic experience. They just invalidate the entire... like you've moved on and once you've moved on on that deeper level then alternative cosmologies become very attractive and common sense. Maybe that's why the sage that Laozi speaks of does not say even though he knows because maybe he recognizes that this process is full inhabiting of that state of being, needs to ripen to its bursting point until it's ready to move on to something else. I think that this ripening is happening on a collective level and that many of us are really done with it, no longer need to be there. It is a couple hundred years old. My favorite formulation of it was Bertrand Russell. This was a hundred and some years ago that basically he said, "we cannot reasonably deny that the universe is nothing but a collocation of atoms bouncing around according to mathematical forces." We can't deny that and so he said, "any philosophy, any authentic honest philosophy, it must be built on a firm foundation of unyielding despair." That's what he said. Only that will be a sound foundation for constructing a habitation for the human soul. Pretty bleak, but he was like Lauren, he was like, "hey, I'm not going to accept any comforting delusionary substitutes for the truth." This was before the scientific underpinnings of that worldview began to crumble, this before quantum mechanics, before chaos theory. Those are the two main pillars of the religion, the

metaphysics of science that are in fact no longer scientifically current. We're still working through the legacy trauma of that worldview and I think it echoes with other experiences of alienation and despair that our culture visits upon us. It's the distillation of all of those. So I can offer this alternative scenario of an unfolding of life and a universe coming alive and us being part of that coming alive and even us being a holographic map of this unfolding. It may offer a little comfort if it doesn't touch the core wound that magnetizes the story of the dead mechanical universe to it. I would also say that alongside the fear that that's true you never fully succumb to it. There's always an intonation of a larger world story, a larger reality. What I'm offering here is a world story that includes the story of separation that Lauren spoke of, the entropy, the heat death of the universe, the meaninglessness all that, it includes that inside of a larger story. It says yeah, that is a phase of human development, a phase of civilization, a phase of consciousness. A necessary phase, but just a phase. So I'm offering an inclusion of that into a larger story, but that will be of scant solace if that phase has not fully reached its maturity. I will point then also, what carries us through that phase is the intimation of a larger reality, a spark of knowledge that that isn't all there is to it. That can stay alive even when the mind completely rejects it, when the mind fully accepts the biomechanical machine and a dead soulless universe story. You can feel the presence of that inside of you alongside the fear. Yeah, that's what I would say initially. One reason I'm hesitant to go into metaphysics, I mean for one thing I don't want to over represent my knowledge. What I've said fits, it's logically coherent to me and so it has an aesthetic appeal, but I don't know it. I tend to be oriented toward beauty and if something is elegant and beautiful and coherent I want to try it out, but that fear lives in me too the fear of, "come on Charles, you know that this is just a delusion that in the end you're just yourself, a collocation of atoms with the illusion of consciousness," denying that until you get snuffed out too. My practice is to recognize that as a state of being and a story and to be willing and open to experiences that prove that wrong. It is a bit of a familiar abode and be careful what you wish for because what does it call you into if you are here indeed to serve life, to be life? What ways have you habituated to the story that we grew up in? There's a lot here. In order to maintain the story of separation you got to dismiss a lot of stuff. Your sense of humor, you got to dismiss that as some kind of cynically putting a cheerful cover on something, but you can't say that that humor comes from a deep knowing that this is all some kind of game. You have to rewrite a lot of things. You have to interpret a lot of things to fit that narrative and at some point you start asking, "why am I so intent on conforming everything to this narrative? Why am I so intent on writing off every spiritual experience that I have or maybe I don't have any, but the people are telling me about left and right. Oh, they must just be deluding themselves." This is a kind of separation too, to reject the reports of other people, to write off people who are not living in that story as being subject to some kind of delusion because I know better than them. I would be suspicious of that. Do you really know better than them? Do you know that you know? Why are you so sure? I hope that was helpful Lauren. I'll say one more thing about this question "Why am I here?" or "What's the point?" Not everybody needs to ask that question. What's important is not to ask that question. What's important is not to deny that question when it comes up and wants you to ask it. Once it comes up, once you've reached that phase where it's coming up and depending on your circumstances, your lineage, your psychic constitution, it could come up at age five or six, it could come up at adolescence very commonly, could come up in middle age, could come up through the dying process, but when it does come up it can be denied only at great cost to your soul. So you don't need to rush into that question. As Lauren was saying, maybe 90 percent of the people are not that interested in such metaphysical questions, but if it's up for you then it's important to accept that question, to let it in and to let it work you. That's what it really does is it works you. It won't let you go and you can pretend, and this is what Lauren was wary of, to

somehow quell it, to offer it a booby prize compensation, a sop to make it go away, to deny it. Once it's up for you you can only deny it by walling off part of yourself and living partially. Once it's up I really do invite you to let it in.