

This is a response to [The Moral Landscape Challenge](#) (Sam Harris)

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Life, an awesome blend of the material and spiritual, is more like a game of poker than a box of chocolates. Success is impossible without reason and its knowledge of probability. Attach to what can be rationalized, however, and not only will you struggle to win, the overly technical mentality will leech away all that is enjoyable.

The notion of necessary-but-insufficient is a universal phenomenon. Reason is essential for resolving issues relating to meaning, values, morality, and the good life. But it is also utterly inadequate. Moreover, if what can be nailed down by reason is to be of any value to us, this knowledge must ultimately give way to an intuitive, qualitative form of understanding. To grasp what truly matters, we must accept, in a literal sense, that Nothing Matters.

Any zealous attempt to authenticate this worldview is an act of self-refutation, since faith in facts and reasoned arguments is indicative of the misguided belief they are enough, when they aren't. In the end, one is compelled to either accept absolute uncertainty by drawing on a higher means of understanding – the non-overlapping heart in favor of the head – or reject it and suffer an alternative variety of epistemological torment. As Sheldon expertly argues in a second-season episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, it's illogical to not, at some point, trust an emotional truth that boils down to nothing more than "just because."

Sheldon: Leonard, I'm moving out.

Leonard: What do you mean, you're moving out? Why?

Sheldon: There doesn't have to be a reason.

Leonard: Yeah, there kinda does.

Sheldon: Not necessarily. This is a classic example of Münchhausen's Trilemma: either the reason is predicated on a series of sub-reasons, leading to an infinite regression; or it tracks back to arbitrary axiomatic statements; or it's ultimately circular: i.e., I'm moving out because I'm moving out.

Leonard: I'm still confused.

Sheldon: Leonard, I don't see how I could have made it any simpler.

This, unfortunately, is only the start of it. In order to identify what it is exactly that reason is necessary for, we are required to first embrace its radical limitations. To do this, however, invites irredeemable intellectual passivity. Why search for a complete and final solution to life's most pressing concerns when reason has already demonstrated to itself, ala Socrates, Hume, Dr Cooper and others, literal solutions do not exist?

It's a rude and unforgiving dilemma. The only way reason can muster the motivation needed to discover its true purpose is for it to invoke self-contradiction by presuming its powers entirely sufficient. And that isn't all. To cope with the cognitive dissonance of this practical-yet-irrational

presumption, the idea the head can conquer the heart and objectify its mystical judgments – from momentous moral choices to changing accommodation to an all-in call at the poker table – the mind must constantly work to suppress the fact it is engaged in a bold, clueless wager against reality and the human spirit. This choice, the decision to endure the psychological suffering that arises from an obligation to forget we’ve set out on a wild goose chase, is based on a further important consideration.

The fundamentally constrained nature of reason has devastating consequences for any form of organized politics. As social animals with a deep nostalgia for a pre-cosmic state of unity, we hanker for confirmation we’re endowed with a shared morality translatable into formal ideals worth fighting for. Though the heart may be superior to the head, it’s ineffable insights cannot be used to guide us as a group. Civilizations aren’t founded on “just because” and Nothing Matters. A just and progressive society requires authority and hierarchy informed by stable concepts and agreed standards of right and wrong.

In this regard, the Christian theocracy that dominated Western society for centuries is little different from the secularized society that replaced it following the Enlightenment.

The church employed an insufferable hedge to justify its tyranny. God is beyond the mind, an ineradicable mystery known in the heart by letting go of reason and trusting, in effect, that Nothing Matters. Then the political overlay. Revealed truth is exalted as legitimate dogma, traction for a rules-based system of reward and punishment. Something – Jesus rising again, for example – literally matters.

Secular society peddles the same have-it-both-ways ruse, substituting the metaphysics of individual freedom for the metaphysics of God. Human beings are ends in themselves, we’re told. There is no transcendent moral realm. Nothing Matters, not because God is a mystery, but because he doesn’t exist. Which would be fine, except the state is now without justification for its rationalized instruments of moral coercion.

Millennia of Western rationalism, both theological and scientific, determined to nail down a one-size-fits-all morality is clearly not rational. The wild goose chase was always grounded in the feeling human intelligence has a bigger role to play in the universe than mere survival. And it does. It’s just we’ve continually posed the wrong question.

What if the necessary-in-necessary-but-insufficient is about understanding why exactly reason is necessary-but-insufficient? That is, rather than attempting the impossible, what if the mind turned its attention to why the relationship between head and heart is non-overlapping? An answer to this more subtle role would release reason from its destructive reductionism. The material world and our spiritual life could finally co-exist, free of the competitive pretense.

And rather than enforcing the unenforceable, politics could become a forum for affirming the answer to the question of why exactly it’s important humanity understand that Nothing Matters.