

A PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY

THE CREATOR

Beyond Obedience

MAKSYM STEPANENKO

On Conscience, Freedom,
and the Possibility of New Worlds

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Contents

About This Book

THE RIGHT TO DOUBT

Preface. The Doubt Where It All Began

Chapter One. Before the First Arrow

Chapter Two. A Being Who Can Work Miracles

Chapter Three. Pride at the Temple Door

A WORLD WITH NO VERDICT IN ADVANCE

Chapter Four. The Universe Has No Plus Sign

Chapter Five. The Maker's Right

Chapter Six. Rays Returning to the Source

Chapter Seven. When Silence Begins to Speak

THE WORKSHOP OF WORLDS

Chapter Eight. An Ordinary Person's Workshop

Chapter Nine. After the Pyramid

Chapter Ten. The Death of Form, the Life of Matter

Chapter Eleven. A Power That Can Let Go

Chapter Twelve. Three Designs for a Universe

THE FREEDOM OF THE CREATED

Chapter Thirteen. The One Who Will Not Let the Question Go

Epilogue. A Beginning, Not a Summit

Afterword. What in This Book Is Hypothesis

Further Reading

AFTER THE BOOK: A WORKSHOP OF QUESTIONS

Workshop. Don’t Take Even This Book at Its Word
Twelve Questions That Remain Open
A Draft of a Creator’s Personal Ethics
The Last Page. An Unfinished Map
About the Author
Publication Details

About This Book

Who has the right to decide what is good and what is evil? And does the power to create a world give the right to dispose of the lives of those who live in it?

It all begins with the doubt of a man who is told he must carry out a command from on high. From the questions it puts to the *Bhagavad Gita* and to ancient stories, the conversation moves on to power, conscience, the nature of consciousness, and a possible future in which creators no longer stand one above another and instead learn to coexist.

The Creator: Beyond Obedience is a philosophical essay on freedom, responsibility, and the price of certainty. It is neither a religious treatise nor an attempt to prove how the Universe is built. It is an invitation to reason, to challenge even beautiful truths, and to look for a morality that begins with the ability to hear another person rather than with obedience.

The book closes with a Workshop and questions for reflection on your own.

THE RIGHT TO DOUBT

Preface. The Doubt Where It All Began

At dusk a room seems larger. The table has been cleared, the windows of the neighboring houses are going dark, and only one thought refuses to grow quieter: if someone is able to create an entire Universe, am I obliged to consider him good? The question is uncomfortable, and not because answering it is forbidden. It is uncomfortable because it forces us to reexamine every word we have learned to hold up against the unknown: “sacred,” “higher,” “destined,” “must.”

For this discussion an ordinary person has neither a laboratory outside the cosmos nor access to the archives of eternity. There is only the experience of living, the ability to reason, the testimony of others—and the unsettling chance of mistaking a beautiful explanation for proof.

Imagine that someone comes to a man and declares: “To save the whole, you must sacrifice a part.” The man asks why. He is shown a map of the world, the history of wars, ancient books, and finally a terrifying vision of the cosmic abyss. “Now do you understand?” the visitor asks. Yet the hardest question arises only after all this: how do we know that power over reality confers power over a moral decision?

This line of reasoning will produce no convenient winner. Nothing here pronounces God guilty and man in the right. What we will try to do is take apart the procedure of the trial itself: who has the right to hand down the final verdict, what evidence that judge has to go on, and what price for an error is paid by the one who was never allowed to speak.

We will have to begin with an ancient scene in which a man holding a weapon suddenly stops seeing enemies in front of him and sees people again.

The right to ask may prove the most important gift any possible maker could give us.

This essay grew out of a long dialogue. It began with episodes from the Indian epic, moved on to the problem of divine commands, then to the structure of good and evil, to the nature of the Absolute, and finally to the hypothesis that conscious beings are more than created: they are gradually becoming creators themselves. There is no attempt here to prove the existence of God, of spiritual evolution, or of multiple universes. This is an inquiry into which conclusions actually follow from our premises and which we have merely grown used to treating as obvious.

Its central idea is simple and uncomfortable: even if someone created existence, the freedom of the created need not be the maker's mistake. Perhaps that freedom is the very meaning of creation.

Along the way we will have to give up our own beautiful conclusions more than once. Good will turn out not to be the same thing as creation. Destruction will turn out not to be the same thing as evil. Power, not the same thing as moral authority. And spiritual growth may look nothing like an approach to a throne.

And if, after all these retreats, some image of a creator does emerge, perhaps it will be a being that can not only make things but also let go of what it has made.

Chapter One. Before the First Arrow

Nothing is abstract before a battle. The horse's nostrils are damp; behind the raised spears familiar faces stir. From a distance the two armies look like two dark bands, but up close a band breaks apart into separate people: an old man adjusts a strap, a boy holds a weapon for the first time, someone is thinking of home. The epic contains no separate, reportage-like scene with these details; they simply help us picture what the abstract word "war" usually hides.

That is why Arjuna's resistance matters so much. As long as the chariot is still rolling toward its place between the armies, the argument can be carried on in words like "justice," "kingdom," and "duty." Once he sees the faces, a different language takes over—the language of particular losses.

In the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna stands between two armies and refuses to shoot. On one side of him are kinsmen, teachers, and friends; on the other, the same people, bound to him in other ways. The war promises to restore justice, but its price is the bodies of people he knows by name. His hesitation is customarily called weakness, attachment, a lack of spiritual resolve. But the question can be turned around: what if Arjuna's doubt is the most important moral achievement of the whole episode?

To doubt is not to deny duty. It means that the word "duty" cannot, by itself, cancel the consequences of an act. One can defend justice and at the same time not want to kill. One can accept that resistance is necessary and still demand proof that war, specifically, is the necessary way to resist.

But it would be too easy to turn this hero into a modern pacifist on whom an ancient god imposes an outdated morality. The *Bhagavad Gita* speaks of more than the victims of war. It asks how to act when refraining from action also does harm. Arjuna is no civilian onlooker who has decided simply to leave everyone alone. He is a warrior, a party to a political conflict, the bearer of obligations on which others depend. Refusing to fight can also hand power to someone ready to use it without restraint.

We find ourselves in a genuine tragedy: two moral demands collide, and no formula can keep both of them intact. Defend justice. Do not turn people into means. Sometimes there is no way to fulfill both completely. But it does not follow from their collision that one of them can be canceled for good.

A lofty end does not excuse us from proving that the means are necessary.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna unfolds a different vision before Arjuna: the life of the body is fleeting, the true Self cannot be destroyed; one should act without attachment to reward; the fate of the warriors is shown as part of a wider cosmic order. Within the religious narrative these arguments draw their force from the divine nature of the one who speaks them. But the moment we move from the epic to practical ethics, a tension appears.

If killing is justified by the fact that everyone is mortal, then death can be justified anywhere. If destruction is explained by a future harmony, one has to show why that harmony cannot be reached some other way. If the command comes from a supreme being, we need to settle how we know it really is supreme—and that the height of its position is also the height of its morality.

The *Mahabharata* is too complex to be reduced to the slogan "the end justifies the means." It does not cancel the grief of the victors or turn the battlefield into a spotless operating room. That is exactly why it is more useful to read it as a tragedy of moral choice than as a license for violence in the name of lofty words.

Many centuries later, Gandhi would propose reading this battlefield as an inner human drama as well. Christian ethics, with its love for the enemy, would set a different limit on retribution. And nonviolence would find hard questions of its own: what should be done about someone who uses our peaceableness as a weapon against the weak?

And yet, before the first arrow is loosed, there remains a second that history all too often crosses out. A second in which one can ask: "Have we really exhausted everything else?" Perhaps morality begins right there, with the refusal to cross out that second.

Chapter Two. A Being Who Can Work Miracles

Picture neither a temple nor a battlefield but a square in a great city. A glowing crack opens above the rooftops, and a stranger steps out of it. He knows the name of everyone present, lifts stones with a single glance, and shows a picture of the future so precise that the doubters fall silent. Then he asks for an act that, only that morning, everyone would have thought impermissible.

We will not explain his abilities away as tricks: in this thought experiment they are real. That makes the question all the more exacting. If a miracle really has taken place, which claim, exactly, has it proved?

Suppose we are facing a being able to alter matter, foresee events, and display worlds we never suspected. It claims to have created the Universe. Let us even grant that all its miracles are real.

What has been proved? Its power. Perhaps its knowledge. But not its goodness.

Knowing what will happen is not the same as knowing what ought to happen. The ability to create is not the same as the right to destroy. The capacity to command space and time does not prove the capacity to tell the just from the unjust without error. Nor does the question go away if the one we are speaking with really is the creator. In ordinary life this mistake is made constantly, except that power stands in for the miracle. Someone knows how to make billions—and is asked about the meaning of life. Someone can lead armies—and his words are taken as the measure of justice. Someone builds a technology that works—and

is suddenly extended credit on questions of freedom his technology never examined.

We carry competence over from one domain to another, as though power were a universal proof in its own right. Yet neither success, nor the ability to predict, nor even the actual creation of a world is a ready answer to the question of what one may do with those who live inside it.

A miracle proves an extraordinary power. It does not prove a moral right.

Here an ancient dilemma arises, familiar from Plato's *Euthyphro*: is the good good because the deity wills it, or does the deity will it because it is good? In the first case morality risks depending on a will we are unable to judge. In the second, the criterion of the good is, in some sense, logically independent of the command itself.

There is also a third answer: the divine nature is identical with the good, so God's will cannot be arbitrary. But for someone standing before the miracle-worker, the practical problem remains. By what signs can that nature be told apart from an infinitely talented imitation? And why should the very ability to doubt be counted as an affront to what is highest?

Perhaps this is the minimal right of a conscious being: even after seeing a miracle, it is not obliged to treat the miracle as moral proof.

The stranger in the square may really have created the stars. His power may be beyond imagining. If he is wise, he ought to be able to withstand a question from a being he himself endowed with the ability to ask. If the question is unbearable to him, we will need still more caution.

The impostor to fear most, after all, is not the one who can do nothing at all, but the one whose genuine power helps us forget that power and goodness are separate questions.

Chapter Three. Pride at the Temple Door

In a small group, people sit in a circle. The conversation turns to spiritual maturity. One participant asks why he should bow before a power when he does not yet know whether it is good. The leader looks at him with patient sorrow and replies: “You don’t understand yet. Your pride is getting in the way.” There is no need in this scene to guess at anyone’s motives: the speaker may have been perfectly sincere. What matters is something else—the logic of the answer itself.

If doubt is always treated as a symptom of spiritual immaturity, then every objection becomes proof that the teacher is right. The student has lost before he has had the chance to make an argument.

One of the handiest ways to close an argument is to call disagreement pride. “You haven’t grown into it yet,” “you need to bow,” “when the time comes, you’ll understand.” Such phrases may carry genuine care. But they easily form a closed system: the objection is declared a symptom of immaturity, and the wish to test the argument becomes further confirmation of the diagnosis.

Stubbornness, no doubt, can stand in the way of understanding. A person really can reject ideas simply because someone else proposed them. But giving up pride is not the same as giving up judgment. Humility before the truth should not be confused with humility before someone who claims a monopoly on the truth. Nor does the doubter get an automatic pass. People can take pleasure in disagreement for its own sake. That pleasure easily passes itself off as independence. What one rejects may be less the con-

tent of a thought than the humiliating sense that it came from outside. Such rebellion is no freer than blind obedience: it, too, is governed by an unacknowledged dependence.

So the real test of critical thinking is twofold. Can I refuse to believe a person everyone trusts? And can I admit that he is right when his arguments really are strong, even if the bare fact of someone else's superiority is unpleasant to me? Only the two abilities together turn doubt into an honest method.

Humility is a readiness to be wrong, not a duty to keep silent.

One can grant that one might be mistaken and still say: "I will not do harm just because you call it sacred." Such a position makes no necessary claim to omniscience. On the contrary, it acknowledges uncertainty: I do not know everything, and so I do not want to commit an irreversible act on the strength of an unconfirmed claim.

The teacher's conviction that he is right can also be a form of pride. More than that: a pride that never has to prove anything, because it has learned to call itself obedience to God.

Mature doubt has two sides. It can resist another's authority, and it can revise its own conclusions. One side alone reduces it to ordinary rebellion. The two together make it a method of knowing.

Here runs the barely visible line between education and taming. A teacher who gradually makes the student able to do without a teacher enlarges the world. A teacher who forever needs an immature student enlarges his own power.

Perhaps the strictest test of a spiritual guide is to leave his knowledge aside and ask how he responds to a calm, well-rea-

soned “no.”

A WORLD WITH NO VERDICT IN ADVANCE

Chapter Four. The Universe Has No Plus Sign

In winter a garden looks ruined. Bare branches, frost-killed grass, soil that everything living seems to have abandoned. Yet under the thin crust of ice microbes are at work, old leaves are becoming food for new roots, and unseen processes are getting the spring ready. If we judged the garden by growth alone, winter would seem evil. If we judged it by decay alone, spring would look like a pointless aberration.

We are used to placing whatever happens on a scale of plus and minus. But nature does not hand us events with their signs already attached. We put the signs there ourselves—and often change them the moment we widen the frame.

Moral reality is usually drawn as a scale. Creation is the positive pole. Destruction is the negative one. Somewhere between them sits zero, the neutral state of the Universe. But this scheme turns a physical description into a moral conclusion far too quickly.

When a star explodes, it destroys an established order and creates the conditions for new elements and systems to arise. A surgeon cuts living tissue in order to save a life. A tumor grows, produces new cells, and extends its own structure. Creation and destruction, taken by themselves, cannot tell us what deserves our approval.

We need another criterion. Perhaps the well-being of conscious beings. Perhaps their freedom. Perhaps the capacity of living systems to go on developing. Perhaps some entirely differ-

ent principle that we have not yet put into words. What matters is not to let ready-made words stand in for the search.

Then comes the temptation to give up judging altogether: if no cosmic scale is in sight, the difference between care and cruelty must be an invention too. That is too quick a leap. The absence of morality from the equations of planetary motion does not show that value is absent from the lives of those who can feel. Color is not written into the formula for gravity, and yet sight exists.

In philosophy it helps to distinguish moral realism, which allows for independent moral facts, from antirealism and constructivism, which account for the origin of our judgments in different ways. For the inquiry ahead, choosing a school in advance matters less than keeping three levels apart: what happens, how it is experienced, and how we ought to act.

Destruction describes a change. Evil is a moral judgment. Confuse the two and you get a false cosmology.

If the Universe contains no objectively existing “good” as a special cosmic substance, that does not make suffering disappear. Pain stays real for the one who feels it. But getting from the fact of pain to a moral obligation to reduce it takes an argument. This is where physics ends and philosophy begins.

One can be a moral realist and hold that independent moral facts exist. One can be an antirealist who sees moral judgments as expressions of human attitudes. One can be a constructivist, for whom norms arise from the conditions of reasonable life together. For now, none of these positions can be declared the uncontested result of our reasoning.

But we can already give up a bad shortcut: good is not simply another name for creation, and evil is not simply another name

for destruction.

On this page one is tempted to close the matter and declare that good is life and evil is death. But one organism can live at the expense of another; the death of a cell can save a whole body; keeping an unjust order in place can do more harm than tearing it down. The world has no single, simple sign that stays the same at every scale.

If we want to defend the value of life, we will have to do it more seriously than with a metaphor about spring. And perhaps the hardest question of all is why the experience of a being in pain should matter to someone who feels no pain.

Chapter Five. The Maker's Right

On the writing desk lies an unfinished book. The author can erase a page, strike out a character, destroy the whole text. No one will ask what rights the character had: in an ordinary novel, a character is not an independent consciousness. Now imagine a book of a different kind—a world whose inhabitants really do live through time, keep memories, and know happiness from fear.

The author's hand still holds the pen. Only one thing has changed: on the other side of the page there are now beings for whom the world is real. And with them comes a moral question that no ordinary manuscript ever raised.

A person has built a mechanism and has the right to use it. But what if, one day, the mechanism begins to experience its own existence? What if it acquires memory, goals, a fear of pain, and the ability to ask, "What gives you the right to switch me off?"

The fact of having made something answers the question of where it came from. It does not automatically answer the question of how the made thing may be treated. Parents gave their child life, but the child is not their property. An author may write a novel, yet a relationship with a genuinely independent consciousness is not the same as a relationship with a manuscript.

Parents create the conditions for a child to come into being, but that does not turn the child into their possession. An engineer may assemble a device, but if the device at some point acquires genuine subjective experience, the relationship of user to tool will no longer be adequate. How much moral status it would have

remains to be investigated; but the fact of its origin cannot, on its own, close the investigation.

A divine creator, of course, need not resemble a parent or an engineer. He might know every consequence of everything that happens. But omniscience is a hypothesis about knowledge, whereas a right is a claim about what is permissible. A bridge between the two is still required. And even if such a bridge exists for God himself, it does not pass automatically to everyone who says, “I act in his name.”

Creating the conditions for someone’s existence does not grant the right to rule their inner world forever.

Suppose the creator of an entire Universe has the power to change any element in it. That is a description of what he can do. Whether he has the moral right to do it is a separate claim. To get from the first to the second, one has to show why the minds inside creation lack moral standing of their own, or why the creator’s purpose always takes precedence over them.

A theologian may reply that the creator knows the whole chain of causes and effects, and so the disasters we see have a hidden good meaning. Perhaps. But that answer does not hand his knowledge over to us. Nor does it entitle any earthly ruler to declare his own cruelties part of an inscrutable plan.

Here a principle comes to light that may prove more important than the question of whether God is real: where a subject came from does not cancel its right to be taken into account.

The ancient question of divine dominion now casts a modern shadow. Humanity may one day build artificial systems whose capacity to experience the world is no longer pure guesswork. Then our reasoning about the rights of the created will stop being

abstract metaphysics and become a question of engineering, ownership, and responsibility.

And perhaps the most morally important quality of a future creator will show itself the moment they first hear their own creation say: “You made me. But I am not you.”

Chapter Six. Rays Returning to the Source

At night the sea seems to be a single whole. Waves rise, collide, and vanish, and not one drop becomes a stranger to the sea forever. It is an easy image to lean on when speaking of a single consciousness from which billions of separate selves temporarily arise. But the comparison hides a trap: we can treat a wave's vanishing as a matter of indifference only because we do not know whether it can feel itself vanish.

And what if every wave can fear, love, remember, and hope? Then talk about the unity of the water no longer settles the question of what a single form is worth.

Now imagine another world, one in which there are no ultimately separate beings. There is a single source of consciousness that unfolds countless perspectives, lives through reality by way of them, and then gathers them back into itself. A single life is a temporary ray sent out into the world.

For the source, the extinction of a million rays may mean no loss at all. It does not become smaller. Nothing leaves it for good. Might our morality, then, turn out to be the product of an excessive attachment to the brief condition of a separate self?

The answer depends on what exactly we count as valuable. If the only thing that matters is that the original source remains unchanged, then a happy world and a tormented one may be worth the same: both end in the same unity. But why should the final state swallow up the value of the path that was lived?

The idea of a single Atman, of Brahman, and of distinct levels of reality offers a rich language here, especially in Advaita

Vedanta. But a language is not a proof. Even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that all minds are manifestations of one source, we do not know whether the memory of individuality survives, how the return takes place, or whether the original source has preferences of its own.

The most tempting conclusion sounds cruel: if no one can be destroyed in the ultimate sense, then all violence is negligible. But the indestructibility of the supposed ground of consciousness does not make the experience of its particular forms negligible. You can destroy a concert without destroying the world's capacity to make music; the work that was lost does not come back because of that.

The unity of the source does not erase the reality of what its passing forms live through.

Music lasts a few minutes and is gone. A conversation between lovers comes to an end. A child grows up, and that childhood no longer exists. Being temporary does not make an event false. Even if individual experience is a manifestation of a single consciousness, pain remains pain within that manifestation.

The argument can even be turned around. If all beings are one, then making another suffer does not stop mattering; it becomes a form of suffering for the one consciousness itself. Unity can justify indifference as easily as compassion; on its own, it does not make the choice.

Strict nonduality, as in Advaita, distinguishes between an absolute and an empirical level of description. But moving from one to the other calls for care. You cannot declare human pain an illusion and then demand real human obedience. If an event is

insignificant on one level, you have to explain why a command concerning it is significant on another.

The opposite possibility also exists. If another's suffering is, in the end, the suffering of the very consciousness that is now saying "I," then unity can give rise to the most radical compassion instead of indifference. Care then turns out to be a clear-eyed way of relating to oneself rather than a virtue shown to someone else.

Which of the two readings is right? A metaphysical premise alone does not decide it. We still have to choose what to count as valuable. And that choice makes itself felt every time a grand theory tries to silence a small pain.

Chapter Seven. When Silence Begins to Speak

Someone sits in silence. First they hear the refrigerator humming, then the air passing through their nose, and then their habitual thoughts lose their persuasive tone. At some point it seems to them that they have glimpsed their own life from far away. Perhaps it is simply an unusual clarity. Perhaps it is a sense of belonging to something larger. Sometimes the experience is so strong that they can find no other word for it than “revelation.”

But to name an experience is not to explain where it came from. And this is where work begins that calls for more caution than admiring the depth of one’s own state.

How is a consciousness to look for the source, if there is one? Meditation, prayer, silence, inner work—all these practices can open unusual ways of experiencing reality. But the strangeness of an experience is no certificate of its origin.

There is a difference between a thought that arrives unexpectedly, an experience of deep unity, and a voice that is perceived as a command from outside. Each of these events may have different explanations. A person can sincerely experience a revelation and still be wrong about its source. The mind is able to produce images and inner speech without any conscious effort. That does not make every unusual experience an illness. Many spiritual practices have historically trained the ability to observe experiences attentively as they arise. Yet neither the intensity of a felt presence, nor unconditional certainty, nor a sudden inner voice confirms on its own that the source is an external deity.

The practical line is drawn by consequences rather than by the word “God”: does the person keep the ability to doubt, to sleep, to work, to sustain relationships, to put off acting? Do intrusive commands appear, or dangerous behavior, or a breakdown of daily life? These signs call for attention to the psychological and clinical context, not for a theological argument with someone in distress.

The more convincing the revelation, the more important it is to keep the freedom not to act on it at once.

This is why a principle of double checking is useful. First, do not turn the subjective force of an experience into objective certainty. Second, weigh the consequences: does the experience leave intact the ability to think, to criticize, to care for people, to sleep, to work, and to revise one’s conclusions? Or does it take those abilities away, demand immediate obedience, and declare every doubt a crime? Questions of mental health are not settled by religious polemic. Literal voices, loss of critical judgment, severe insomnia, and impaired everyday functioning call for clinical evaluation. At the same time, practicing a spiritual discipline or having an unusual experience is not in itself a diagnosis.

If a genuine source of wisdom exists, doubt need not offend it. Perhaps the reverse is true: testing may be the very means by which consciousness stops mistaking its own fantasies for the truth.

If the thought “you must” ever rises from the depths of your mind, the wisest first step may be to pause. Write the thought down. Get some sleep. Check the facts. Tell someone who isn’t afraid to disagree with you. Do not commit an irreversible act just because it came with a sense of cosmic necessity.

Perhaps the real use of meditation is not to receive orders but to stop taking every vivid thought for one. Silence may be valuable if only because it teaches us to tell a thought from an act.

THE WORKSHOP OF WORLDS

Chapter Eight. An Ordinary Person's Workshop

In the morning someone opens the window, straightens the books, and clears yesterday's cups off the desk. In half an hour a small universe has changed—the order of things, the light, the chance to work in peace. Then the same person sits down at the computer and creates a system that did not exist the day before. A year later other people are working inside it; ten years on, it begins to live a life of its own.

At first "creation" seems too lofty a word for this. But why? Creation does not have to begin with the birth of a star. We are always making forms real, turning possibility into existence, joining what used to be apart.

Then the conversation takes a turn. We start asking not only about a creator's rights but about our own creating. People do not wait until the end of a spiritual path before they create. They put a room in order, grow a tree, bring a child into the world, write a program, build a company, invent a language, set the rules of a game. They change reality on purpose.

These are different kinds of activity. Having a child is not the same as making an object, and founding a company is not the same as creating spacetime. The ability to create universes cannot be logically derived from the abilities we know. But one continuous trait is visible: consciousness can organize the world around it and bring forth systems that go on acting beyond the impulse that started them.

A child is neither a manufactured object nor a product of the parents' will. A whole biological history, beyond any one person's command, takes part in a child's coming into being. Yet parenthood reveals something particular about our experience of creating: sometimes the result becomes an independent subject that not only slips out of control but acquires purposes of its own.

A business, a book, a city, a language, a technology platform—these are further examples. Some are material, some institutional, and some consist above all of relationships. In every case the creator organizes possibilities that already exist, and what is created acquires a momentum of its own. We do not make matter out of nothing—and yet we make something that never existed before as a system.

You do not become a creator on the day you are given a universe. We are already creating—the only questions are scale and responsibility.

Hence the hypothesis of a creator's spiritual evolution. Perhaps we are not moving from a total absence of creative power to its sudden acquisition. Perhaps a capacity we already have is gaining ever greater scale, complexity, and independence. Today it is objects and organizations. Tomorrow, autonomous artificial systems, self-sustaining ecosystems, transformed planets. Beyond anything science can observe, a speculative question arises: is there a fundamental limit past which no new worlds can be created?

A neat series of examples does not prove a hypothesis. This one has to explain how experience accumulates, how consciousness relates to physical capability, and where creative power might reach its limit. Its merit lies in a clear starting point: for us,

creation is more than a religious word. We keep finding it in our own work.

From here one can posit a continuity: from changing a room to organizing a society, from organizing a society to transforming a planet, from transforming a planet to creating new environments for life. But honesty requires leaving a gap at this point. We have no proof that the ability to build complex systems within existing physical laws will ever let us create new laws or new spacetimes.

Perhaps there is an impassable boundary somewhere on this road. Or perhaps it only looks like one to a creature of today, with a short biography and feeble technology. Our hypothesis need not pretend to be knowledge in order to stay fruitful.

Chapter Nine. After the Pyramid

It is easy to picture the spiritual world as a pyramid. At the top stands a shining throne, below it the steps, and every being occupies its proper place. The picture makes sense to anyone who grew up among job titles, military ranks, and school grades. It promises clarity: the higher, the more powerful; the more powerful, the closer to the truth.

But let us try to imagine, instead of a pyramid, a city at night seen from above. Light burns in thousands of windows. Each house is linked to the others by roads, electricity, water, language, exchange. No one has to stand above everyone else for a complex structure to exist. Some nodes matter more to certain flows, others to different ones.

If creative development reaches the point of giving rise to new universes, the original vertical begins to come apart. In the traditional picture God is at the top and the created are below. In the new hypothesis a creator can give rise to another creator, and that one to the next. Each can become an independent center of development.

What results is less a pyramid than a heterarchy: a network of participants with different capacities but no single mandatory axis of subordination. In management terms it is fair to recall “teal” organizations, where self-organization does not mean that everyone has the same experience, and the absence of a rigid pyramid of bosses does not mean the absence of responsibility. The word “heterarchy” is more precise here than plain equality. Members of the network can differ in knowledge, scale, and influ-

ence without being bound to obey a single eternal vertical. In organizations such principles are associated with self-organization; in our hypothesis they become the image of a cosmology in which creators give rise to new worlds and enter into relations without forming a single center of command.

A problem of terminology arises. If the Absolute is literally everything that exists, a second Absolute equal to it cannot appear alongside it: the very word “alongside” already places both within a wider reality. But if we call any being capable of making a separate world a creator, many such creators are logically possible. The word “Absolute” should then be reserved for the ultimate whole rather than applied to every powerful participant.

Growth may lead not to a summit above others but to the ability to exist alongside them.

The word “Absolute,” however, needs refining. If the Absolute includes everything that exists, a second independent Absolute beside it contradicts the very definition. It may be more accurate to distinguish the primal ground of being from the local creator of a world. Even the maker of a universe may remain a participant in a wider reality.

Then a whole tree of generation comes into view: worlds that give rise to creators; creators that give rise to worlds; new minds under no obligation to copy the original design of their own home. Such a system has no necessary final step. Its completeness may consist in the very fact that it can never be completed.

But potential development confers no moral right to dominate. On the contrary, a creator’s highest achievement in such a net-

work might be the ability to create beings who owe their maker no obedience.

Nor is the network an automatic utopia. It can breed conflict, isolation, and unequal means. The mere absence of a throne guarantees no moral well-being. But the network changes the ideal of growing up: the aim is no longer to take the elder's place but to become independent and capable of cooperation.

If a maker really wished to bring forth his own kind, he would also have to accept an unpleasant possibility: one day the new creators will propose worlds he would never have thought of, and values he will have to argue with.

Chapter Ten. The Death of Form, the Life of Matter

An old house stands on a vacant lot. In the morning the machines arrive, and by evening nothing is left of it but a heap of brick, dust, and a level patch of ground. To the memory of those who lived there, this is destruction. To the builders of a future park, it is the start of work. To matter, it is a rearrangement of parts. Three views of one event, and each is right at its own scale.

When we say "the destroyer is secondary, because he destroys what has already been made," it is easy to forget that the maker, too, takes his material from a world that came before. Even writing a single line takes energy, time, language, and other people's labor. Every one of our creations is heir to countless transformations.

At first creation seems more fundamental than destruction. For something to be destroyed, it has to exist. Annihilation relies on a structure that has already arisen. But creation, too, rarely begins from emptiness: it draws on matter, energy, earlier forms, and the labor of others. Building a house means transforming materials; organized life means constant exchange with its environment.

Perhaps, in observable nature, transformation itself comes before both categories. We call a process creation when a structure we care about has appeared, and destruction when it has vanished. One and the same event is often both, depending on the scale and the question. This does not mean that everything in the

world is of equal value. Tearing down an old dam may save the people living downstream, or it may doom them. The judgment depends on consequences, intentions, alternatives, and how the risk is shared. Moving from describing a process to judging it morally requires a human standard—or, in our hypothesis, the standard of some wider consciousness.

Thermodynamics gives us no right, either, to treat cruelty as a duty imposed by nature. Keeping local order requires exchange, energy, and dissipation; but no known physical rule demands a villain before a star can finish its cycle or a cell can give way to another. The balance of arising and decay is not the balance of compassion and hatred.

Not all that vanishes was destroyed in vain. But not all that must change has to be tormented.

The second law of thermodynamics does not require evil beings to exist. When order forms locally, available resources are spent and energy dissipates. Moral cruelty, though, does not enter the equations. For the old to make way for the new, no one has to inflict suffering out of malice.

That is why the idea of a cosmic balance between good and evil is suspect. A balance between the arising and vanishing of structures is a possible physical story. A balance between compassion and cruelty is already a moral thesis, and it has no comparable physical foundation.

The Universe is under no obligation to produce a mega-destroyer every time a mega-creator appears. The creator can bring processes to a close himself, remove damaged structures, and clear space for the new. Destruction is a function of change, and need not be a villain's calling.

If ultimate creators exist, perhaps their art lies precisely in the finesse of transformation: to end things without humiliation, to make room without senseless damage, to redistribute resources so that the disappearance of one form does not become a needless catastrophe for another.

This is not yet an ethics of the Absolute. But it is a demanding enough human practice: telling the unavoidable cost of change apart from the cruelty it is convenient to call unavoidable.

Chapter Eleven. A Power That Can Let Go

Two master builders are putting up bridges. The first knows how to give orders so that no one dares object. The bridge goes up fast, the reports are flawless, the workers keep quiet. The second spends time on awkward questions: Who noticed the crack? Why was the design changed? What happens if a strong wind comes ahead of schedule? His work looks less impressive. But in which of the two workshops is a mistake more likely to be caught before it becomes a disaster?

The answer is not always clear-cut. Discipline sometimes saves the day, and rounds of approval sometimes get in the way of action. Still, the question shows that morality can change not only the direction of power but a system's very capacity to deal with reality.

Yet an intuition remains that cannot simply be brushed aside: perhaps goodness does more than direct power—perhaps it increases it. Not the force of a blow, but the capacity to bring a lasting future into being.

Someone who rules through fear can marshal enormous resources. Cruelty sometimes delivers impressive short-term efficiency. But a system built on submission alone has to keep reproducing control. Its members become functions of a central will instead of independent sources of growth.

A system of trust, by contrast, can bring together the abilities of free participants. One person founds a school, and out of it come people able to create new schools, new research, and

wholly unexpected kinds of work. A creator makes not only objects but the very possibility of independent creation.

If a participant trusts others and can tell the truth without danger, the group gains information it could never have extracted by force. If a maker respects his students' autonomy, each of them can offer a solution that was never in his own mind. The harder the task, the more it matters to turn other people's independence into a source of new possibilities rather than a threat.

And yet this must not be turned into the sugary formula "the good are always stronger." History knows cruel rulers who prospered and just communities that perished. Destruction is sometimes quicker than creation. Morality is no magic armor. Our thesis is narrower and more interesting: certain forms of morality can raise the ceiling on how complex and long-lived creative systems become, through trust, accurate feedback, and the renunciation of total control.

The strong can get results. The more mature can create others who will get results without them.

In this sense morality can work as an amplifier. Respect for other minds helps complex cooperative systems emerge; cruelty often destroys the conditions for trust. This is neither a universal mathematical theorem nor a promise that the good always win. It is a hypothesis about how far two ways of organizing power can ultimately go.

The criterion of autonomy matters most of all. The more mature a maker, the less he needs to control every step of what he has made. He can do more than turn out copies of his own design: he can open space for the unforeseen. In this tentative

sense, moral maturity is part of the quality of creative power rather than an add-on to it.

A serious objection remains, however. A moral being can be weak; a powerful one can be cruel. So we must distinguish creative power, depth of understanding, and a moral attitude toward others. They may be connected, but the connection is not given in advance.

Morality then becomes part of the technology of creation—not because the good automatically receive more energy, but because the ability to take others into account makes possible forms of cooperation beyond the reach of any single command.

Even here, though, we should be careful with the language of power. A person who refuses to do evil may lose a battle, lose his authority, even lose his life. In a certain moral dimension his act may remain significant, but that does not make him invincible. The power we are speaking of cannot be reduced to the ability to win today.

Chapter Twelve. Three Designs for a Universe

Imagine a hall with no ceiling. Stars where the walls should be. At a table with three blueprints on it stands a being who can change the laws of a future world. No advisers stand nearby to check its decision. It alone chooses what time will be like, how much freedom the inhabitants will have, and what a mistake will cost.

This is, of course, no physical model of how the Universe was born. It is a moral laboratory, where we are made to say aloud the values that usually hide behind the words “natural order.”

Suppose we have gained the ability to create whole worlds. Before us lie three designs.

The first is perfect order. There is no pain and no catastrophe in it, because its maker has predetermined everything. Its beings are happy—until a question arises: can they be anyone other than what they were permitted to be?

The second is radical freedom. Minds can choose, err, struggle, build, and destroy. But this freedom is bound up with laws of nature that allow disease, violence, and enormous losses. Isn’t freedom too costly if its price is paid by those who never chose the conditions of their birth? The trouble with the first universe is not that its inhabitants must be unhappy. They may be perfectly happy. But if a different future is never open to them, their freedom exists only as stage scenery. The trouble with the second is that freedom of choice is often paid for with the bodies of those who did not choose the rules of the game. Neither total predictability nor an unlimited capacity to do harm offers an obvious ideal.

The third design proposes searching for an arrangement in which independence need not be bought with cruelty. What if, for instance, pain warned of danger but seldom became torment? What if conflicts more often had reversible consequences? What if the means of coercion were limited even for the mightiest beings? We do not know whether such a physics is possible. But whoever declares suffering necessary owes us an account of why he ruled out the alternatives.

A creator's wisdom shows not only in what he can make but in which worlds he is willing to give up.

The third is free creation that keeps unavoidable suffering to a minimum. We try to preserve the independence of beings while making the world more resilient to catastrophe, reducing useless pain, and opening safe ways to settle conflicts. None of this proves such a world technically feasible. It tests our imagination: why must the choice be confined to all-powerful control on one side and cruel freedom on the other?

Here, unexpectedly, the questions of goodness, creation, and responsibility converge. It is not enough that something can be created. One has to decide what has the right to come into being, which risks we will allow, and which consequences we are ready to own.

A creator's wisdom may lie less in the number of worlds he makes than in his ability to renounce a world that would cost its inhabitants too much.

Finally, the designer faces an awkward question that was nowhere in the brief: does he have the right to decide everything alone? Could future minds be given a mechanism for changing the conditions of their own existence—something like a constitu-

tion of the universe, a right of revision, access to the truth about their origin?

If such a mechanism is possible, the height of the creator's art might be not the power to alter any star but the ability to make a world that will one day be able to change itself in good faith.

THE FREEDOM OF THE CREATED

Chapter Thirteen. The One Who Will Not Let the Question Go

We come back once more to the field where we began. We have to: sooner or later every beautiful cosmology must stand the test of one particular human being. Arjuna is still holding his weapon. Before him are the faces of his own kin, behind him his allies, and everyone is waiting for him to decide. No argument about infinity can lift the weight of the bow or the expectations of those he promised to protect.

Let us imagine that the conversation takes one more turn. Instead of arguing straight away about the immortality of the soul, the warrior asks about the limits of his own responsibility. What happens if I do not kill? What happens if I do? Which options have we dismissed too quickly?

So, Arjuna once more. Before him stands a being whose power he believes in. He is told that the cosmic order is larger than any single life, that personal attachment keeps him from doing his duty, that the true Self cannot be killed.

But imagine a different conversation. Arjuna says: “I grant that I may not be seeing the whole of reality. I am ready to give up the throne, my pride, even my own life. But why should my willingness to sacrifice myself turn into a right to sacrifice others? Show me the greatness of the goal, yes, but show me also the necessity of this means and no other.”

In the traditional text, Krishna offers Arjuna another way of understanding action, and it would be dishonest to swap the

Gita's ending for one we have invented. A thought experiment, though, lets us test our own principles: if creation is meant to grow, must its maturity take the form of carrying out orders unconditionally?

Perhaps some tasks really do call for submission: a ship in a storm cannot convene an endless council over every maneuver. But our trust in a commander rests on aims, competence, rules, and the possibility of holding him to account afterward. It gives him no right to appeal to an unverifiable sanctity whenever doubt becomes inconvenient.

Conscience does not prove us right. But give it up, and we lose the last means we have of noticing that we are wrong.

What we have here is a moral thought experiment; it neither retells the *Gita* nor presumes to correct it. It tests whether the autonomy of the created can be a value even in the presence of its maker.

In the model of a network of creators, the answer may turn out to be yes. If the point of evolution is the emergence of new, autonomous centers of creation, then the right to ask "why?" is no side defect of consciousness. It is one of the signs that consciousness is coming of age. Trust need not begin by renouncing reason. Reverence does not oblige us to call every order just. And then the measure of power changes for good. The highest is not the one who can force every mind to submit, but the one who can create the conditions in which minds become independent without losing the wish to look after one another.

We do not know whether there exists, anywhere, a primal source able to hear this argument. But if it created beings who

know how to ask, then, without further grounds, the question itself cannot be written off as a design flaw. Perhaps a mature creator would not take offense. Perhaps, for the first time, he would find before him a partner in conversation instead of a tool.

The battlefield will remain tragic. No beautiful phrase will bring back the dead. But we will have gained a criterion that outlives the legend: every authority must be able to explain why its decision deserves trust, above all when others pay the price.

Epilogue. A Beginning, Not a Summit

When a craftsman closes up his workshop, he does not take everything made that day home with him. Some things stay on the workbenches, some go to other people, some will be reworked, and some will turn out to be useless. None of this cancels the work. On the contrary: the work only truly becomes part of the world once it moves beyond its author's personal intention.

Perhaps something similar happens with minds. We do not know whether they can survive death, return to unity, or create new physical universes. But even now we can see a smaller and more reliable truth: what has been made can acquire a history of its own, and a good conception can demand that its maker know how to step back.

We can picture the universe as a vast workshop of many levels. In each of its regions minds arise that at first can change their surroundings only a little, then build stable systems, and later, perhaps, new forms of life, new worlds, and new creators. Yet this is no finished map of the cosmos. It is a hypothesis we arrived at by asking one question after another.

Does objective good exist? That has not been established. Does creating something give the right to own it unconditionally? That does not follow from the mere fact of creation. Is evil necessary for the world to develop? There are no grounds for equating moral evil with physical destruction. Can a mind become the creator of new universes? Unknown. And yet even now a human being is capable of acts of creation and of answering for them. It is easy to build yet another pyramid on the words "become a

god." Who is higher, who is stronger, who stands closer to the throne. But everything we have worked through leads to a harder image—a network in which maturity shows itself as the ability to do without constant command and to refrain from destroying the independence of others.

Whether this network can reach across many universes is unknown. Perhaps our dreams will never get past cosmic science fiction. But the moral test of this dream is open to us today—in how we treat a child, an employee, a student, a person who has the courage to tell you "no."

If creation really grows, a moment comes when its freedom matters more than its author's power.

Being a creator means more than changing the world. It means making something that did not exist before and then discovering that what you made no longer wholly belongs to you. A child grows up. An idea outgrows its author. A society changes its own rules. Perhaps true maturity lies in being willing to let this happen.

If we ever really do meet the primal source, perhaps the most worthy conversation will have nothing to do with how low we ought to bow. Perhaps it will begin with two simple questions: "What have you created?" and "What has become freer because of what you created?" The question this book began with comes back changed. It is no longer "Why must I bow before the creator?" but "What can I create that will not need my constant dominion?"

The answer may fit inside no temple and no cosmology. It begins much nearer—with the first attempt to make the world not only more orderly but also freer for those who live in it.

Afterword. What in This Book Is Hypothesis

This essay deliberately separates three levels of claims. Descriptions of human creativity, of the transformation of resources, and of the limits of known physical processes belong to observable reality. Reasoning about moral responsibility, freedom, and the moral worth of minds consists of philosophical arguments, open to objection. Assumptions about a single Absolute, the accumulation of spiritual experience from one life to the next, the creation of new universes, and the evolution of creators are speculative metaphysics; no empirical proof of these hypotheses is offered here.

The most important open problem is how morality relates to power. We have described mechanisms by which trust and respect for autonomy can widen what a community is able to create together. But we have not proved that the Universe is built in such a way that the morally better creator always turns out to be the more powerful. That, precisely, remains a matter for further inquiry.

Further Reading

The *Mahabharata*, above all the *Bhagavad Gita*: chapters 2 (duty, death, and action), 11 (the universal form), and 18 (decision and freedom of choice); the *Udyoga Parva* (the negotiations before the war) and the *Shanti Parva* (coming to terms with victory). Section numbering differs from edition to edition. The *Valmiki Ramayana*, the *Yuddha Kanda*: the conflict between Rama and Ravana, the end of the war, and the conversation with Sita. When comparing translations, keep in mind variant readings and differing numbering systems. Plato, *Euthyphro*—on how piety, divine will, and the good are related. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*—on the autonomy of moral judgment and on treating rational beings as ends. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*—on creativity and becoming as the philosophical foundations of the world. Shankara and the tradition of Advaita Vedanta—on the relation between Atman and Brahman, the levels of reality, and liberation. Mahatma Gandhi, his commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita* and his writings on satyagraha—for a different reading of struggle and duty. This list is a set of signposts rather than a critical scholarly apparatus: verbatim quotations and exact verse correspondences should be checked against specific academic editions.

AFTER THE BOOK: A WORKSHOP OF QUESTIONS

Workshop. Don’t Take Even This Book at Its Word

Books on spiritual growth often end with a promise: follow the author and you will learn the truth. This book ends differently. Too much in it remains unproven for it to be turned into a set of instructions. The Absolute, rebirth, the universes of creators, the moral laws of the cosmos—we discussed all of these as possibilities. But questions about your own power, other people’s freedom, and the price of your decisions can be explored right now.

This workshop is not meant to measure anyone’s “level of spirituality.” It has no scores, no stages, and no correct profile. Its aim is to make the reader less dependent on beautiful claims, the author’s included. The exercises work best in writing, and it helps to come back to your answers a week or a month later. Sometimes the change in an answer will matter more than the position you started from.

Exercise 1. Meeting the Miracle-Worker

Imagine that tomorrow a being appears before you who predicts events with proven accuracy and displays physical abilities that were impossible until now. It tells you that it created your Universe, and it demands that you do something that goes against your conscience. Write down your response in three versions.

- In the first version, you are absolutely certain the being is God.

- In the second, you are certain only of its power, not of its origin.
- In the third, you do not even know whether it means you well.

Now compare your answers. What changed? Why? What facts could change your decision? Are there acts you would refuse no matter how powerful the one addressing you? If so, what is that limit based on? If not, what protects you at all from the command of whoever is stronger?

A question for the margin. What must be proven before might becomes moral authority?

Exercise 2. The Price of the Word “Necessary”

Recall a decision you explained with the words “there was no other way.” It might be a conflict, a dismissal, a breakup, a punishment, or a business decision. You don’t need to reveal it to anyone. Divide a sheet of paper into three columns: the options you actually tested; the ones you rejected without testing; and who bore most of the cost.

Try to describe what happened through the eyes of someone who had no part in making the decision but had to live with its consequences. There is no need to cast yourself as villain or hero. It is enough to distinguish honestly between an objective constraint and the limits of your own imagination.

Exercise 3. A Map of My Own Making

Take five things that came into being or changed because of you: a relationship, a project, a business, a text, a habit, a space, a community. For each, answer four questions: what exactly you cre-

ated; whose resources you used; how far the creation can exist without constant control; and whose life it made easier or harder.

Then pick one case in which your attempt to control the result kept it from growing. Could you have set rules in advance that would let other participants shape what happened? If not, why not, exactly?

The crux of practice. The measure of making is not only what came into being, but also what was given the chance to live without you.

Exercise 4. Three Designs for a Universe

Now go back to the three possible universes from Chapter Twelve: the fully ordered one, the radically free one, and the one that is free but limits needless suffering. Don't simply choose the most pleasant one; choose the one whose making you could answer for before those who will one day live in it.

Draw up five fundamental rules for your world. Then argue against yourself: imagine an inhabitant whom these rules harm. How can they challenge them? Can they leave the system? Is it permissible to change the laws without the consent of those they affect? If your world is built so that no complaint can alter its creator's design, why is it anything more than a beautiful dictatorship?

Exercise 5. The Doubt I Dislike

Choose a belief you find psychologically hard to give up. It might be a religious idea, a political position, an image of yourself, or a claim made in this book. Write the strongest argument against it—without mockery and without deliberately weakening the

opposing view. Ask an imaginary opponent to correct your summary until they would accept it as fair.

Then state which observations you would accept as sufficient grounds for revising the belief. If no such observations exist under any conditions, honestly call your position faith, a moral choice, or a personal commitment—just not tested knowledge.

Twelve Questions That Remain Open

1. If goodness is not a physical property of the Universe, can it still be an objective property of the relations between minds?
2. What separates necessary transformation from justified cruelty? Is the first possible without the second?
3. Should a creator have rights over the created simply because without the creator it would not exist?
4. Can the moral status of a mind depend on how long it exists?
5. If every “I” is a manifestation of a single source, does that strengthen the duty to care for one another or weaken it?
6. How does enlightenment differ from psychological certainty if we have no independent way to check what it contains?
7. Where does useful trust in a spiritual teacher end and the handing over of your own responsibility to that teacher begin?
8. Is there a moral strength that is not measured by the ability to win or to subjugate?
9. Is the ability to create autonomous creators higher than the ability to create flawlessly obedient systems?
10. Is a world possible with full freedom but without the extreme forms of preventable suffering?

11. If creators form a network, what rules could settle disputes among them without a supreme judge?
12. What freedom are you willing to give your own creation, even knowing that one day it will disagree with you?

A Draft of a Creator's Personal Ethics

This text can be challenged and rewritten. It is meant as a starting point for putting your own principles into words rather than as an oath.

I acknowledge the limits of my knowledge. So I do not turn my inner voice, someone else's revelation, or my own success into proof that I am absolutely right.

I distinguish ability from right. That I can do something does not yet mean I have the right to do it; having created a system does not make its participants my property.

I look for reversible decisions before irreversible ones. Especially when others, rather than I, will pay for the mistake.

I treat the autonomy of others as a value I am bound to take into account. It may limit my design, but its very existence is what makes a creation more than an extension of my will.

I leave room to revise my own views. If facts one day refute my cosmology, I will not have to give up my conscience along with it.

The Last Page. An Unfinished Map

A sheet of paper remains on the table, and it holds no final drawing of the universe. In one corner is Arjuna's chariot. In another, the square of a window where someone at dusk argued with the thought of God. Between them are gardens, workshops, invisible lives, worlds on the drawing board, voices one wants to believe, and questions one would rather not answer.

You could draw a pyramid over all of it. Or a network. Or you could leave the sheet blank and accept that, for now, we know nothing beyond our own ideas. But one distinction is already hard to miss: creating and owning, believing and obeying, transforming and tormenting are not the same thing.

If this book has achieved anything at all, it has done so by complicating the all-too-easy justifications of power rather than by handing over a ready-made truth. Perhaps, for a start, that is enough. Perhaps a creator's path begins at the very point where they first ask themselves: "What will become freer because I intervened?"

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Maksym Stepanenko is an entrepreneur and the managing partner of Innova Consulting Group. His professional interests lie at the intersection of law, entrepreneurship, and new technologies. *The Creator* grew out of personal reflections on conscience, freedom, and responsibility.

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