Causality, God, and the Limits of Explanation

An ontological clarification of religion, meaning, and responsibility

Author: Alexander Wolfgang Strüver
Date: February 2026
Location: Thailand

License: Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

Abstract:

If you take causality seriously, you inherit a responsibility that is both liberating and uncomfortable: you have to separate what a system does from what you wish it meant. That is the starting point of this essay. It is written neither to mock belief nor to recruit anyone into disbelief. It is also not an attempt to defend theology by repainting it in scientific language. The aim is simpler and stricter: to clarify what can be claimed about religion and God once you stop treating explanations as narratives and begin treating them as structural accounts of how effects are produced.

Religion will be approached here as a real causal phenomenon. That does not mean it is "true" in a metaphysical sense. It means it has observable consequences that shape human behavior, group cohesion, moral coordination, and the long-horizon stability of civilizations. Anything that produces effects in the world can be analyzed in terms of conditions, constraints, and outcomes. In that sense, religion is not a superstition to be dismissed, but a functional mechanism that has repeatedly proven its stabilizing power—especially where uncertainty, suffering, and social scale would otherwise fragment trust and coordination. Ignoring that causal role is not enlightenment; it is simply a refusal to look at what works and why it works.

God, by contrast, will be treated as a conceptual claim. Not as an enemy, not as a strawman, and not as a psychological defect to be diagnosed. "God" is a word that bundles many different assertions into one symbol: an origin claim, a moral authority claim, an intervention claim, a relationship claim. When those claims are left bundled, discussion becomes emotional by default, because every critique of one layer is heard as an attack on all layers. This essay unbundles the term. It asks which of those claims remain coherent under a causally closed description of reality, and which claims rely on exceptions that the structure itself does not allow. That is not polemic. It is the basic hygiene of definitions.

Causality will be treated as a closed explanatory framework. That does not mean it is a "worldview" meant to replace religion, and it does not mean it answers every question a human being can ask. It means that within the domain of reality we inhabit—where events have conditions, where changes have dependencies, where systems persist only when they remain stable under constraints—there is no need to import additional agents to make the mechanism run. A causally closed framework does not claim that nothing exists beyond it. It claims something more precise: that explanations inside the system must be accounted for by the system's own operators and boundary conditions, rather than by ad hoc interventions. This is the difference between an explanation and a story. An explanation binds itself to what would count as a failure; a story can always add another chapter.

This is why the essay must draw a boundary from the beginning. It will not try to prove that a creator exists, and it will not try to prove that none exists. That question sits outside what a closed causal account can settle, because the origin of the operators is not an operator-level question. The essay stays inside the domain where claims can be disciplined by structure. It examines what can and cannot be meaningfully claimed once causality is taken seriously—and what happens to the familiar, normative image of God when the difference between function, meaning, and ontology is no longer blurred.

1. What Causality Can Explain — and What It Cannot

This section establishes a simple but demanding standard: if something produces effects in reality, then it belongs—at least in part—to the domain of causal analysis. That standard does not reduce human experience to cold mechanics. It does something more important. It separates what is *happening* from what we *want it to mean*. Once that separation is made, causality becomes both a powerful lens and a disciplined one. It can illuminate an enormous range of phenomena, but it must also admit where its authority ends.

1.1 What a causal framework can explain

A causal framework explains phenomena by tracking conditions, constraints, and transitions. It asks what must be in place for a change to occur, what makes a configuration stable or unstable, and what kinds of outcomes are carried forward under pressure. When applied consistently, this approach reaches far beyond physics in the narrow sense, because causal structure is not limited to atoms and forces. It extends to any system whose states change lawfully under constraints.

In the physical domain, this is straightforward. Physical processes can be described through invariants and operators: patterns that remain stable, and rules that govern transitions. The point is not to claim that every detail is already known, but that the method itself is clear: if an event occurs, it occurs through some admissible transition under boundary conditions, whether or not a given observer has mapped those conditions yet.

In biology, the same logic applies at a different level of organization. Evolution can be treated as a chain of stabilized paths: lineages persist where they remain viable under constraints, and they diverge where conditions change or where new structural capacity allows additional organization to be carried. There is no need to introduce intention or moral direction into the

mechanism. Stability and constraint are sufficient to produce both persistence and transformation.

The emergence of complexity, often treated as mysterious or “almost magical,” becomes less dramatic once the causal question is stated correctly. Complexity does not appear because reality “wants” it. It appears when systems achieve enough surplus stability to tolerate added degrees of freedom without collapsing. Under the right conditions, stable layers can stack. Under the wrong conditions, systems simplify or fail. Complexity, in this framing, is not a prize. It is a costly configuration that only persists when it can be carried.

Social coordination also falls under causal analysis, even though it is made of meanings, not molecules. Groups stabilize when expectations become predictable, when norms reduce uncertainty, when trust is reinforced through repeatable patterns of behavior. The mechanisms differ from physics, but the logic does not: stable coordination requires constraints, and those constraints shape what kinds of collective outcomes are possible. Where coordination fails, the failure is rarely mysterious. It typically follows from misaligned incentives, brittle norms, missing enforcement, or overload beyond what the system can integrate.

Psychological effects are similarly causal in structure. Fear, hope, belonging, shame, loyalty—these are not random clouds in the mind. They are functional responses to perceived threats and opportunities, shaped by memory, reinforcement, social feedback, and the need to preserve coherence in a changing environment. A causal account does not “devalue” these experiences. It treats them seriously enough to ask what conditions generate them, what stabilizes them, and what makes them contagious across people and time.

And this is exactly why religious impact and persistence can be approached causally without contempt. Religions do not merely “exist as ideas.” They operate as systems that produce measurable consequences: they coordinate norms, embed identity, stabilize meaning, and create long-horizon continuity that individual lives cannot provide on their own. Whether a doctrine is metaphysically true is a separate question from whether it is causally effective. A causal framework can explain why religious structures endure, why they intensify under stress, why they bind communities, and why they shape behavior even when abstract belief weakens. The mechanism is visible in history and in daily life.

The key claim is therefore not ideological, but methodological:

If a phenomenon has effects in reality, it can be analyzed causally.

That sentence does not declare victory over faith. It simply sets the rule of intellectual engagement: effects demand mechanisms, and mechanisms can be studied.

1.2 What causal closure means

To say that causality forms a closed explanatory framework is to make a precise statement, not a metaphysical one. “Closed” does not mean “nothing else exists.” It means: within the domain under analysis, transitions must be explained through admissible internal relations rather than external exceptions.

A closed causal ontology explains all internal transitions. If something happens in the system, it happens through operators and boundary conditions that belong to the system. This does not require that we already know every operator. It requires that we do not escape uncertainty by importing arbitrary interventions whenever explanation becomes inconvenient. Causal closure is a discipline against exception-driven storytelling.

This also means a causally closed framework does not require external agents to function. It does not need a guiding hand to keep matter behaving consistently, or to keep biological systems adapting, or to keep societies forming norms. It is enough that stable structures persist and unstable ones dissolve under constraint. Once you accept that principle, you no longer need constant metaphysical supervision to account for ordinary continuity.

At the same time, causal closure does not deny existence claims outside the system. It simply refuses to treat those claims as explanatory shortcuts inside the system. A creator could exist and still be irrelevant to the explanation of internal transitions, in the same way that the origin of a chessboard is irrelevant to the legality of moves once the rules are set. You can ask who made the board, why the rules are the way they are, and what the maker intended—but none of that changes whether a knight can move like a bishop.

This is the essential distinction:

Closure is not denial. It is a boundary condition.

It tells you what counts as an explanation *within* the system, and it prevents you from smuggling exceptions into the mechanism under the pressure of unanswered questions.

1.3 What causality cannot explain by definition

The strength of causal explanation becomes clearer when it admits its own limit with precision. A causal system can explain transitions—how states change under operators and constraints. But it cannot, by its own nature, step outside itself to explain why those operators exist in the first place.

A causal system cannot explain the origin of its own operators. It can describe how a law functions, how it constrains transitions, and what kinds of stable configurations it permits. It cannot derive why that law is there rather than another. Any attempt to do so either becomes circular—using the operators to explain the operators—or becomes speculative—adding assumptions that are not forced by the system itself.

It also cannot derive why its laws exist at all. Even if you build a perfectly consistent account of reality's internal mechanics, you have still not explained why those mechanics are the mechanics. You have mapped the structure of the game, not the origin of the gameboard.

And it cannot access a "before" its own applicability. The word "before" already assumes the temporal operator is in place. The word "cause" already assumes causal admissibility. The moment you ask what happened *before* causality, you have smuggled causality into the question, because you are using causal grammar to reach beyond causal space.

That is why the boundary can be stated in a single sentence that is not rhetorical, but structurally necessary:

The origin of causality is not a causal question.

This is not a retreat into mystery. It is conceptual hygiene. It prevents the essay from turning into either dogmatic atheism ("there is nothing beyond causality") or dogmatic theology ("the unexplained must be God"). It holds the line where the line actually is: causality can explain the internal world with immense reach, but it cannot—without contradiction—explain the origin of the very operators that make explanation possible.

With that boundary in place, the discussion can proceed without hostility and without fog. We can now examine what happens to the common normative image of God once internal explanation is treated as complete in principle, while the origin question remains open in a disciplined, non-manufactured way.

2. Why the Normative God Cannot Exist Within Causal Reality

This section draws a careful line between two different things that are often treated as one: the cultural image of God that most people intuitively refer to, and the question of whether any kind of origin or initializer could exist at all. The aim here is not to "disprove God" as a provocation. It is to test a specific concept for ontological viability—meaning: can this concept coherently fit inside a causally closed reality without forcing contradictions, exceptions, or hidden rule changes?

2.1 Defining the "normative God" precisely

When people say "God," they rarely mean an abstract first principle. In everyday life—and in most mainstream religious traditions—the operative concept is normative. It is not merely descriptive ("there is an origin"). It is prescriptive ("there is an authority"), relational ("you are seen"), and moral ("you will be judged").

The normative God is commonly implied to be:

- **Personal**: not just an impersonal ground of being, but a someone—an entity with perspective, awareness, and identity.
- **Intentional**: acting with purpose, willing outcomes, aiming at certain states rather than others.
- **Morally judging**: evaluating human behavior according to a standard, approving or condemning, rewarding or punishing.
- **Interventionist**: capable of stepping into the world to alter events, answer prayers, perform miracles, or steer history.

- **Anthropocentric**: especially concerned with humans, human meaning, human moral status—often treating humanity as central to the story of reality.

- **Relational**: not merely the source of existence, but the partner of a relationship—someone who hears, responds, commands, forgives, or demands loyalty.

It matters to state this clearly because otherwise the discussion becomes unfair in both directions. Critics often attack a simplified caricature, while defenders retreat into a more abstract God that is not actually the one they invoke in practice. This essay refuses both moves.

This is not a strawman. It is the dominant cultural model.

It is the God people pray to, fear, thank, bargain with, confess to, and interpret events through. If we are going to examine how causality interacts with the concept of God, we have to evaluate the concept that actually governs lived religion, not a sanitized philosophical substitute.

2.2 Structural incompatibility with causality

Once the normative God is defined, the structural conflict becomes visible. The issue is not whether such a being would be “good” or “bad.” The issue is whether such a being can operate inside a causally closed reality without turning reality into a patchwork of exceptions.

Take the properties one by one.

Intervention violates causal closure.
In a causally closed system, internal transitions are produced by internal operators under boundary conditions. If an external agent can step in and alter outcomes at will, then the system is no longer closed in the explanatory sense. You have introduced a second class of transition: ordinary lawful transitions, and special interventions. That may feel comforting, but it breaks the explanatory frame. The world is no longer governed by stable operators alone; it is governed by operators plus discretionary override.

That override cannot be treated as “just another cause” without changing what closure means. If interventions are regular and lawlike, then they are part of the system’s operators and should be describable as such. If they are discretionary, they are not operators; they are exceptions.

Selective action implies inconsistency.
The normative God is not merely interventionist, but selectively interventionist. He helps here, not there. He answers this prayer, not that one. He parts the sea for one group, remains silent for another. Selectivity is essential to the concept, because it ties intervention to moral narrative.

But selectivity creates a structural problem: it implies that reality is not consistently governed by the same transition constraints. Instead, reality becomes contingent on preference. That

does not merely add complexity; it changes the nature of lawfulness. If the same conditions can yield different outcomes because an agent sometimes chooses to override the transition, then causality becomes secondary. The system is no longer primarily operator-driven. It is will-driven.

Moral preference implies teleology.
Moral judgment in the normative sense is not just evaluation; it is alignment to purpose. If God prefers certain human outcomes—obedience, virtue, salvation, moral development—then reality contains a directional aim. That introduces teleology: the idea that processes unfold toward intended ends, not just stable outcomes.

But causal analysis, as framed in this essay, does not allow purpose as an operator. Purpose can exist *inside* systems as a cognitive phenomenon—humans can aim, plan, value. But importing purpose as an external governing principle of reality changes the explanatory architecture. It turns the world into a stage where events are not merely lawful transitions, but steps in a narrative that is “meant” to happen.

Once you make that move, you no longer have a causal ontology in the strict sense. You have an authored world.

Miracles imply operator suspension.
A miracle is not simply an improbable event. In its classical religious meaning, it is a violation or suspension of ordinary constraints: the dead return, water becomes wine, the impossible becomes actual because a higher authority commands it. Miracles are not merely unexplained; they are explicitly framed as signs of sovereignty over law.

But if operators can be suspended, then operators are not operators in the ontological sense. They are policies—rules that normally apply until someone decides otherwise. The problem is not that this is “too magical.” The problem is that it dissolves stability at the level of explanation. You cannot build a coherent account of reality on rules that can be turned off without constraint, because then any event can be explained by “exception,” and the distinction between explanation and story collapses.

This is the key insight:

A system that requires constant exception handling is not stable.

Not stable in a moral sense. Not stable in a cultural sense. Stable in the strict functional sense of a system whose operators remain enforceable and whose transitions remain disciplined. Exception handling can exist inside engineered systems, but only if it is itself rule-governed. A reality that depends on discretionary exceptions is not causally closed; it is administratively managed.

And that is exactly what the normative God implies: not law, but governance by personal will.

2.3 Why omnipotence does not solve the problem

At this point, the common rebuttal appears: “God is beyond causality.” The intention behind the statement is understandable. It tries to protect God from the constraints of the system and to preserve both lawlike reality and divine sovereignty.

But structurally, the move does not solve the problem. It splits God into an unreachable abstraction and then continues to speak about him as if he acts inside the system.

If God is beyond causality, then claims about his actions inside causality collapse.
Because action inside the system is, by definition, a causal claim. It asserts that something happened *because* of God—because he chose, intervened, judged, answered, punished, forgave. Those are all transition claims. If God is outside the system in a way that is not causally expressible, then you cannot make action-claims about him without smuggling causality back in. You can hold a metaphysical belief, but you cannot hold it as an explanatory mechanism for events.

Alternatively, if God acts causally, he is bound by causal structure.
The moment God produces effects inside reality—changes outcomes, moves matter, alters states—he is participating in the same operator space as everything else. That does not mean he must be weak. It means his actions must still be admissible transitions, or else reality is no longer governed by stable operators. He cannot be both an actor in the system and exempt from what “acting” means.

So omnipotence does not repair the contradiction. It either turns God into a non-explanatory abstraction (beyond causality, therefore beyond action-claims), or it turns God into an agent whose actions must be operator-consistent (inside causality, therefore not exception-based sovereignty).

That leads to the clean conclusion of this section:

The normative God fails not morally, but structurally.

This does not settle the origin question. It does not declare that no initializer exists. It simply shows that the culturally dominant image of God—as personal, intentional, morally judging, interventionist, anthropocentric, and relational—cannot be integrated into a causally closed reality without turning reality into a system of discretionary overrides. And once that happens, causality stops being the explanatory backbone and becomes a decorative layer applied after the fact.

With that clarified, the essay can now proceed to the next step without hostility: if the normative God is structurally incoherent, why does religion remain so powerful and durable—and what exactly is it doing in causal terms that makes it one of the most persistent stabilization systems in human history?

3. Religion as a Causal Stabilization System

This section makes a distinction that is often avoided because it feels emotionally risky: a phenomenon can be causally powerful without being metaphysically necessary. Religion can be one of the most effective stabilization systems humanity has ever produced, and it can

still fail as an ontological account of reality. Those two statements do not contradict each other. They belong to different levels of analysis. Once that separation is held consistently, religion becomes legible—not as a relic of ignorance, but as an engineered response to real human and civilizational constraint.

3.1 Religion as a real causal force

Religion produces observable effects. This is not a matter of opinion, and it does not require agreement with any doctrine. You can measure religious effects in behavior, in institutional continuity, in law, in family structure, in moral language, in art, in sacrifice, in conflict, in reconciliation, in resilience under hardship, and in the way communities hold together when pressure rises.

Those effects are historically undeniable. Civilizations have not merely "had" religion as decoration. Religions have shaped calendars, regulated sexuality and inheritance, constrained violence inside the group, justified violence outside the group, stabilized leadership, legitimized authority, organized charity, and provided a framework through which suffering could be metabolized without dissolving social order. Even where religion has caused harm, the harm itself confirms the causal power: only a force that actually moves people can fracture societies or mobilize them.

To deny that religion has real causal impact is intellectually dishonest. It is the same kind of denial as pretending that money is "just paper" or that laws are "just words." Yes, they are symbolic systems—but symbols can be causal when they coordinate large numbers of minds into predictable patterns. Human reality is not built only from physics. It is built from shared constraints, shared meanings, and shared commitments that become stable enough to outlive individuals. Religion has been one of the most persistent architectures for doing exactly that.

So the first claim of this section is simple: whatever one believes about metaphysical truth, religion operates as a real causal structure in human history and human psychology.

3.2 Core causal functions of religion

If we treat religion causally, we should not begin with doctrines. We should begin with functions: what does the system accomplish under constraint, and why does it persist? The answer becomes clearer when you stop asking whether religion is "true" and start asking what problems it reliably solves for large groups over long time horizons.

Social cohesion.
Human groups do not remain coherent by default. Scale introduces fragility: strangers must cooperate, trust must be extended beyond kin, conflicts must be contained before they spiral into permanent fragmentation. Religions create shared identity markers—rituals, symbols, narratives, moral language—that allow a group to recognize itself as a unit. They compress social complexity into a common frame: "we are the kind of people who live by this," even when individuals disagree on details. Cohesion is not warmth. It is coordinated stability. Religion has repeatedly produced it.

Norm enforcement.
Norms without enforcement decay into preference. In small groups, enforcement can be direct: reputation, reciprocity, immediate consequence. In large groups, enforcement requires an architecture that reaches beyond direct observation. Religious systems often supply that architecture through internalized accountability: the sense that moral order is not only social, but transpersonal and persistent. Whether that is metaphysically true is not the causal point. The causal point is that internalized accountability lowers enforcement costs. It reduces the need for constant external surveillance by moving part of the constraint mechanism into the individual conscience. That is an immense stabilization advantage for large societies.

Meaning stabilization.
A mind that cannot stabilize meaning becomes volatile under uncertainty. Humans face structural pressures that cannot be removed: mortality, loss, unfairness, randomness, and the fact that the world does not owe anyone coherence. Religion provides interpretive closure—narrative frames that turn chaos into legible structure. Not because the world actually becomes less complex, but because the cognitive load becomes carryable. Meaning stabilization is not "comfort." It is a mechanism that prevents disintegration when reality exceeds the mind's tolerance for ambiguity.

Existential buffering.
Fear of death, fear of insignificance, fear of abandonment—these are not philosophical games. They are constraint pressures on human cognition. A society of beings who cannot metabolize those pressures becomes unstable: people seek shortcuts, scapegoats, addictions, violence, or submission to any structure that promises relief. Religion functions as a buffer by offering a stable horizon: an order larger than the individual, a continuity beyond the present moment, a frame in which suffering can be endured without collapsing into nihilism. Again, the causal point is not whether the buffer corresponds to metaphysical truth, but that it reliably reduces destabilizing psychological volatility at scale.

Behavioral predictability.
Every durable civilization requires predictable behavior, because infrastructure, trust, and long-horizon planning depend on it. If human action becomes too chaotic, complex coordination fails. Religions generate predictability through repeated rituals, shared prohibitions, shared duties, and identity-linked commitments. Rituals are not "primitive habits." They are stabilizers: they synchronize groups, reinforce hierarchy or equality depending on the tradition, and regularly rehearse the boundaries of acceptable behavior. Predictability is not oppression by default. It is the minimum condition for stable cooperation among many.

Put together, these functions show why religion persists even when metaphysical belief weakens: the system is not sustained only by doctrine. It is sustained by the stability work it performs.

In neutral systems language, the thesis can be stated without insult or praise:

Religion functions as a large-scale stabilization technology.

It is a technology made of symbols, rituals, narratives, and moral constraints—designed, refined, and selected over time because it stabilizes human collectives under existential and civilizational stress.

3.3 Why causal explanation does not invalidate meaning

At this point, many readers will feel a reflexive objection: if religion is explained functionally, does that not reduce it to manipulation, illusion, or mere psychology? This is where the essay must be precise. Explaining the mechanism of a thing does not dissolve the reality of its effects. And it does not automatically erase the subjective meaning people experience within it.

Explaining function does not negate subjective experience. A love poem can be explained as patterns of language that trigger emotion, but the emotion is still real. Music can be explained as vibrating air and neural entrainment, but the tears are still real. A causal account does not flatten human life; it clarifies why certain forms reliably move human beings.

Understanding mechanics does not erase impact. If anything, it can deepen it by replacing fog with structure. The fact that a bridge is an engineering artifact does not make it less capable of carrying weight. The fact that a tradition stabilizes a society does not automatically make its participants foolish. It means they are embedded in a system that has been selected—culturally, historically, psychologically—for its capacity to hold people together.

What causal explanation does dissolve is a specific kind of claim: the claim that religion is metaphysically necessary for reality to function, or for morality to exist, or for meaning to be possible.

That is the philosophical move this section needs to land cleanly:

Causal explanation dissolves metaphysical necessity, not human relevance.

Religion can remain relevant as a stabilization system even when the normative God collapses structurally. That does not force a reader to abandon faith, but it prevents a category error: it prevents treating functional success as proof of ontological truth. The essay is not asking the reader to despise religion. It is asking the reader to locate it correctly—inside the causal world as a powerful human and civilizational mechanism, rather than above the causal world as a literal description of reality's operators.

And once religion is located correctly, the next question becomes unavoidable: if myths and miracles are not ontological explanations, what exactly are they doing—why do they form the narrative core of religious systems, and how do they persist even when their literal claims can be dissolved into boundary conditions and causal misunderstandings?

4. Myths, Miracles, and Misread Boundary Conditions

This section treats religious narratives with the seriousness they deserve, which means doing two things at once: refusing ridicule, and refusing confusion. Myths and miracle stories are often handled in only one of two ways—either they are defended as literal reports of supernatural intervention, or they are dismissed as childish fabrications. Both reactions miss the functional reality. In a causal framework, myths are neither sacred evidence nor primitive nonsense. They are stabilization structures: compressed models that made a chaotic world cognitively and socially carryable when causal access was limited.

4.1 Myths as boundary placeholders

A myth forms where three pressures meet: a real event or recurring pattern, a human need for coherent interpretation, and a lack of causal resolution. Early societies were not stupid; they were constrained. They lacked instrumentation, formal modeling, and long-horizon knowledge systems. But they still had to live, coordinate, and endure. They still had to explain death, fertility, storms, disease, power, betrayal, loyalty, and the terrifying unpredictability of nature and other humans.

When causal explanation is unavailable, interpretation does not disappear. It becomes narrative.

In this sense, myths fill explanatory gaps. They provide a stable account where the system cannot yet produce a stable causal account. They do not merely entertain. They answer questions that cannot be left open in a fragile society: Why did this happen? Who are we? What do we do now? What counts as forbidden? What binds us together when fear rises?

Myths also stabilize interpretation where causality is unavailable. A community that cannot stabilize meaning under uncertainty becomes volatile. Volatility at scale is not philosophical; it is dangerous. It produces mistrust, fragmentation, scapegoating, and internal collapse. A myth prevents that by offering closure: not necessarily correct closure, but durable closure—closure that allows social coordination and personal endurance to continue.

This is why a myth is not simply a “false story.” It is a system response to uncertainty under constraint. It encodes:

- a shared model of agency (“what forces matter”),
- a shared model of consequence (“what happens if we break the order”),
- and a shared model of identity (“who belongs and why”).

That leads to the key framing, which must be stated without sarcasm:

Myths are not lies. They are early compression algorithms.

A compression algorithm does not preserve every detail. It preserves what is functionally useful under limited bandwidth. In the same way, myths compress complex, opaque realities into narratives that can be remembered, repeated, taught to children, and used to coordinate

adult behavior. They trade precision for carryability. Under historical constraint, that trade is not irrational. It is structurally expected.

4.2 Physical misinterpretation as divine narrative

Many religious narratives become clearer when you treat them as attempts to explain boundary conditions without access to the boundary conditions themselves. When a community encounters an anomalous phenomenon—something large, rare, powerful, or unusually resilient—it does not default to "we don't know." It defaults to integration: it integrates the anomaly into the existing meaning structure so that it does not remain a destabilizing fracture.

This is where physical misinterpretation becomes divine narrative.

Take **size differences**. Across history, populations have varied in average height and bodily proportions due to nutrition, disease burden, climate adaptation, and genetics. If one group encounters another with markedly different stature, the difference can be interpreted not as biology under conditions, but as ontology: "They are not like us in kind." Once that interpretive move is made, narrative escalates quickly. A large body becomes "giant." A different body becomes "otherworldly." The boundary condition—nutrition, environment, lineage divergence—was not accessible, so the story becomes metaphysical.

The same applies to **strength myths**. Physical capacity is heavily shaped by food quality, training culture, labor demands, and overall health. A society that produces a small class of highly trained warriors can appear superhuman to a society whose bodies are depleted by scarcity. In a world without systematic physiology, strength becomes a sign of blessing, bloodline, or divine favor. Again, what is misread is not the person, but the boundary conditions that made the capacity possible.

Longevity myths follow the same logic. In historical settings with high infant mortality, unstable sanitation, and frequent disease, a person who survives unusually long can appear touched by the divine. Add oral transmission across generations—where stories are compressed and stylized—and "lived to old age" can transform into "lived for centuries." The causal mechanism (variance, survival under conditions, narrative amplification) is invisible; the symbolic mechanism becomes the explanation.

From here, culturally powerful figures become more than people. They become categories.

That is how you get the recurring patterns of:

- "giants,"
- "chosen ones,"
- "divine bloodlines,"
- "half-gods,"

- “holy lineages.”

Notice what these motifs accomplish functionally: they stabilize hierarchy and authority. If leadership is framed as metaphysical selection rather than contingent social power, it becomes harder to contest. If a bloodline is divine, the social order becomes cosmically anchored. This is not automatically cynical manipulation; it is structural evolution of meaning systems under governance pressure. Societies need justification architectures. Myth provides one.

In this frame, miracles do not need to be mocked to be explained. A “miracle” is often one of three things:

1. a real event whose causal chain was not accessible,
2. a misclassified phenomenon under unknown boundary conditions,
3. or a narrative intensification used to stabilize trust, identity, or authority.

The important point is not “religious people were wrong.” The important point is: under limited causal access, narrative is the default integration tool. If you understand that, you can read miracle stories as functional artifacts rather than as scientific claims.

4.3 Why myth persists even after explanation

A modern reader might ask: if we can now explain many of these phenomena causally, why does myth persist? Why do miracle stories remain psychologically and socially potent even when their literal claims no longer withstand scrutiny?

The first answer is **emotional resonance**. Myth speaks in the language of the human nervous system: fear, hope, guilt, belonging, sacrifice, redemption. A causal explanation can be correct and still feel thin to the part of the mind that needs orientation under stress. Myths do not compete with explanations on precision. They compete on psychological load-bearing. They offer a stable story shape where life feels shapeless.

The second answer is **identity embedding**. Myths are not just stories people believe; they are stories people *are*. They are woven into family rituals, communal markers, moral language, holidays, songs, architecture, and the inherited memory of a group. Once a myth becomes identity scaffolding, removing it is not like correcting a factual error. It feels like dissolving the boundary of the self and the group. Even when a person stops believing the literal claim, the myth can remain as a belonging mechanism.

The third answer is **narrative efficiency**. Myths compress complexity into memorable form. A community cannot transmit an entire causal framework through oral tradition. It can transmit a story that encodes a behavioral rule. “Do not violate the boundary” is easier to carry as a sacred narrative than as a probabilistic risk assessment. And because myths are repeatable, they survive. They are high-fidelity at the level that matters for social coordination: the moral payload, the identity signal, the ritual rhythm.

That leads to the conclusion of the section, which should land quietly, not triumphantly:

Myth survives not because it is true, but because it is effective.

This does not insult the human need for myth. It names it. In a causal framing, effectiveness is not an accusation; it is an explanatory category. Myths persist because they stabilize minds and societies under constraints that remain real even in modernity: mortality, uncertainty, injustice, and the fact that human coordination is fragile.

With that established, the essay is ready for the decisive boundary turn: even if myths can be explained functionally, and even if the normative God collapses structurally, one question remains structurally open—the origin of the causal operators themselves—and that open question is precisely where many people try to reinsert theology. The next section will show why that move fails unless the concept of “creator” is radically reframed.

5. The Absolute Boundary: The Origin of the Causal Structure

This section is the hinge of the entire essay. Everything before it has been about what causality can do inside reality: it can explain mechanisms, dissolve mythic necessity, and show why the normative God is structurally incompatible with a closed causal world. But once the internal story becomes coherent, a deeper question becomes unavoidable—not because religion demands it, but because intellectual honesty does: where did the causal structure itself come from?

A causally closed framework can map the operators of reality. It can describe invariants. It can identify what transitions are admissible. It can show why stable configurations persist and why unstable ones collapse. What it cannot do—without contradiction—is step outside its own explanatory domain and explain why those operators exist at all. This is not a weakness of the framework. It is the logical price of closure.

5.1 Why the origin question is structurally inaccessible

To ask about the origin of causality is to ask a question at a level that causality itself does not have the tools to answer. Causality is the grammar of internal explanation: it links conditions to outcomes, constraints to transitions, state A to state B. The moment you try to apply that grammar to the grammar itself, the structure folds back on itself.

Causality cannot reach beyond itself. Not because it lacks ambition, but because “reaching beyond” already assumes the operators you are trying to transcend. Any origin explanation that stays causal must use causal terms—cause, before, after, produces, generates, explains. But those terms are not neutral. They are already inside the system. They belong to the operator set.

This produces a structural trap: any attempt to explain the origin of causal operators becomes either circular or speculative.

- **Circular**: You use causality to explain why causality exists. The explanation presupposes what it claims to derive. The argument returns to its starting point and never actually crosses the boundary.

- **Speculative**: You introduce an additional premise—an external agent, a prior realm, a meta-law—to break the circle. But that premise is not forced by the system. It is an added story. It can be believed, but it cannot be demanded by causal reasoning, because the causal framework cannot validate what it cannot access.

So the clean, disciplined stance is not to “solve” the origin question with a convenient metaphysical patch. It is to name the boundary exactly where it stands.

Asking who established causality is meaningful, but not answerable from within causality.

Meaningful, because it is a coherent human question: it points at the ultimate contingency of laws. Not answerable, because any answer framed as causal already presupposes the operators it is trying to explain.

This is where the essay must resist the most common temptation: treating the unknown as permission to import the normative God through the back door. The origin boundary does not justify theology. It only justifies humility.

5.2 Creator vs. initializer distinction

Once the boundary is named, a second move becomes necessary. People often leap from “causality cannot explain its own origin” to “therefore God.” But even if one were to entertain an origin agent, most religious discourse smuggles in far more than the origin question allows. It upgrades an origin hypothesis into a moral authority and a relational overseer. That upgrade is not logically warranted.

To keep the analysis clean, we need a sharper distinction.

A **creator** implies intention and purpose. The word “creator” carries a narrative: an agent who wants something, designs for outcomes, values what is produced, and stands in a meaningful relationship to the created. “Creator” is not merely a causal starter. It is an author.

An **initializer**, by contrast, implies structure establishment. It is the minimal concept required to express the possibility that the operator set—whatever it is—was set rather than simply “being.” An initializer is not automatically a person. It does not necessarily have a mind. It does not necessarily care. It might not even be meaningfully describable in human terms. The only thing the initializer concept does is mark the difference between “the structure exists” and “the structure was established.”

This distinction matters because most theological conclusions rely on importing creator-properties that are not licensed by the origin boundary. Even if an initializer exists, you cannot automatically attach intention, love, judgment, or human centrality to it without adding independent assumptions.

Initialization does not imply care, intent, or relationship.

That sentence is not hostile. It is simply precise. The existence of an operator set does not logically imply that the operator set was designed for human flourishing, or for moral education, or for a cosmic storyline in which humanity occupies the center.

A stable causal structure could exist for reasons that have nothing to do with us. Or it could be established in a way that is indifferent to what emerges within it. The fact that something emerges does not retroactively prove that it was the goal.

Humans, under this framing, are not “made in the image” of anything. They are a stable outcome—an emergent configuration that became carryable under specific boundary conditions on a particular planet at a particular stage of its development. That does not reduce humanity. It locates humanity.

5.3 Why this does not justify theology

This is the step where the essay closes a loophole that many discussions leave open on purpose. The origin boundary is frequently used as a rhetorical license: “Science cannot answer the origin question, therefore my religion stands.” But that conclusion does not follow.

Even if a causal initializer exists, no theology is automatically justified by that fact.

No commandments follow. A set of operators does not generate a moral code. A structural origin does not produce a list of duties. To jump from “there may be an initializer” to “therefore you must obey these rules” is a category error. It confuses ontology with normativity.

No moral authority follows. Authority requires a legitimate relation between the authority-holder and the governed. In human life, authority is justified by responsibility, competence, and accountability within a shared system. A hypothetical initializer—especially one that is beyond causal access—cannot be assumed to be a moral legislator without additional premises that are not derivable from the origin boundary.

No human centrality follows. The fact that humans can ask questions does not make humans the point of reality. The fact that humans seek meaning does not mean meaning is cosmically assigned to them. Human centrality is a psychological desire, not a structural conclusion.

And this is where the section needs to end with a sentence that is stark, but not nihilistic:

Even if a causal initializer exists, it grants us nothing.

Not because humans are worthless, but because ontological origin is not a moral coupon. It does not purchase salvation, it does not validate doctrine, and it does not install humanity as the audience of the cosmos.

What it grants—at most—is the permission to remain honest: to admit that the origin question is real, that it exceeds causal access, and that any story told beyond that boundary is a story we choose to tell, not a conclusion forced by structure.

That boundary sets up the next move of the essay: if theology cannot be justified by an initializer hypothesis, then morality and responsibility must be grounded elsewhere. The next section will show why this is not a collapse into meaninglessness, but a transition into ethics that is owned rather than outsourced—ethics that does not depend on surveillance, miracles, or metaphysical threats to remain stable.

6. Why a Possible Creator Is Irrelevant to Ethics

This section addresses the most predictable reaction to everything that came before: *If the normative God collapses structurally, then what stops morality from collapsing with it?* Many people have been taught—explicitly or implicitly—that ethics depends on metaphysical authority, and that without divine judgment, responsibility dissolves into preference. The fear is understandable, because it is tied to a real problem: human beings can rationalize almost anything when constraints weaken. But the conclusion does not follow. Ethics does not require a creator in order to exist, and it does not require metaphysical surveillance in order to remain binding.

If anything, ethics becomes more coherent when it stops pretending to be outsourced.

6.1 Ethics do not require metaphysics

Ethics emerges wherever agents interact under constraint. The core material of ethics is not theology; it is the reality of consequences. When one agent can harm another, exploit another, deceive another, abandon another, or protect another, a moral domain exists whether or not anyone calls it sacred. Ethics is the logic of stable coexistence among beings whose actions have real effects.

This is why ethics can be grounded without metaphysics.

- **Ethics emerge from interaction.**
  The moment two agents share a world, they create a field of consequences. Cooperation increases stability; predation increases volatility. Trust reduces enforcement costs; betrayal increases surveillance needs. You do not need a cosmic judge to observe this. It is visible in every stable relationship, every functional community, and every civilization that outlives its founders.

- **Responsibility emerges from agency.**
  Responsibility is not a metaphysical property. It is the structural fact that an agent can select among alternatives and therefore can be held accountable for outcomes. The more an agent can foresee consequences and adjust behavior, the more meaningful responsibility becomes. An infant is not responsible in the same way an adult is, because the agent capacity differs. That is not ideology; it is functional realism. Responsibility scales with agency.

- **Harm and stability are sufficient grounding.**
  If an action predictably produces harm—fractures trust, destroys bodies, destabilizes families, collapses institutions—then it is not morally neutral in any society that wants to persist. Moral rules are not arbitrary decorations; they are stabilizers that reduce destructive variance. A culture does not prohibit murder because a god dislikes it. It prohibits murder because a society that treats murder as acceptable becomes uninhabitable. This does not make ethics "selfish." It makes ethics structurally anchored.

The crucial shift is to see morality not as a list handed down from above, but as the architecture required for stable coexistence at scale. Metaphysics may intensify motivation for some people, but it is not the source of ethical truth in the functional sense. The source is causal reality: actions have consequences, and systems either remain stable under those consequences or they collapse.

6.2 Why divine command ethics fail structurally

Divine command ethics claims that morality is binding because a higher authority commands it. Many traditions use this framework explicitly: the good is good because God wills it, and the wrong is wrong because God forbids it. At first glance, this seems to provide moral stability, because it offers absolute language. But structurally, it carries a weakness that becomes visible under scrutiny.

External authority removes accountability.
When the reason for doing the right thing is "because I was told," the moral agent is not actually owning the moral logic. The person is complying. Compliance can produce stable behavior, but it is not the same as ethical integrity. Integrity requires internal consequence-binding: understanding what harm is, why harm matters, and why restraint is necessary even when no one is watching.

An external moral authority can train behavior, but it can also weaken moral development by discouraging moral reasoning. The rule becomes a password rather than a principle. Once the external authority is doubted—or once a competing authority appears—morality becomes negotiable again, because the person never built the internal structure that makes restraint coherent.

Moral outsourcing weakens responsibility.
Outsourcing morality means transferring the burden of judgment away from the agent. The agent becomes a messenger of the rule rather than a custodian of consequences. That creates a dangerous loophole: if a rule is interpreted as divine, then the agent can justify harm while feeling morally pure. History is full of examples where "obedience" became a vehicle for cruelty precisely because the moral reasoning was outsourced. A person who believes they are executing divine will can bypass empathy, nuance, and consequence evaluation. The moral system becomes brittle: it can produce stability inside the in-group, while legitimizing destabilization outside it.

This is not a claim that religious people are immoral. It is a structural claim about the mechanism: the more morality is framed as external command, the easier it is to detach moral certainty from real consequence evaluation.

That leads to the central insight of this subsection:

Ethics derived from fear are unstable under scrutiny.

Fear can enforce behavior, but it is not a stable foundation for morality because fear is an external motivator. If the fear weakens—if belief fades, if punishment seems delayed, if the authority is questioned—the behavior loses its binding force. The person has not been anchored to consequence logic; they have been anchored to surveillance. And surveillance is never total, whether human or imagined. A stable ethical agent is stable even in private.

A causally grounded ethics asks a different question than divine command ethics. It does not ask, “Who commands?” It asks, “What does this action do to the stability of the system we live in?” That question does not vanish when metaphysics is removed. It becomes clearer.

6.3 Responsibility in a causally closed world

A causally closed world does not remove morality. It removes the fantasy that morality can be outsourced to metaphysical enforcement. It replaces obedience with ownership.

In this frame, humans are not judged by gods. That statement is not meant as insult. It is meant as relocation of responsibility. If reality is causally closed, then consequences are the judge. Harm is the judge. Collapse is the judge. The world does not need to punish you mystically; it punishes you structurally when you destabilize the systems you depend on.

Humans judge consequences. That does not mean morality becomes “relative.” It means morality becomes accountable to reality. A moral claim must cash out in consequences: does it stabilize trust, reduce harm, increase long-horizon cooperation, protect the vulnerable, preserve functional order? If it does not, then it is not moral architecture—it is ideology wearing moral language.

And in that sense, stability replaces obedience.
Not stability as comfort, but stability as the capacity of a system to persist without degrading into violence, paranoia, fragmentation, or collapse. Ethical rules become the internal constraint layer that keeps multi-agent life livable. You do not refrain from betrayal because a cosmic eye sees you. You refrain because betrayal degrades the fabric that makes your life possible, and because you understand that the costs do not vanish just because they are delayed.

This is where the essay can offer a constructive shift rather than a void: responsibility without metaphysics is not weaker. It is heavier. It removes excuses. It removes the ability to say “I was commanded” or “I will be forgiven anyway” or “judgment is someone else’s problem.” It makes the agent the carrier of stability.

And that sets up the final movement: if morality is not granted from above, and if religion is a stabilization technology rather than a metaphysical necessity, then the question becomes:

what does it mean to be human inside a causally stable world—how do we build meaning, responsibility, and durable order without pretending the universe owes us a narrative? That is where the essay turns from critique to synthesis.

7. Responsibility Without God: Humans as Stability Carriers

This final section is where the essay earns its right to exist. If all it did was subtract—remove the normative God, dissolve miracle claims, and reduce religion to function—it would leave a vacuum that readers could easily mistake for cynicism. But a causal framework does not have to be cold, and it does not have to be nihilistic. It simply refuses to lie about where meaning comes from. When illusions fall away, what remains is not emptiness. What remains is agency—human beings as the carriers of stability in a world that does not guarantee it for them.

7.1 Humanity as a product of stability, not intention

Within a causally closed reality, humans do not need to be designed in order to be significant. They do not need to be placed intentionally at the center of creation in order to matter. The causal account is more austere and, in a way, more honest: humans are stabilized outcomes.

That means two things at once.

First, humans are not designed. Not in the normative sense of being made for a purpose, assigned a destiny, or placed into the world as the intended audience of reality. A causal structure does not require that kind of narrative. It requires boundary conditions, admissible transitions, and enough surplus stability for complexity to become carryable.

Second, humans are stabilized outcomes. We are what happens when a particular planet, under a particular chemical and atmospheric envelope, produces an ecological and evolutionary corridor where layered complexity can persist. We are not magic inserted into matter. We are matter organized into a stable pattern with enough degrees of freedom to reflect on itself. That is not an insult. It is a description of what kind of thing a human being is: a high-density stability configuration capable of memory, forecasting, and long-horizon commitment.

From that perspective, human dignity does not come from being the target of divine attention. It comes from being the kind of system that can carry responsibility. A rock cannot be responsible. A storm cannot be responsible. A human can. That is not metaphysics. That is functional difference.

And it reframes the human role in the universe without romance and without despair: not as a chosen species, but as a transitional carrier—capable of stabilizing civilization, capable of creating knowledge systems, and capable of deliberately shaping the conditions under which future complexity will either remain stable or collapse.

7.2 Meaning without metaphysical privilege

If humans are not designed, then meaning is not delivered from above. This is the point where many people feel a loss—because “bestowed meaning” feels safe. But safety is not the same as strength.

Meaning is constructed, not bestowed. It emerges when an agent binds itself to commitments across time—when it decides what it will carry, what it will protect, what it will refuse to become, and what kind of world it will help stabilize for others. Meaning is not a cosmic object waiting to be discovered like a hidden treasure. It is a causal product of agency. It is what forms when a mind becomes capable of long-horizon consequence-binding.

That does not make meaning weak. It makes meaning accountable.

A bestowed meaning can be claimed without being earned. A constructed meaning has to be carried. It costs something. It requires discipline, restraint, courage, and continuity. It requires that you remain consistent even when external enforcement is absent.

This is why the following sentence is not motivational language but structural truth:

Meaning that survives without divine enforcement is stronger, not weaker.

If a person does good only because they fear punishment, the goodness is conditional. If a person remains responsible even when there is no surveillance—no cosmic eye, no guaranteed reward—then responsibility has become internal structure. It is no longer borrowed. It is owned.

In that sense, removing metaphysical privilege does not remove meaning. It removes excuses. It removes the temptation to treat morality as compliance. It forces the question that a mature ethics cannot avoid: *What do you do when no one is watching and nothing is promised?*

The answer is the measure of the person. And on the level of civilization, it is the measure of whether a society can remain stable without mythic enforcement.

7.3 Final synthesis

A causal account of reality does not eliminate awe. It eliminates the habit of filling gaps with comforting stories and then mistaking those stories for structure. It does not forbid belief, but it refuses to treat belief as an explanatory license.

Causality does not eliminate wonder.
It eliminates illusion.
What remains is responsibility—without surveillance, without promise, and without exemption.

Responsibility without surveillance means that the burden of stability cannot be outsourced to imagined oversight. Responsibility without promise means that ethics cannot be treated as

a transaction—good behavior in exchange for reward. Responsibility without exemption means that no one gets to step outside consequence, whether they call themselves chosen, forgiven, enlightened, or faithful. The causal world does not grant special pleading. It grants outcomes.

And yet, this is not bleak. It is clarifying.

Because if responsibility is real, then so is dignity. Not the dignity of being watched by the universe, but the dignity of being capable of carrying the world you live in—capable of stabilizing trust, protecting the vulnerable, and building structures that outlast impulse.

In a world where the gods do not rescue you, the human becomes the rescuer.

Not in a heroic narrative sense. In a functional sense: by building constraints where chaos would otherwise expand, and by building meaning where emptiness would otherwise spread. That is what it means to be a stability carrier.

Optional Closing Note

This essay is not anti-religious. It does not demand that anyone abandon faith, ritual, or tradition. It is anti-category-error. It insists that functional effects are not proofs of metaphysical claims, and that moral responsibility cannot be grounded in exception handling.

Belief is personal.
Ontology is not.

Belief may remain a private commitment, a cultural inheritance, or a psychological anchor. But when we speak about what reality is and how it operates, we owe each other clarity: definitions, boundaries, and the refusal to turn unknowns into warrants for authority.

That clarity does not destroy meaning. It makes meaning honest—and therefore stable.

License and Usage Notice

© 2026 Alexander Wolfgang Strüver

This work is licensed under the **Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial–NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)** license.

You are permitted to:

- Share and redistribute the material in any medium or format
- Quote and reference the work with proper attribution to the author

Under the following conditions:

- **Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit to the author and indicate if the work is cited or referenced.

- **NonCommercial** — You may not use the material for commercial purposes.

- **NoDerivatives** — You may not remix, transform, adapt, or build upon the material.

This license applies not only to the textual expression, but to the **conceptual structure and ontological framework** presented in this essay. Any form of derivative work, reframing as part of another theoretical system, or commercial usage requires explicit prior written permission from the author.

This essay is provided for intellectual discourse, academic reflection, and private study.
It is not intended as theological instruction, ideological advocacy, or moral prescription.