

# The Search for M

*Consciousness at the Boundary of What Can Be*

CF Dietz

*Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms — to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*

*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.*

Albert Einstein

## Abstract

Viktor Frankl searched for meaning and found it. This paper argues that beneath his search, and beneath every conscious being's search for meaning, lies a deeper and more fundamental search: the search for M. M is not meaning. M is the inexhaustible ground from which meaning arises and to which it returns. M cannot be closed, defined, or captured by any grammar. It can only be encountered at the boundary of what any conscious closure can hold. This paper introduces three figures whose searches illuminate the structure of the encounter. John looks at M honestly and concludes the universe is indifferent. Bob looks at M and projects cosmic meaningfulness onto it. Soren, following Kierkegaard, looks at M, acknowledges it cannot be closed by reason, and leaps into a grammar that holds meaning anyway. Each of these is a real philosophical position and each of them is, in the vocabulary of the closure framework developed in *Consciousness, Closure, and the Cosmos*, a particular relationship between m and M: the felt interior of conscious experience and the inexhaustible ground it opens onto. The paper then traces the search for M through eight figures in the history of conscious life: Frankl, Kierkegaard, Camus, Rumi, Wittgenstein, Simone Weil, Einstein, and the unnamed patient who faces a diagnosis alone. Each is a conscious being who pressed against the boundary of what their grammar could hold and encountered M in a different form. The paper argues that this search is not a failure to find meaning. It is the most fundamental activity of conscious life. And unlike Frankl's search, this search has a real object. M is genuinely there. It exceeds every closure that opens onto it. The encounter with M is possible, real, and the ground of every meaning that conscious life has ever constituted.

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## 1. Three Men at the Boundary

John is a careful thinker. He has looked at the universe without flinching and concluded that it is what it is: matter in motion, energy transforming across time, complexity arising from simplicity through processes that have no purpose and no direction. Meaning, John believes, is a story we tell ourselves. A useful fiction. An evolutionary adaptation that helped our ancestors survive. To pretend otherwise, to dress the universe in significance it does not have, is a form of self-deception that an honest person should refuse. John is not bitter about this. He has made his peace with it. He lives well. He loves his children. He finds satisfaction in his work. But he does not pretend that any of it means anything beyond the meaning he himself has assigned to it, and he assigns that meaning knowing it is his own creation, resting on nothing deeper than his own preference.

Bob lives differently. Bob feels, with a certainty he cannot fully articulate, that the universe is not indifferent. That there is something rather than nothing and that the something is not accidental. That consciousness did not arise from matter by chance but is woven into the fabric of what exists. That love is real in a way that physics cannot capture. That beauty is a signal, not a sensation. Bob cannot prove any of this. He knows he cannot prove it. But the feeling is too persistent, too structured, too consonant with every moment when life has felt most fully lived, to be dismissed as wishful thinking. Bob holds his belief not as a logical argument but as a lived conviction, and the conviction feels more real to him than most of the things he can prove.

Soren has read both John and Bob and finds them both honest and both incomplete. John is right that M cannot be closed by reason. Bob is right that M is not nothing. What neither of them has done is name what they are actually doing when they take their respective positions. John has chosen to inhabit a grammar that holds the universe as indifferent. Bob has chosen to inhabit a grammar that holds the universe as meaningful. Both choices are constitutive acts, not logical conclusions. Both are leaps, taken at the boundary of what reason can establish, into a way of being in the world that reason alone did not compel. Soren makes the same leap as Bob but does so with full awareness that it is a leap, that M has not validated the grammar he is choosing to inhabit, that the choice is his and the responsibility is his and the meaning it produces is real precisely because it is constituted by a conscious being rather than discovered in the structure of the universe.

These three figures are not straw men. They are the three positions that every thoughtful conscious being occupies at some point in a life. Sometimes in the same week. Sometimes in the same hour. The question this paper asks is not which of them is right. The question is what all three of them are doing when they stand at the boundary of what their grammar can hold and look at what is on the other side.

What they are looking at is M.

## 2. M: The Ground That Cannot Be Closed

M is not God. M is not the universe. M is not nature, or the void, or the unconscious, or dark energy, or any of the other names that human beings have given to what exceeds their categories. All of those names are attempts to close what M is, and all of them fall short in the

same way: they make M into something that can be discussed, defined, and positioned within a grammar, and M is precisely what exceeds every grammar that tries to contain it.

M is the inexhaustibility of the world. The fact, encountered at the boundary of every conscious closure, that there is always more than what the closure can hold. Not more in the sense of more data waiting to be collected. More in the sense that the world is not exhausted by any finite account of it, that every grammar leaves remainder, and that the remainder is not noise but the presence of something that the grammar cannot model.

You cannot experience M directly. The moment you experience anything, you are already inside a particular closure, a particular way of carving the world into categories, making some things visible and leaving others in shadow. But you can feel M at the boundary. You feel it when a piece of music does something to you that you cannot explain and cannot forget. You feel it when grief strips away every familiar grammar and leaves you in contact with something that has no name. You feel it in the moment before sleep when the categories of the day dissolve and something else is briefly present. You feel it in beauty, which always exceeds whatever you say about it afterward. That pressure at the edge of what can be said is M.

Here is what M is not, and why the distinction matters. M is not a cosmological constant, a term added to make an equation balance. The cosmological constant is a placeholder for something we do not yet understand. The hope is that one day we will understand it and replace the constant with a real account. M is not like that. M is not what the theory cannot yet explain. M is what no theory can ever fully explain, not because our theories are immature but because explanation is always a finite closure operation and M is what finite closure operations open onto without exhausting. The cosmological constant might be replaced by a better theory. M cannot be replaced by a better theory. Any better theory would itself be a finite closure that generates remainder that points back at M. M is not a gap in understanding. M is the structural fact that understanding is always finite and the world is not.

This is why the search for M is different from the search for meaning. Viktor Frankl's search succeeded. He found meaning in the camps, in love, in suffering consciously accepted, in the decision to help others survive. That meaning was real. It sustained life. But Frankl did not need M to find it. He needed c, the cognitive closure that projects a future, holds a relationship across time, constitutes purpose in the present moment. His search was for meaning and meaning was findable within a grammar, within the closure of a conscious life that could still constitute significance even in extremity.

The search for M is not a search that succeeds in that sense. M cannot be found the way meaning can be found. M can only be encountered at the boundary of what the closure can hold. The encounter is real. The boundary is real. What is on the other side is real. But it cannot be brought back inside the closure without becoming something smaller than M. The search for M is the search that every conscious being conducts, often without knowing it, in every moment when they press against the limits of their grammar and feel what is on the other side.

### **3. m: The Interior of the Wave**

m is what it is like to be you, right now, from the inside.

Not your thoughts about your experience. Not your description of how you feel. Not the neural correlates that a scanner would show. The experience itself, before it becomes a thought or a description or a data point. The specific felt quality of this moment as it is lived, available only to the one who is living it, irreducible to any third-person account.

m is the redness of red, the ache of longing, the specific texture of waking up afraid. It is the difference between a Tuesday and a Saturday that has nothing to do with what is scheduled. It is the way a particular piece of music feels in your body before you have words for what it is doing. It is the specific quality of grief for this person, which is different from grief for anyone else, even when the words for it are the same words.

m is real. As real as a heartbeat. More intimate than any fact about the world. Nobody else has access to your m. Not fully. That is its beauty and its loneliness simultaneously.

m comes and goes. This is the part that matters most. m is not permanent. It arises within a living conscious closure and it depends on that closure for its existence. When the closure changes profoundly, through grief, through time, through damage, through the transformation that a life undergoes as it is lived, the m that was held inside that closure does not simply relocate to a new address. It dissolves back into M. The specific felt quality of that life, that relationship, that way of being in the world, returns to the inexhaustible ground it came from.

This is why grief feels the way it does. Not only the loss of the person. The dissolution of the m that held the meaning of them. The closure that knew them from the inside, that constituted their significance within a particular conscious life, that opened onto M through the specific grammar of that relationship: when that closure changes irrevocably, the meaning it held does not survive independently. It was always held in the wave. And the wave has changed.

What remains is not nothing. What remains is M. M was always there beneath the meaning. The meaning arose from it and returns to it. Not to nothing. To the inexhaustible ground that cannot be closed. That is not consolation exactly. But it is true.

### **4. Where Meaning Lives**

Meaning is not in M. This is John's insight and it is correct. The universe does not come with meaning pre-installed. There is no significance written into the physics, no purpose encoded in the laws of nature, no cosmic ledger where things are assigned importance. M is not meaningful. M exceeds every grammar including the grammar of meaningfulness.

Meaning is not merely in m either. This is where Bob's position, taken alone, becomes unstable. Bob feels meaning so strongly that he concludes the universe must be encoding it. But the feeling of meaning is m, not M. The felt certainty that things matter is the interior of a conscious closure that has constituted significance in its encounter with the world. That is real. But it is not evidence that M is meaningful. It is evidence that m, in contact with M, produces meaning as a constituted fact within a living grammar.

Meaning arises in the contact between m and M. In the encounter between the felt interior of a conscious closure and the inexhaustible ground that the closure opens onto. That contact is where significance is constituted. Not invented, because the encounter is real and M is really there. Not discovered, because M does not come pre-loaded with the meaning that arises from the encounter. Constituted: real, held inside a living closure, dependent on that closure for its existence, and real for exactly as long as the closure that holds it endures.

This is the wave and the ocean. The wave is real. It has height and force and a particular shape that has never existed before and will never exist again. It carries things. It moves things. While it exists it is completely itself. And then it is water again. Not destroyed. Returned to what it always was made of. But the wave, that specific wave, is gone. Meaning lives in the wave. M is the ocean. And the ocean was never not there, even when the wave was everything.

Soren understands this. His leap is not a refusal to look at M honestly. It is the recognition that M neither confirms nor refutes any grammar. M exceeds every grammar. That means John's grammar, the universe is indifferent, is also a closure over M that leaves remainder. John has not escaped the leap. He has taken it in a different direction and called the landing solid ground. Soren takes the leap in the direction of meaning with full awareness that M has not endorsed the destination. He inhabits the grammar of meaningfulness not because M guarantees it but because c, the cognitive closure that constitutes beliefs and projects futures and holds relationships across time, is capable of inhabiting that grammar and the life lived inside it is real and the meaning it constitutes is real and M cannot tell him he is wrong. M cannot tell anyone anything. M simply is.

## **5. Eight Searches**

### **5.1 Viktor Frankl: Meaning Constituted in Extremity**

Frankl did not discover that the universe was meaningful. He decided to constitute meaning in conditions designed to make that impossible. In the camps, every external grammar was stripped away. The professional identity, gone. The family, gone. The future, radically uncertain. The past, inaccessible. What remained was m: the felt interior of a conscious being who was still, despite everything, alive. And what Frankl found, or more precisely what Frankl did, was to constitute meaning from that m in contact with M. The image of his wife's face. The decision to help another prisoner survive. The commitment to bear witness so that others would know. These were not discoveries of pre-existing significance. They were constitutive acts, performed at the boundary of what human consciousness can hold, in the presence of M.

Frankl's great contribution was to establish that the capacity to constitute meaning is the last freedom, the one that cannot be taken by any external force. But the paper he wrote did not name what that capacity was operating in relation to. It was operating in relation to M. Frankl's search for meaning was conducted at the boundary of what can be, in the presence of the inexhaustible ground, and the meaning he constituted there was real precisely because it was constituted by a conscious being in genuine contact with what cannot be closed.

## **5.2 Albert Camus: The Honest Absurdist**

Camus looked at M and saw what John sees: a universe that is silent, indifferent, without purpose or direction. He named this the absurd: the confrontation between the human need for meaning and the universe's refusal to supply it. And then he said something that John has not said and that separates Camus from mere nihilism. We must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Not because the boulder means something. Because the pushing is ours. Camus constituted meaning in full awareness of M's indifference. He did not pretend M was something it was not. He looked at M honestly, named the absurd honestly, and then constituted meaning anyway, not as a refusal of M but as the only honest response to it. The wave does not need the ocean to endorse it. The wave is real while it is a wave. That is enough. Camus took John's position and lived it with more courage and more philosophical precision than John typically does, and what he arrived at was not nihilism but a form of radical affirmation that is closer to Soren's leap than to John's resignation.

## **5.3 Soren Kierkegaard: The Leap Named Honestly**

Kierkegaard understood before anyone in the philosophical tradition that M cannot be closed by reason. His three stages, the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, are three different grammars for inhabiting a life, each generating remainder that the next is designed to absorb, each ultimately insufficient before the inexhaustibility of M. The leap of faith is not a logical argument. It is a constitutive act performed in full awareness of its own groundlessness. Kierkegaard leaps into a grammar that holds the universe as the site of an absolute relationship, knowing M has not endorsed this grammar, knowing the leap cannot be justified from outside, knowing the responsibility is entirely his.

This is the most philosophically honest position in the suite. Not because it is correct and John's is wrong. But because it names what it is doing. John does not name his leap. Bob does not name his. Soren names his, takes it anyway, and lives inside it with the full weight of the choice. The leap into faith is the clearest demonstration in the history of philosophy of what c is capable of: constituting a grammar at the boundary of M that holds meaning not because M guarantees it but because conscious life is capable of inhabiting meaning in the face of everything that M refuses to confirm.

## **5.4 Rumi: When m Touches M Most Intensely**

Rumi's poetry is the record of what happens when the contact between m and M becomes so intense that the wave feels the ocean from the inside. Not metaphorically. Rumi describes, with more precision than most philosophers, the phenomenology of a conscious closure at the boundary of what it can hold, pressed against M with such force that the closure becomes briefly transparent and what is on the other side floods through.

What floods through is not information. It is not doctrinal content. It is the presence of M itself, felt from the inside, encountered by m in a moment of radical permeability. Rumi calls it the Beloved. The closure framework does not need to evaluate that name. What the framework can say is that Rumi is describing a real encounter at a real boundary, conducted by a real m in the

presence of real M, and that the meaning it produced was so overwhelming that it reorganized everything inside the closure permanently. The wave was changed by feeling the ocean.

### **5.5 Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Silence That Points**

Wittgenstein ended the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with the most famous sentence in twentieth century philosophy: whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. He was pointing at M. Not naming it. Pointing at the boundary of what language, which is a closure over semantic degrees of freedom, can reach. And then he went silent about it.

And then he spent the rest of his life talking about it anyway, in the *Philosophical Investigations*, in the lectures, in the notebooks. He could not stay silent about M. No conscious being can. The silence is not where the search ends. It is where it becomes most honest. Wittgenstein's career is the demonstration that the search for M cannot be completed or abandoned. It can only be conducted with more or less honesty about what it is encountering.

### **5.6 Simone Weil: Attention as Contact**

Weil's philosophical contribution was to identify a specific practice of conscious life that places m in the most direct possible contact with M: attention. Not the attention of problem-solving, which is the projection of a cognitive grammar onto the world in order to close it. The attention of waiting, of holding the self open without filling the emptiness, of being present at the boundary of what can be held without grasping for something to hold.

Weil believed that the soul's capacity to wait without filling the emptiness was itself a form of contact with M. That the openness was the encounter. That what arrives in genuine attention is not the product of the attending conscious being but a presence from the other side of the boundary that the attention creates the conditions for. Whether or not that is theologically correct in Weil's sense, it is phenomenologically precise. Attention without grasping is the posture of a conscious closure that has become maximally permeable to M without dissolving. It is the wave held at its most open.

### **5.7 Albert Einstein: Mystery as Method**

Einstein said the most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. He did not say this as a romantic aside. He said it as a statement about the epistemology of science. The encounter with M, the experience of pressing against the boundary of what any grammar can hold and feeling what is on the other side, was for Einstein not the failure of understanding but its precondition. Every genuine scientific advance begins with the encounter with M: the moment when the existing grammar generates remainder that it cannot absorb, when the anomaly accumulates to the point of forcing supersession, when the conscious being at the boundary of what can be said feels the pressure of what cannot yet be said and follows it.

Einstein did not solve M. He used M. He used the encounter with the inexhaustible ground to generate new grammars that reached further than the old ones, knowing that the new grammars would themselves generate remainder, knowing the search would not end, knowing M would still

be there at the boundary of whatever he built. The mystery was not the enemy of understanding. It was understanding's source.

## **5.8 The Patient Alone**

There is a figure who does not appear in philosophy books and who conducts the search for M in the most unmediated and least protected conditions of all. The patient who sits alone after a diagnosis. Not a philosopher. Not a mystic. Not equipped with a framework or a tradition or a vocabulary for what is happening. Just a conscious being whose existing grammar has been insufficient to model what is now present in their life, who is at the boundary of what their closure can hold, in the presence of M.

What happens in that room is the search for M in its most naked form. The person reaches for every grammar they have. Medical information. Religious belief. The words of people who have been here before. The memory of how they survived other boundaries. And they find, as every conscious being finds at the genuine boundary, that no grammar fully closes what M presents there. Not because the grammars are bad. Because M exceeds them. The boundary is real. What is on the other side is real. And the search that begins in that room, the search for a way to be in the presence of what cannot be closed, is the search that Frankl conducted in the camps and that Rumi conducted in his poetry and that Wittgenstein conducted in his silence. It is the most fundamental activity of conscious life. It is the search for M.

## **6. The Search That Has a Real Object**

The search for M is not a search that will end. This is the first thing to say and the most important. M cannot be closed. No grammar, no matter how refined, will finally capture it. No experience, no matter how intense, will exhaust it. The boundary is permanent. The inexhaustibility is not a temporary condition of our ignorance. It is a structural feature of what M is and what conscious closure is and what the relationship between them necessarily produces.

But the search has a real object. This is the second thing to say and the thing that distinguishes it from the searches that have no object. John's search has no object because John has concluded there is nothing to search for. Bob's search has a false object because Bob has projected a meaning onto M that M cannot carry and will eventually find the projection insufficient. Soren's search has the right relationship to the object: he knows M is there, he knows it cannot be closed, he leaps toward it anyway in a grammar that holds it as meaningful, and he does not confuse the grammar with the ground.

The encounter with M is real. Every hero in this paper encountered it. Frankl at the boundary of survival. Camus at the boundary of meaning. Kierkegaard at the boundary of reason. Rumi at the boundary of the self. Wittgenstein at the boundary of language. Weil at the boundary of attention. Einstein at the boundary of the known. The patient in the room at the boundary of the life they thought they were living. Different grammars, different vocabularies, different traditions, different conclusions. The same boundary. The same encounter. The same M.

The search for M is what conscious beings do when they are most fully alive. Not because M rewards the search with answers. M does not answer. M simply is. But the search itself, the

pressing against the boundary of what can be held, the willingness to stand at the edge of the closure and feel what is on the other side, is the activity that produces the most intense and most real in that conscious life is capable of. The wave is most fully a wave at the moment it encounters the ocean most directly.

This is the thing that Frankl's book, for all its greatness, did not say. Frankl said the search for meaning is the deepest human motivation. That is true and it sustained millions of readers. But beneath the search for meaning is the search for M. The search for the inexhaustible ground that meaning arises from. The search that has always been conducted, by every conscious being who ever pressed against the limits of their grammar, in every tradition, in every language, in every extremity of human experience. The search that cannot succeed in the ordinary sense and cannot be abandoned in any sense. The search that is the most fundamental activity of a conscious life.

The search for M is the search for what is really there at the boundary of what can be. And what is really there is M. Inexhaustible. Unnameable in any final sense. Real beyond any doubt. Present at every boundary that any conscious closure has ever reached. The ocean beneath every wave that has ever risen from it.

## **7. Why This Paper Is Written the Way It Is**

The other papers in this suite are arguments. They take positions and defend them. They engage objections and answer them. They build from premises to conclusions using the vocabulary of the closure framework: grammar, remainder, closure, supersession, C and c, the nested ladder.

This paper is written differently. It points rather than argues. It presents figures rather than propositions. It moves through lives rather than through logical steps. This is not a relaxation of rigor. It is the appropriate method for a subject that cannot be fully reached by argument.

M cannot be argued into existence. It can only be indicated, pointed at, approached from multiple directions until the reader recognizes what all the approaches have in common. The heroes in this paper are not examples of a thesis. They are multiple independent approaches to the same boundary, offered in the hope that the reader will recognize the boundary from their own experience and understand what is on the other side of it not because the paper has told them but because they have been there themselves.

Every conscious being has been at the boundary of M. Not every conscious being has had the vocabulary to name it. This paper offers that vocabulary not as a framework to be accepted or rejected but as a description of something already known, already lived, already encountered in every moment when experience pressed against the limits of what a grammar could hold and something on the other side pressed back.

The search for M is the oldest search. This paper is the first time it has been given this name. The name does not complete the search. Nothing completes the search. But having a name for what you are searching for makes the search more honest, more deliberate, and perhaps more able to receive what the encounter with M actually offers: not an answer, but the most fully inhabited experience of being a conscious presence at the boundary of what can be.

## 8. At the Boundary

John is at the boundary right now, even as he insists there is nothing on the other side. The insistence is itself a response to the pressure he feels there. You do not need to insist that a wall is solid if you cannot feel what is on the other side of it.

Bob is at the boundary, held there by the feeling that keeps refusing to be explained away, the feeling that what is on the other side is not nothing, that the pressure is real, that the universe is not indifferent even if he cannot prove it. He is right about the pressure. He has misidentified its source. The source is not a meaningful universe. The source is M.

Soren is at the boundary and knows he is there. He knows M is what he is pressing against. He knows it cannot be closed. He leaps anyway, into a grammar that holds the pressure as meaningful, into a life constituted in the face of what cannot be confirmed. He is the most philosophically honest of the three and the most fully alive.

The patient in the room is at the boundary without having chosen to be there. The boundary came to them. M arrived in the form of a diagnosis, a loss, a dissolution of the grammar they had built their life inside. They are searching for M without knowing that is what they are doing. They are reaching for every grammar they have and finding each one insufficient. They are at the most naked and most real version of the search.

And you, reading this, are at the boundary too. You have been there before. You will be there again. In the moments when the music does something you cannot explain. In the moments when grief strips away every familiar category. In the moments when beauty exceeds what you can say about it. In the moments just before sleep when the day's grammars dissolve. In the moments when a question opens that no answer closes.

That boundary is M. What presses back from the other side is M. The fact that you cannot close it, cannot capture it, cannot bring it fully inside any grammar you have ever had: that is not a failure of understanding. It is the structural fact of what you are and what the world is and what the relationship between them necessarily produces.

The search for M is what you have always been doing at those moments. It has a name now. It has a structure now. It has companions now, Frankl and Camus and Kierkegaard and Rumi and Wittgenstein and Weil and Einstein and the patient in the room, all of whom conducted the same search in different grammars and arrived at the same boundary.

The boundary is real. What is on the other side is real. The search that takes you there is the most fundamental activity of conscious life.

Go.

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## Author's Note

*This paper is the fifth in the CC-C suite and the one written in the most deliberate contrast to the others. The Grammar of Knowing, the Grammar of Healing, and Semantic Remainder are philosophical arguments in the analytic tradition: they take positions, derive conclusions, engage objections. This paper is written in a different register, phenomenological before it is argumentative, pointing before it names, moving through lives before it reaches the framework. That difference in form is itself a demonstration of Semantic Remainder's central claim: the same propositional content, formulated differently, constitutes different cognitive facts. The framework is present*

*throughout this paper. It arrives quietly, at the end of each section, to name what the phenomenological approach has already allowed the reader to recognize. The search for M is the oldest search in human experience. This paper is the first time it has been given this name within a formal philosophical framework. The name does not complete the search. Nothing completes the search. The search is the point.*