

**26 LOGICAL  
REASONS  
I AM A  
THEIST &  
ATHEIST**

by Preeti Gupta

**A WISHY-WASHY  
AGNOSTIC**

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## NO PERMANENT HEAVEN

REASON 17

“AND THEN THE prince and the princess lived happily ever after. The End.”

*Sigh.* Fairy tales are magical, aren't they? For a few wonderful moments, we immerse ourselves in this fantasy world of love, intrigue, and happy endings, knowing that everything will turn out okay in the end. We love fairy tales for this reason. Have we ever heard of a fairy tale in which they talk about the princess marrying her prince, living happily for a few years, then going through the trauma of a divorce, but getting married again to someone else she loves, being happy again for a few more years, then repeat ad nauseam?

No, of course not. No one wants to go through that roller coaster, that's not our idea of a worthwhile outcome after all that struggle. Intense effort is fine within a constrained limit. We will all tolerate it as long as there is some reward at the end which allows us to never toil again.

### **A PERMANENT ENDING WITH HEAVEN?**

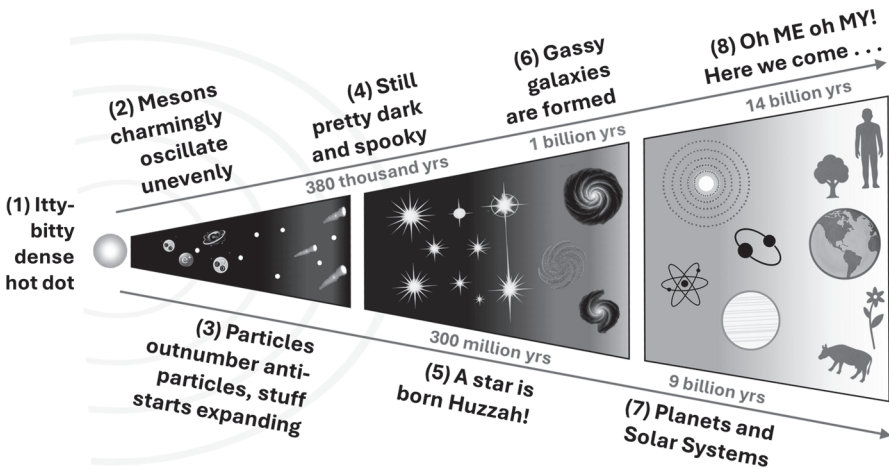
And that's exactly what we are promised by the world's beloved religions. A final, permanent, happy ending. A fairy tale. The end. Once we pass the spiritual test we've been given—once we've gone through our one life accepting Christ as our savior, or cleared our

karmic debt through iterations of avatars up and down the sentient chain, and achieved monk-like zen—we're supposed to be able to drift permanently somewhere in the clouds, with angels, harps, milk, honey, virgins, bright lights, and a reunion with our loved ones, never to return again. This is the static, frozen, eternal state presented to us by religion.

In the last chapter, we observed that our spiritual test doesn't seem to align well with the irregularities of our history on Earth. Similarly, I'm not so sure that this final state of existence—this promised land of heaven—meshes with its dynamic, ever-changing surroundings in the cosmos, either. Everything is always in a state of flux, whether on this planet, or up above.

### IMPERMANENCE OF THE COSMOS

The Big Bang and its aftermath, of course, is the most obvious example of cosmic evolution. As we've discussed, there was an itty-bitty hot dot about 13.8 billion years ago, and then kaboom! It exploded and spewed out gas, energy, and matter in all directions. The resulting quantum confetti slowly expanded over time and formed the different stars, planets, and galaxies we see today.



We suspect we can estimate the age of the Big Bang and our universe by measuring how fast everything is still flying apart and by examining the leftover glow of that explosion—the cosmic microwave background, aka the universe’s baby photo. Clues on past events are often left behind in some form of information retention.

However, we don’t know if the universe will continue to expand and things will spread out even more, or will one day contract back like an interstellar rubber band, due to cooling, gravity, or the pull of dark energy from black holes. It’s thought that if the galaxy does not collapse onto itself, then it will annihilate in 5 billion years instead, since the Milky Way is on a course to collide with Andromeda, the galaxy nearest to us.

Within this slowly expanding realm surrounding us, there are tons of other discoveries we’ve made about black holes, matter, antimatter, nebulae, stars, entangled quanta, and the like. The James Webb Telescope, launched in December 2021 as the successor to the famous Hubble Telescope that’s been floating around in space for years, has been sending us incredible images of even more phenomena which we are only now able to see.

The pictures are truly fascinating. The Webb whippersnapper has been able to take snapshots in infrared, and illuminate parts of space that grandpa Hubble couldn’t see before. It’s been able to send clearer pictures of nearby galaxies and their shapes, and it’s been able to photograph stars and the earliest objects in our environs that are closer to the starting point of the Big Bang. The hope is that we can understand that event better. It’s also been able to photograph planets in other solar systems (exoplanets), create better interstellar maps, and look for life in a way that has never been done before.

While astrophysics had already made great strides in understanding the universe even before this info was gathered, I think for me, it was particularly striking to see these recent James Webb pictures and to realize just how physical and gaseous the universe actually is. It's one thing to vaguely hear that this stuff exists somewhere out there, based off knowledge obtained as a fifth grader in science class. It's another to revisit these details as an adult, and really comprehend the makeup of the galaxies, stars, planets, and black holes surrounding us.

I get why many scientists become atheists. The more awareness one has about how the universe works, the harder it is to trust in some magic fairy tale told to us from childhood. Understanding how the Big Bang created energy and matter, and how the universe is constantly changing and moving, makes it harder to then switch to an image of a static, permanent heaven. Exactly where is this heaven in the constantly expanding or contracting universe around us? It's hard to envision.

### **IMPERMANENCE OF ENERGY**

Of course, I realize that heaven may not be at a fixed location in the stratosphere. Or it could be in a parallel universe. And with my background in Eastern religion, I've never really visualized heaven in a physical manner anyway. For someone like me, heaven is more comparable to a state of energy—perhaps a gaseous, mellow cloud of consciousness swaying above somewhere—or a glowing blob of light, like that we hear of in NDEs.

But even then, my image of an energy-like nirvana where I get to shed my physical body and merge with other souls to finally

achieve a state of permanent, loving bliss doesn't seem to match the realities of how energy actually operates.

We know that energy cannot be destroyed, so that part *does* match with my image of an eternal soul. HOWEVER, energy is never able to stay steady in one state—it's got commitment issues and is constantly transforming from one capacity to another. It takes a lot to keep energy at one level. Even stored potential energy (like in a magnet or battery), which should theoretically be able to retain its strength indefinitely if it was in an isolated bubble, is subject to decay or change from interactions with external forces in the real world. Eventually, a magnet or unused battery weakens and loses its power. Nothing stays the same forever.



So if our consciousness or soul is a form of energy that lives on once our human avatars pass away, the laws of dynamics and change could apply to us as well. It doesn't seem reasonable to think that we could achieve a higher level of being and just stay there for eternity. In the chapter on soul energy, we discussed how a fidgety electron could absorb energy from a photon and jump up several orbits. But it would then be in a restless, unstable state, easily prone to shedding photons and dropping back down again towards the electromagnetic pull of the nucleus in an atom. Lower energy states are more maintainable than higher ones. In the same way, is it really possible that we can reach some kind of blissful, higher energy state and just stay there? Or will entropy eventually tap us on the shoulder and say "Party's over, back to the nucleus"? I talk about it more in the next chapter as well, from a different angle, but if we go by how energy behaves, the Eastern concept of a permanent nirvana seems unsustainable.

### **IMPERMANENCE OF TIME**

So we've got shapeshifting MATTER, as well as the dynamic state of ENERGY, constantly transforming on the planet and in the stratosphere above us. We can also add to this list the flowing river of TIME.

Time, as far as we can tell, will continue to march on—possibly for eternity. Even if time does come to an end, perhaps with the deflation of our galaxy soufflé—where SOMETHING turns back into NOTHING—that occurrence may be trillions of years away. For now, assuming time is ongoing and perhaps infinite, why do we think it will be *finite* for us with an eventual hard stop in heaven?

According to the theist camp, one static, cataclysmic event enabled us to reach the state we're in—temptation, or a fall from grace—and one final, cataclysmic event will pull us out of it—death, or enlightenment.

This applies regardless of the religious dogma we are referencing. With Western religions, the typical belief is that there is only this *one life*. With Eastern religions, the parallel appears to be a *single reincarnation journey*. We don't hear about achieving moksha, chillaxing up there in some nirvana hot tub, and then getting out after the holy water gets cold and falling again to the bottom of the reincarnation ladder. Either way, whether we are talking about one life or many lives, most religions imply that at the end of this one spiritual journey in total—however long it may be—we'll achieve a final, permanent, static resting state where we never have to struggle ever again.

But if time is eternal, then why is our journey just a fragment of that continuum? What caused the universe to start a soul's pilgrimage at one particular time and end it at another? If time loops on infinitely, it seems unlikely that we are only fed into this loop at a specific, microscopic set of coordinates which barely represents a blip in time. It doesn't seem to make any sense.

If TIME, ENERGY, and MATTER are constantly evolving and ongoing—if the entire universe surrounding us is DYNAMIC—then the static picture that religion tries to feed us seems glaringly contradictory. What seems more likely to me is the horrifically unsettling thought that there is NO final resting place, heaven or otherwise.



## THE IMPERMANENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE OF HEAVEN

In fact, Friedrich Nietzsche, in his book *Eternal Recurrence*, wrote about this very concern. He not only worried that we would be reincarnated endlessly to suffer in a myriad of ways, his paranoia was that eventually, whatever configuration or intersection of parameters converged to bring about our birth into this *specific* body would inevitably reoccur. He feared that we could be reborn into the exact same avatar, into the exact same family, and forced to relive the exact same existence and experiences again. Because if time is infinite, eventually all possible permutations will be

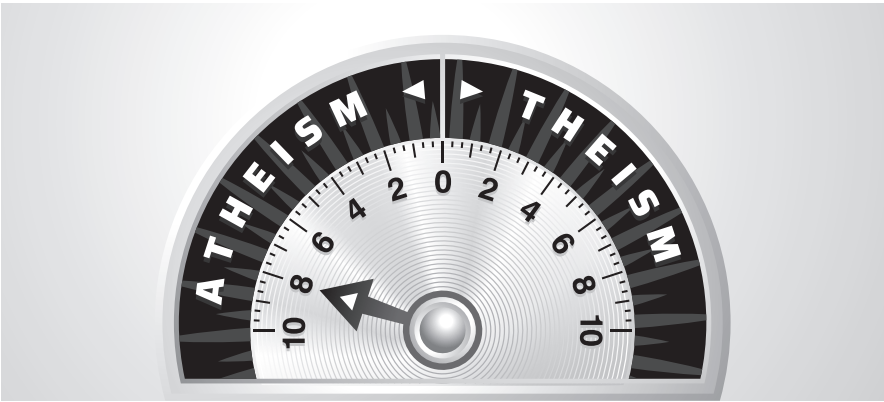
exhausted. The universe would then have to circle back to the exact same confluence of events.

The thought actually depressed him to no end because he was terrified by the implication of having to endure his own life again, full of pain and struggle. In fact, he went mad in his final decade and spent his remaining years incapacitated and under constant care, including a stint in a mental asylum.

I'm not so sure I agree that the EXACT same life I am currently living will happen to me again—that may be an exaggeration—but the lightbulb realization that we may never stop reincarnating had already alarmed me way before I learned about Nietzsche. So it's a logical foreboding to have. When I began pondering my creepy hunch further and did some research, I ran into his mirror theory. While both of us individually drummed up this scary possibility—and I would think others have too—surprisingly, I don't see much discussion around it. It seems almost taboo to voice the apprehension that there is no final resting place or cessation of suffering . . . that our physical lives may be as good as it gets.

The issue is not just the negation of a heaven for *theists*. As Nietzsche rightly pointed out, even if there is no heaven or soul and we are merely random products of the Big Bang and physics, how do we know the universe won't drum up the right mixture of neurons, electrons, protons, and croutons and give birth to us morons yet again? Sure, it might have been a one-in-a-billion-trillion-gazillion chance that the Earth and mankind were able to come into being, but if it happened once, it can happen again—in a theistic OR atheistic world.

So between (1) the dynamic, changing nature of MATTER through evolution on earth and in the cosmos, (2) the constant agitation of all forms of ENERGY, and (3) the ever-shifting sands of TIME, I am a skeptic when it comes to believing in a final, permanent resting state where suffering will cease to exist. Whether we call that state *heaven* or some other secular term, unfortunately the odds appear overwhelmingly against a final happy ending. As with Nietzsche, the bleak thought absolutely petrifies me, with my ISM needle at a quivering 8.



## **26 LOGICAL REASONS I AM A THEIST AND ATHEIST**

(15) Mutations and Adaptations—atheISM 7

(16) Reincarnation Gaps—atheISM 8

(17) No Permanent Heaven—atheISM 8